

PARTICIPATORY REPORTING AS METHOD ACTING
THE JOURNALISM-THEATRE CONNECTION

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Master of Arts

by
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PARTICIPATORY REPORTING AS METHOD ACTING:
THE JOURNALISM-THEATRE CONNECTION

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a candidate for the degree of master of journalism,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Note

The British spelling of “theatre” is used in this research because it appears to be the spelling almost universally preferred by people involved in theatre. Also, it is assumed “theatre” applies to the art, while “theater” refers to the building.

For my father,

David Hunt,

for letting me go to Russia ...

to discover journalism,

for letting me go to Missouri ...

to discover theatre.

Thank you.

With love,

Your daughter,

Claire

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PARTICIPATORY REPORTING AS METHOD ACTING
THE JOURNALISM-THEATRE CONNECTION

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ABSTRACT

This research presents a little-discussed reporting technique, termed for the purpose of this research “participatory reporting,” and uses research from the field of theatre to examine the technique for its potential contribution to journalism. Participatory reporting is a term used for the purpose of this research to describe a journalistic reporting technique whereby journalists directly participate in stories by doing what the people in those stories do, as opposed to the traditional reporting techniques of observation and interviewing. Together with the journalistic technique of participatory reporting, this research applies a theatrical technique, an acting technique termed for the purpose of this research “method acting,” as a theory in an attempt to determine whether similarities exist between the two techniques in terms of their effects on their practitioners, as evidenced by their products, and whether those similarities, if they exist, might indicate participatory reporting’s contribution to journalism.

Preface

... We try to understand this as filmmakers through empathy, because that's what you do. You extend empathy in every single direction, because you can't understand the human motivation without empathy.

—Steven Spielberg, introduction to *Munich*

During the winter semester of 2006, as a graduate student in the University of Missouri-Columbia's School of Journalism, I didn't do a lot of journalism. Instead, I did theatre. I got the lead part in *Nickel and Dimed*, the stage adaptation of the book *Nickel and Dimed: On not getting by in America*, by Barbara Ehrenreich, about her experience reporting on the lives of the working poor by actually trying to live like them.

Through my involvement in the play, I noticed an unusual phenomenon. I became more sensitive to poverty. I witnessed real, low-wage workers in my off-stage life, imagined in detail what they were going through and felt sympathy and compassion for them to a degree which I had not before. I could not understand it. I myself had worked similar jobs for years. But years later, I retained little compassion, or patience, for workers who held the jobs I once had.

Suddenly, as an actor in a theatrical production, I felt differently. I developed a deeper understanding I had either lost or never had. The role was having an emotional

and psychological impact on me. I began to wonder what was so unique about participating directly in a dramatic narrative as an actor. How was it different from other life experiences?

I thought about what Ehrenreich did for the book *Nickel and Dimed*. The author had not just observed or interviewed people. To a certain extent, she had lived their lives, and, albeit temporarily, became one of them. Ehrenreich participated in the story. Over time, I came to call this technique “participatory reporting,” a term rarely found in the journalism literature, scholarly or otherwise. Because the subject was not discussed much, I struggled with it, and turned to my experience in theatre, where I had first had the idea, for inspiration. I could see many parallels between participatory reporting and acting. In playing “roles,” participatory reporters are, essentially, “actors.”

I became intrigued by a specific acting technique which is particularly emotional and psychological in nature, popularly termed “method acting,” where actors draw heavily on their own personal psychology in creating their characters. I read about “method actors,” who prepared for roles by living lives as similar as possible to those of their characters. That is exactly what Ehrenreich did for *Nickel and Dimed*. Was there a connection? Because method acting was so psychologically intense, it could yield unique consequences for actors. Could similar experiences do likewise for journalists?

I eventually figured out by “deeper understanding,” I was talking about empathy. Empathy is a concept found in multiple disciplines, from medicine and education to even business, particularly in fields where practitioners must deal regularly with the public. Rarely have I seen it in the journalism literature. My perception of traditional journalism

was it eschewed emotional and psychological involvement. I thought journalists were sometimes explicitly warned not to get too close to their stories.

But journalists do deal with the public. Not only do they have to interact with other people, they have to represent them as well, and as accurately as possible at that. If empathy was so critical to so many other public professions, surely it applied to journalism, too? And if so, was it a “skill” which could be developed? Acting helped me be more empathetic. I wondered if a similar approach in journalism, which, for me, was already so much like acting, might accomplish the same thing. And if so, I wondered, was that participatory reporting’s contribution to journalism?

The day the play opened, the book was discussed as assigned reading in one of my journalism classes. In the discussion, I raised the issue of emotional and psychological pain. Physical hardship, accessed through the five senses, is relatively easy to document. It can be quantified. But much of the pain Ehrenreich experienced was psychological, not physical. What’s more, she could report on it, because she had experienced it herself and thus knew it to be true, in keeping with the highly important journalistic ethic of accuracy. The thoughts and feelings of other people might not be as easy to document while still adhering to accuracy.

I offer participatory reporting here not only as one possible way to report on psychological pain, but also as a sort of “sensitivity training” for journalists. This research is about honoring psychological pain as information which is just as important, valid and useful as any other gathered during the reporting process, and it is also about developing empathy for others by experiencing their feelings firsthand.

Journalism is, by and large, an intellectual practice. Like art, this phenomenon is an emotional and psychological one. It is the New Age concept, lifted from Eastern medicine, of the “mind-body connection,” the power of the subconscious mind, bypassing the brain to get to the heart. The empathy I developed while participating in the play was emotional and psychological, not rational. Even if I hadn’t literally lived other people’s lives, I had sympathy and compassion for them, because I had experienced their feelings myself. That is the very definition of empathy.

Do we have to experience other people’s psychological pain in order to understand them? When actors do it, it is not real, but it is effective, both for the actors and, through catharsis, for their audiences. It goes without saying people are more sensitive to problems they have experienced themselves. Victims of diseases and their loved ones are probably more likely to lobby for scientific research into cures for those diseases than people who have no experience with them. Feeling leads to deeper understanding, on stage or off. I am not sure people have to suffer literally to develop the virtue of empathy. I wouldn’t wish cancer on anybody, not for all the cure in the world. But I do know there is real power in emotion, in feeling, and life’s best work, be it in journalism or in theatre, is made not merely with the intellect, but with the heart and soul.

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

This research presents a little-discussed reporting technique, termed for the purpose of this research “participatory reporting,” and uses research from the field of theatre to examine that technique for its potential contribution to journalism. Together with the journalistic technique of participatory reporting, this research applies a theatrical technique, an acting technique termed for the purpose of this research “method acting,” as a theory in an attempt to determine whether similarities exist between the two techniques in terms of their effects on their practitioners, as evidenced by their products, and whether those similarities, if they exist, might indicate participatory reporting’s contribution to journalism.

As an art form which can be particularly emotional and psychological in nature, theatre was chosen for use in this research largely on the hypothesis that participatory reporting’s contribution to journalism might lie precisely in its emotional and psychological effects on journalists. This research considers the feelings, positive or negative, which arise from personal, emotional and psychological involvement to be information as useful as any other gathered during the reporting process.

This research in no way advocates journalists involve themselves in theatre or any other art form. Rather, it encourages journalists simply to pay more attention to the emotional and psychological, not just material and physical, aspects of stories. This research presents participatory reporting as by far not the only way to do journalism but as one among many techniques journalists have at their disposal and a possible contribution to the larger body of journalistic work.

In this chapter, this research's topic, question, hypothesis, purposes, theory, methodology and samples are introduced.

Topic, question, hypotheses and theory

The Journalism-theatre connection

This research departs from the assumption there are similarities between journalism and theatre. Such similarities, identified for the purpose of this research, might include the following. Journalism and theatre are both creative endeavors, in that in both disciplines creative processes result in creative products. Both entail preparation and research. Both are forms of story-telling. Both claim a higher objective of "truth." And, as the creative work of individuals, both have the potential for subjectivity.

In creative work, practitioners use techniques to produce products. Both journalism and theatre are extensive disciplines encompassing multiple individual practitioners, techniques and products. Such individual practitioners in journalism include reporters, editors and producers, copyeditors, photographers and various designers and

technicians. In theatre, practitioners include playwrights, directors, actors and also various designers and technicians. In both disciplines, practitioners employ techniques specific to their work to create individual products which contribute to the larger, final products. Final journalistic creative products include information or “news” sources such as newspapers, magazines and television and radio broadcasts. Final theatrical creative products include live productions such as plays or musicals.

The Reporting-acting connection

Stemming from the assumption there are general similarities between the larger disciplines of journalism and theatre, this research focuses on the specific practitioners, techniques and creative products of each discipline, attempts to identify similarities between those techniques and queries whether such techniques, if they are indeed similar, can have similar effects on practitioners in both disciplines, as evidenced by the products, and if so, how these effects might contribute to journalism. The specific journalism and theatre practitioners under examination are reporters and actors, respectively, whose creative products are stories and characters. In other words, where reporters create stories, actors create characters.

As far as technique is concerned, it is precisely that aspect of the creative process which led to the particular focus of this research. The reporting-acting parallel in particular was chosen due to possible similarities among certain aspects of two specific techniques used in reporting and acting, namely, participatory reporting and method acting. Before these particular techniques are discussed in further detail, the above

information is summarized in table 1:

Table 1. Focus of research

		parallels	
		journalism	theatre
general	practitioners	editors and producers, reporters, photographers, designers, copyeditors, technicians, etc.	playwrights, directors, actors, designers, technicians, etc.
	techniques	editing, producing, reporting, writing, photographing, designing, copyediting, etc.	writing, directing, acting, designing, etc.
	products	information or “news” sources (newspapers, magazines, television or radio broadcasts, etc.)	theatrical productions (plays, musicals, etc.)
specific	practitioner	reporter	actor
	technique	reporting	acting
	product	story	character
focus of research	practitioner	participatory reporter	method actor
	technique	participatory reporting	method acting
	product	story	character

Participatory reporting

Participatory reporting is the term chosen for the purpose of this research to describe a reporting technique whereby reporters, when gathering information for stories, participate in those stories by doing what the people in those stories do. For example, for a story about factory workers, a participatory reporter actually works in that factory, as opposed to just observing and interviewing its workers. From this partial definition alone, participatory reporting differs from traditional reporting techniques in that participatory reporters not only observe people and interview them about their experiences but try to have and report on their own experiences themselves.

Method acting

Similarly, method acting as a technique may entail research methods like those employed in participatory reporting, in that method actors may do what their characters do, ostensibly to understand their characters better and thus deliver more accurate portrayals of them. For example, in preparing for the role of factory worker, a method actor might actually take a job as that particular sort of factory worker. Derived from the ideas of Constantin Stanislavski and Lee Strasberg in the early part of the twentieth century, method acting is distinguished from other acting techniques primarily by its emphasis on psychological realism (Tust-Gunn 1995, 3).

Effects of method acting on actors

Research has shown, due to the psychological emphasis of the method acting technique, actors who employ the technique may become emotionally and psychologically involved in their characters or roles (Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999, 158). This involvement has been shown to have both positive and negative effects on the technique's practitioners, the actors (Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999, 160-161). The positive effects of method acting on actors include personal growth resulting from self-discovery and/or increased self-knowledge and/or -understanding and empathy resulting from increased understanding of other people (Tust-Gunn 1995, 1-2, 39). Conversely, the same psychological intensity of the technique may lead to a phenomenon termed "boundary blurring," in which the boundaries between actors and their characters weaken, resulting in identity confusion, whereby actors confuse their own personalities with those of their characters, yielding negative results (Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999, 161). An even more negative effect of method acting on actors is extreme boundary blurring, where actors become so confused with their characters the result is certain types of emotional distress, such as carrying aspects of their characters' personalities from the stage into their personal lives and vice versa (Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999, 161-163). Additionally, because of the temporary and unreal nature of theatre, actors may allow themselves the freedom to think, feel, speak and behave differently than they might if situations were real and seemingly interminable or without a known end (Tust-Gunn 1995, 2). Also, in a phenomenon termed "double consciousness" or "dual consciousness," actors have the

opportunity to think critically about emotional and psychological experiences, to think and feel at the same time, a luxury which many people may not have about their own, “real-life” situations (Tust-Gunn 1995, 44). Double consciousness establishes distance between actors and their characters, enabling actors to exert some control, by means of intellectual awareness, over their emotional and psychological involvement in their roles so involvement does not become excessive and result in emotional distress (Tust-Gunn 1995, 44). The effects of method acting on actors, discussed above, are summarized in table 2:

Table 2. Effects of method acting on actors

emotional and psychological involvement in roles		
“positive”	“negative”	neutral
personal growth resulting from self-discovery and/or increased self-knowledge and/or -understanding	“boundary blurring” or identity confusion	changes in thought, feeling, speech or behavior due to awareness that situation is temporary and not real
empathy resulting from increased understanding of other people	extreme boundary blurring or emotional distress	“double consciousness,” maintaining an “outsider status,” a capacity to think critically, to remain aware, all while having an emotional and psychological experience, in other words, thinking and feeling at the same time

Possible effects of participatory reporting on journalists

This research seeks to determine whether participatory reporting can have similar effects on journalists, as summarized by the questions presented in table 3:

Table 3. Possible effects of participatory reporting on journalists

general		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do participatory reporters develop emotional and psychological involvement in their stories, just as method actors may with their characters? • If so, does that emotional and psychological component hold the key to participatory reporting's contribution to journalism? 		
specific		
“positive”	“negative”	neutral
Do participatory reporters experience personal growth resulting from self-discovery and/or increased self-knowledge and/or – understanding?	Do participatory reporters experience ‘boundary blurring’ resulting in identity confusion?	Do participatory reporters think, feel, speak or behave differently because they are aware that situations are temporary and not real?
Do participatory reporters develop heightened empathy for and understanding of other people as a result of their projects?	Do participatory reporters experience extreme boundary blurring resulting in emotional distress?	Do participatory reporters exhibit a “double consciousness,” the ability to think critically all while having an emotional and psychological experience, in other words, thinking and feeling at the same time?

Methodology and sample

The methodology used to help answer these questions is a literary analysis of three, book-length, contemporary journalistic products featuring participatory reporting. The three books are Ted Conover's *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, for which the author worked as a prison guard; Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America*, for which the author worked low-wage jobs; and Matt Taibbi's *Spanking the Donkey: Dispatches from the dumb season*, partly about the author's experiences as a political journalist during the 2004 presidential political campaign. These three books were chosen because they are contemporary; are exemplary in participatory reporting concept and execution according to the technique's definition discussed in Chapter Two, Literature Review, of this research; and potentially exhibit examples of participatory reporting's effects on journalists similar to method acting's effects on actors. Though they are now in book form, all three were originally published as individual journalistic works in periodicals. Together, the books represent a variety of issues, social, economic and political.

As journalistic creative products, the books are analyzed to determine if participatory reporting's effects on journalists, as evidenced by their products, are similar to method acting's effects on actors.

The elements of this research discussed above throughout this section are summarized in table 4:

Table 4. Elements of research

general	specific
topic	participatory reporting
question	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are participatory reporting's effects on journalists, as evidenced by their products, similar to method acting's effects on actors?
hypothesis	Participatory reporting's contribution to journalism might lie in the technique's emotional and psychological effects on journalists.
purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• to introduce participatory reporting more solidly into the journalism literature• to encourage journalists to pay more attention to their personal emotions and psychology as useful information in reporting
theory	method acting
methodology	literary analysis
samples	three book-length, contemporary journalistic products featuring participatory reporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conover, Ted. <i>Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing</i> (2001)• Ehrenreich, Barbara. <i>Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America</i> (2001)• Taibbi, Matt. <i>Spanking the Donkey: Dispatches from the dumb season</i> (2005)

Structure

After this chapter, subsequent chapters proceed as follows:

- Chapter Two, Literature Review. The journalism and theatre literature is reviewed in an attempt to define more clearly the two principle concepts of this research, participatory reporting and method acting.
- Chapter Three, Methodology. An explanation is given of the methodology. Method acting is applied as a theory to the samples to examine them for possible similarities between method acting's effects on actors and participatory reporting's effects on journalists, as evidenced by their products.
- Chapter Four, Findings and Analysis. The theory is applied to the samples. The books are examined for similarities between method acting's effects on actors and participatory reporting's effects on journalists.
- Chapter Five, Conclusion. Participatory reporting's effects on journalists which are similar to method acting's effects on actors, if any, as evidenced by the analysis of the samples, are discussed as a possible indication of participatory reporting's contribution to journalism. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are also included.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, the journalism and theatre literature is reviewed in an attempt to define more clearly the two principle concepts of this research, “participatory reporting” and “method acting.” While participatory reporting is the topic, method acting is the theory used to examine it.

Again, this research seeks to determine whether similarities exist between the journalistic technique of participatory reporting and the theatrical technique of method acting in terms of their effects on their practitioners, as evidenced by their products, and whether those similarities, if they exist, might indicate participatory reporting’s contribution to journalism.

Participatory reporting

The terms “participatory journalism” or “participatory reporting” appear very little in journalism literature, even less so with the meanings ascribed to them in this research. One source, a brief entry by Robert Dardenne in *History of the Mass Media in*

the United States: An encyclopedia, defines participatory journalism as “journalism in which individuals consciously act to create news and then report that news, or to report on events in which they have participated” (Dardenne 1998, 496). Dardenne also includes an alternative meaning of the term. “Participatory journalism” was used by the “civic journalism” or “citizen journalism” movements of the 1990s and 2000s which sought to involve people who are not journalists in journalism (Dardenne 1998, 496). That is not what is meant by participatory reporting in this research. For the purpose of this research, participatory reporting is the term chosen to describe a reporting technique whereby reporters participate in stories by doing what the people in those stories do. Because so little has been written about participatory reporting as defined by this research, the extensive literature on “literary,” “narrative” or the “New” Journalism and “creative” or “literary nonfiction”¹ was examined in order to come to more comprehensive definition of participatory reporting.

Definition: What participatory reporting is not

Unintentional or incidental

Defining more specifically what participatory reporting is can be done in part by defining what it is not. For the purpose of manageability, this research excludes from its

¹ Literary journalism, too, remains a loose concept hard to define. There is not even a consensus about an adequate term for it. One author refers to “half a dozen interchangeable labels” (Davis 2005, 10) for the genre. Another writes how the difficulty in accurately naming the form rendered database searches inadequate (Hartsock 2000, 3-5). However, another writes that, although numerous terms exist, “literary journalism” is the most appropriate (Applegate 1996, xi), and that is the one chosen for use in this research for the purpose of manageability.

definition of participatory reporting such literary forms as travel or nature writing, autobiographies or memoirs and personal accounts of tragedies such as accidents or diseases. The reasons for narrowing the category as such are threefold. Such journalistic products, though technically “participatory” in the sense that their authors actually participate in the stories, are too expansive to include in this research. Also, such products often violate what is often considered to be an essential journalistic criterion of timeliness. They are written too long after the actual events they describe. In addition, such products do not involve active reporting. They are unintentional or incidental. By “active reporting,” it is meant journalists embark on experiences with the intention of getting stories out of them. They may be acting on assignment or, if they are enterprise reporters, their own ideas. Active reporting is not, for example, retroactively writing a column about a car accident or battling cancer. Also, although broadcast journalists and photojournalists have practiced participatory reporting, again, for the purpose of manageability, this research is concerned exclusively with print journalism.

Not all observers of literary journalism identify the same criteria. Dardenne, the only author to identify participatory journalism as a genre, writes, “Journalists ... also have written about events in which they participated unintentionally: train derailments, airplane crashes, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Journalists also have long made into news any number of personal dramas” (Dardenne 1998, 496). However, several other authors exclude from literary journalism some of the same categories excluded from this research. In the introduction to his anthology of the New Journalism, Tom Wolfe excludes autobiographies and memoirs from literary journalism on the basis of timeliness, claiming reports must be written soon enough after the events they describe in

order to qualify as journalism, but he does say, “The sort of reporting one now finds in the New Journalism probably begins with the travel literature of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (1973, 50). In the introduction to their anthology of literary journalism, Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda also exclude the “memoir, essay ... , nature writing and travel writing,” in part because “journalism ... implies a process of active fact-gathering – not just working from memory or sensory observation but doing what reporters call reporting” (1997, 13).

“In-depth,” “immersion” or “saturation” reporting

Much of the literature on literary journalism, while primarily emphasizing writing style, also stresses “in-depth,” “immersion” or what Wolfe called “saturation” reporting (1973, 52), by which it is meant reporters spend an extensive amount of time with the people in their stories, but not necessarily that they participate in those people’s activities. Both observers of literary journalism and writers of such products themselves stress the importance of extensive reporting. In the introduction to a contemporary anthology of nonfiction writing, Robert Boynton makes note of the journalists’ “innovative immersion strategies” in gathering information for stories (2005, xiii). In interviews for an anthology of literary journalism, one journalist said, “One of the ways you do good research is you really go and live with people,” and another said, “You have to stay around a long time before people will let you get to know them” (Sims 1984, 11). Again, though literary journalists may spend a lot of time with the people in their stories, to the point even of establishing emotional intimacy, they may not actually participate in those people’s

activities. A distinction between literary journalism and participatory reporting is participatory reporters do not just observe, but participate in, the action.

“Activist” or “advocacy” journalism

Participatory reporting, and some literary journalism in general, have been confused with what is termed “activist” or “advocacy” journalism, whereby journalists overtly support a particular point of view (Murphy 1974, 4). Some participatory reporting can be classified as “activist.” Norman Mailer, when participating in a political march while reporting for his book *The Armies of the Night*, can be considered to have been practicing a form of advocacy journalism. However, for the purpose of this research, advocacy is not an implicit characteristic of participatory reporting.

Writing style

This research includes in its principal concept the word “reporting,” not “journalism,” to distinguish it from the wealth of literature on literary journalism which is concerned primarily with style of writing, not reporting. Literary journalism is almost always defined in terms of writing style, that is, as nonfiction written with fiction techniques. Wolfe, in the introduction to his anthology, though he discusses reporting techniques, is overwhelmingly concerned with writing styles (1973, 55). In the introduction to his anthology of criticism of the New Journalism, Ronald Weber writes it was “fundamentally a literary rather than a journalistic development” (1974, 14-15).

While the unorthodox writing style of the New Journalism, coming after decades of a more traditional style of writing in American journalism, was, at the time, remarkable, contemporary authors generally agree creative writing in journalism is no longer exceptional, and journalists have greater liberty than ever to experiment with writing styles. Precisely because of “the license to experiment with form earned by the New Journalists of the sixties ... the days in which nonfiction writers test the limits of language and form have largely passed” (Boynton 2005, xii). In the introduction to an anthology of contemporary literary journalism, Boynton writes the stories included in the anthology are distinguished by the creativity of their reporting, not their writing (2005, xii). “ ... [T]his new generation experiments more with the way one gets the story,” and their products are “more reportorial than literary” (Boynton 2005, xii). Thus, rather than reexamine literary journalism from the point of view of writing style, which has been done a great deal in journalism research in the past three to four decades, this research focuses instead on reporting techniques.

History and examples of literary journalism and participatory reporting

History of literary journalism

While multiple New Journalists did conduct participatory reporting, the technique existed before the 1960s. Because so little has been written about participatory reporting or even participatory journalism, its history is difficult to trace. It is helpful, however, to

look at the larger body of literary journalism for examples of participatory reporting. Though little has been written about it as such, participatory reporting is nothing new.

The true origins of the literary journalism genre are disputed. While the New Journalists were considered by some to be wholly revolutionary in their writing styles, similarities in writing styles and even subject matter existed between the New Journalists and the Muckrakers (Hollowell 1977, 35).

The muckraking journalism of the reform period from 1890 to 1912 reveals some works which are very similar to certain varieties of the New Journalism. ... Although (Ida) Tarbell and (Lincoln) Steffens were more concerned with social reform than with literary style, their work involves the scene setting and narrative passages common to the articles of Wolfe, (Gay) Talese, (Gail) Sheehy, and others (Hollowell 1977, 35)

As stated above, Wolfe finds examples of the sort of literary journalism he examined in the “eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,” and cites multiple fiction writers throughout history, such as Charles Dickens, who used in-depth reporting techniques to gather information for their writing (1973, 50). Boynton cites sources which date the advent of what he calls “reportorial journalism” back to the time of Mark Twain and says nonfiction experienced a notable rise in the “second half of the nineteenth century” (2005, xx). Kerrane and Yagoda go back even farther to call Daniel Defoe, who wrote in the early 1700s, “perhaps the first true modern literary journalist” (1997, 17), adding, “In the late nineteenth century and on into the twentieth, curiosity about the lives of the poor, and the conviction traditional methods of investigation were inadequate, frequently led journalists to put on tattered clothes and try to experience how the other half lived. ... ” (1997, 58). Another author includes in the history of literary journalism “Indian captivity

narratives, autobiographical accounts of settlers taken prisoner by Indians,” a sort of nonfiction written hundreds of years ago (Shapiro 2005, 41-42). Another maintains “Literary journalism is several hundred years old” (Applegate 1995, xi), while another includes in the genre “Roman acta” (Hartsock 2000, 247).

Examples of participatory reporting

The history of literary journalism is long. That of participatory reporting is perhaps less extensive. At the very least, examples of participatory reporting can be found in the muckraking era. A partial list, by no means exhaustive, of more notable participatory journalism follows. A prominent journalist who used participatory reporting in the pre-muckraking era was Nellie Bly, who, among other endeavors, actually got herself admitted to a psychiatric institution, without initially revealing herself as a reporter, in order to report on the conditions therein (Dardenne 1998, 496). Bly was exemplary of the “stunt girls” of the time, who, in actively creating news events, or “stunts,” in order to write about them, would comply with part of Dardenne’s definition of participatory journalism (1998, 496). Another practitioner of participatory reporting around roughly the same time was Jack London (Kerrane and Yagoda 1997, 83). “In 1902 he lived for seven weeks in the East End of London, renowned as the worst slum in the world ...” (Kerrane and Yagoda 1997, 83). London, inspired by previous examples of participatory reporting, had come to believe the “interior could be penetrated only in disguise” (Kerrane and Yagoda 1997, 83), and the result was his 1903 book *The People of the Abyss*. For his 1906 book *The Jungle* about the conditions of meatpacking industry

workers, Upton Sinclair, whose curiosity was piqued when the workers went on strike, took a job for seven weeks in the Chicago stockyards (Jensen 2000, 52-53). “He went undercover as a stockyard employee wearing his own shabby clothes and carrying a dinner pail. In the daytime, he wandered about the yards observing the oppressive working conditions, and at night, he visited the workers in their dismal quarters where they would tell him their distressing stories” (Jensen 2000, 52-53). Decades later, James Agee lived with a poor family in the Appalachians for his 1941 book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

In the 1960s, writer George Plimpton made a name for himself playing professional sports and writing about them. His 1964 book *Paper Lion* chronicled his experience playing with the 1963 Detroit Lions². In the New Journalism era, both Wolfe and Hunter Thompson, perhaps the two most prominent New Journalists, used participatory reporting. In 1965, Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, his book about his experience traveling with writer Ken Kesey and his “Merry Pranksters,” was published. Thompson “ran” with the Hell’s Angels for a year and a half while gathering material for his 1966 book *Hell’s Angels: A strange and terrible saga*. Again, Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* was about an anti-war demonstration in which he actively participated.

In the 1980s, Conover emerged as a practitioner of participatory reporting, a term Conover himself has been the only practicing journalist to use, at least in the literature reviewed for this research. In 1984, Conover’s book *Rolling Nowhere: Riding the rails with America’s hoboes*, about his experience in the early 1980s riding freight trains,

² Interestingly, Plimpton is also an actor.

similar to London's *The Road* of 1907, also about the author's life lived as a hobo, was published. Later, Conover applied participatory reporting techniques by working "undercover" as a prison guard, which resulted in his 2001 book *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*. Also in the 1980s, Kidder worked for eight months in a computer company to gather material for his nonfiction book *The Soul of a New Machine*, published in 1981. From 1998-2000, Ehrenreich conducted research for *Nickel and Dimed*, published in 2001. In 2005, Ehrenreich's book *Bait and Switch: The (futile) pursuit of the American dream*, another book featuring participatory reporting similar to that used for *Nickel and Dimed*, was published. The most contemporary example of participatory reporters might include journalists "embedded" with members of the military in war zones, often referred to as "embeds."

Method acting

As for participatory reporting, there is not a lot of literature on method acting, or, more specifically, the relationship between actors and their characters, the emotional and psychological dynamic of acting which pertains to this research (Tust-Gunn, 4).

This research uses the term method acting, because, arguably, it is the single most influential school of acting in North America (Tust-Gunn 1995, 3). The "Method," while technically coined by Strasberg, derives heavily from the ideas of Stanislavski, whose "System" revolutionized acting in the 20th century (Tust-Gunn 1995, 19). The ideas of Stanislavski and, later, Strasberg, have had the most lasting and widespread impact on American actor training and performance (Tust-Gunn 1995, 8). The system or the method

are not theories per se, but accumulations of ideas and techniques which address how actors create characters (Tust-Gunn 1995, 7).

History of method acting

Stanislavski's ideas date to the turn of the 19th century (Tust-Gunn 1995, 9). After helping to found the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897, Stanislavski first mentioned the term the "System" in his writings in 1909 (Tust-Gunn 1995, 9). In 1923, the Moscow Art Theatre company toured America, and some of the company's members remained in New York and began teaching Stanislavski's ideas, officially introducing them to America (Tust-Gunn 1995, 12). Among the students of some of the teachers of Stanislavski's ideas was Strasberg who, along with others, helped found the highly influential and controversial Group Theatre in New York in 1931 (Tust-Gunn 1995, 12), with which he remained until 1937 (Tust-Gunn 1995, 15). Separated from Stanislavski by distance, politics and language, Strasberg developed his own interpretation of Stanislavski's ideas (Tust-Gunn 1995, 15). Departing from the original "System," the "Method" emerged (Tust-Gunn 1995, 19). In 1947, some of those who had been affiliated with the Group Theatre founded the Actors Studio, which also greatly influenced 20th-century American drama (Tust-Gunn 1995, 18). "The form of acting developed in the Group and taught at the Studio was to dominate the American stage for 30 years. The importance of the contributions of the Group Theatre and The Actors Studio cannot be overestimated" (Tust-Gunn 1995, 20-21). Though Strasberg's interpretation of Stanislavski's ideas gradually became more important in America than Stanislavski's

original ideas themselves, and Stanislavski himself continued to modify his ideas until his death in 1938 (Tust-Gunn 1995, 11-12), the two styles remain similar, and the “approach advocated by Stanislavski continues to influence the majority of actors in this country” (Tust-Gunn 1995, 33).

Definition of method acting

Stanislavski developed his ideas in part as a search for an alternative to the highly stylized, “presentational” style of acting he observed in his day (Tust-Gunn 1995, 10). Actors seemed preoccupied with the external trappings of the trade such as facial expression, gesture, voice and costume, resulting in largely superficial performances of more entertainment than artistic value (Tust-Gunn 1995, 10). Additionally, Stanislavski was concerned with the apparent unpredictability of actors’ work (Tust-Gunn 1995, 10). “Good” actors could have “bad” nights. In an effort to create more realistic portrayals, and also to systematize acting to address the ephemeral nature of creative inspiration, Stanislavski turned to psychology (Tust-Gunn 1995, 10). As the first theatre artist to do so, Stanislavski achieved a status in drama comparable to that of Sigmund Freud in psychology, and comparisons between the two have been made (Tust-Gunn 1995, 8). Like Freud, Stanislavski was interested in the “unconscious,” or subconscious (Tust-Gunn 1995, 10). Recognizing its power, he sought to manipulate actors’ subconscious minds by inducing in them their characters’ emotional states (Tust-Gunn 1995, 11). To do so, Stanislavski proposed two approaches (Tust-Gunn 1995, 11). Either actors could draw on their own experiences, essentially “remembering” their own emotions which

were similar to those of their characters in an exercise called “affective memory” or actors, often with the help of directors, could create imaginary situations or stimuli, what Stanislavski called the “Magic If,” designed to produce the appropriate emotional responses (Tust-Gunn 1995, 11). “How would you feel if? ... ” (Tust-Gunn 1995, 11). Either way, Stanislavski, who claimed direct mental focus had the opposite of the hoped-for effect of realism, leading instead to strain and distortion, sought to bypass intellectual analysis of emotions and move actors’ work from a mental to an emotional level (Tust-Gunn 1995, 16).

Both Stanislavski and Strasberg, through their emphasis on the psychological aspects of actors’ work, sought in general to create a larger portrait reflecting the internal life of characters which extended beyond the script. Because of the ideas developed in Moscow and New York in the first half of the 20th century, it is now commonplace for American actors to examine their “motivations.” “Why am I saying this?” “Why am I doing this?” “What do I want?” They write “biographies” of their characters and do improvisations and role-playing in rehearsals, imagining how their characters would respond in various situations, to understand and reproduce the emotional and psychological meaning behind the words on the page.

Effects of method acting on actors

Because of the intense emotional and psychological emphasis of both Stanislavski and Strasberg, acting techniques began to have the potential to have emotional and psychological impacts on actors, and the boundaries between actors and characters

became a concern. Here is where the literature is scant. Two studies in particular examine the actor-character relationship (Tust-Gunn 1995, Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999). One, a 1995 dissertation by Lisa Tust-Gunn for the California School of Professional Psychology at Alameda, seeks in part to link psychology and acting by reviewing the degrees of actor-character proximity and actor emotional and psychological involvement in roles, ranging from complete identification with characters to strict distance (Tust-Gunn 1995, 1). Tust-Gunn finds generally positive psychological results from the emotion-based approach to acting advocated by adherents to Stanislavski's ideas (1995, 1). Because of the psychological exploration of characters and the occasional use of personal experience in preparing for a role, acting offers actors an opportunity for self-exploration and self-discovery (Tust-Gunn 1995, 39). Like a form of therapy, acting may help actors confront what Carl Jung might have termed the "Shadow," "embrace the dark side," as it were, an important step in personal development necessary for achieving psychological health. In addition, because actors must forge an emotional and psychological connection with characters who are often different from them, acting can teach empathy for others (Tust-Gunn 1995, 39). A potential negative repercussion of method acting is excessive emotional and psychological involvement in roles, which can lead to identity confusion (Tust-Gunn 1995, 36). Actors might have trouble distinguishing between themselves and their characters (Tust-Gunn 1995, 36). The problem manifests when actors carry their personal "baggage" on to the stage or their characters into their personal lives. To address the problem, Tust-Gunn advocates maintaining an intellectual capacity which observes and analyzes all while actors simultaneously feel, for emotion is critical for their work (Tust-Gunn 1995, 44-48). This

“double” or “dual consciousness” allows actors to exert some control over their emotions (Tust-Gunn 1995, 44-48).

Another study of the actor-character relationship, by the University of Missouri-Columbia’s Suzanne Burgoyne and Karen Poulin with Ashley Rearden, dubs this concept of the confusion between actors’ personal lives and their characters “boundary blurring” (1999, 157). Focusing on student actors, some of whom, however, have significant professional experience, the study also finds both positive and negative effects of method acting on actors (Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999, 160-161). Actors reported acting “enhanced sensitivity, empathy, and awareness; strengthened sense of identity and values; facilitated emotional growth; improved understanding of self and others; and cultivated skills in relating to others” (Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999, 160-161). At the same time, when boundary blurring becomes extreme, it can result in emotional distress in actors (Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999, 161, 163). This study, too, advocates an element of control, an awareness or external consciousness which allows actors to transcend emotional and psychological states and think critically about their situations (Burgoyne and Poulin with Rearden 1999, 162).

Examples of method acting applied to other disciplines

Despite the potentially hazardous effects which can arise from emotional and psychological overinvolvement in roles, the benefits to actors of the Stanislavski approach to acting have been documented (Tust-Gunn 1995, 1). The Tust-Gunn study in particular discusses the use of acting in psychotherapy, sometimes termed “drama

therapy” or “psychodrama,” with positive results (1995, 56-59). And what is popularly termed “method acting” has been applied in other professions, particularly as a means of developing empathy in practitioners. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* advocated using method acting as a technique to train medical practitioners to empathize with their patients (Larson and Yao 2005, 1100). And a study published in the *Journal of Moral Education* proposed using acting and particularly the ideas of Stanislavski in the field of education, again to teach empathy (Verducci 2000, 87).

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, an explanation is given of this research's methodology. "Method acting" is applied as a theory to the samples, three book-length, contemporary journalistic products featuring "participatory reporting," to examine them for possible similarities between the effects of method acting on actors and the effects of participatory reporting on journalists, as evidenced by their products.

Again, this research seeks to determine whether similarities exist between the journalistic technique of participatory reporting and the theatrical technique of method acting in terms of their effects on their practitioners, as evidenced by their products, and whether those similarities, if they exist, might indicate participatory reporting's contribution to journalism.

To recap, the documented effects of method acting on actors include varying degrees of emotional and psychological involvement in roles which manifest in the following phenomena: personal growth resulting from self-discovery and/or increased self-knowledge and/or -understanding; empathy resulting from increased understanding

of other people; boundary blurring resulting in identity confusion; extreme boundary blurring resulting in emotional distress; freedom of thought, feeling, speech or behavior due to an awareness that situations are temporary and not real; or “double consciousness,” an ability to think critically all while having an emotional and psychological experience. These effects are summarized in table 2 on page seven of this research.

In comparing method acting’s effects on actors to participatory reporting’s effects on journalists, this research draws from the above-mentioned phenomena to pose the following specific questions: Do participatory reporters experience personal growth resulting from self-discovery and/or increased self-knowledge and/or -understanding? Do participatory reporters develop heightened empathy for and understanding of other people as a result of their projects? Does participatory reporting result in identity confusion and emotional distress for the journalist? Do participatory reporters think, feel, speak or behave differently because they are aware that situations are temporary and not real? Do participatory reporters exhibit a “double consciousness,” the ability to think critically all while having an emotional and psychological experience, in other words, thinking and feeling at the same time? These questions are summarized in table 3 on page nine of this research.

The methodology used to help answer these questions is a literary analysis of three, book-length, contemporary journalistic products featuring participatory reporting. The three books are Ted Conover’s *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, for which the author worked as a prison guard; Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America*, for which the author worked low-wage jobs; and Matt Taibbi’s *Spanking the*

Donkey: Dispatches from the dumb season, partly about the author's experiences during the 2004 presidential campaign. These three books were chosen because they are contemporary, are exemplary in participatory reporting concept and execution, and potentially exhibit examples of effects on journalists similar to those of method acting on actors. Though they are now in book form, all three were originally published as individual journalistic products in periodicals. Together, the books represent a variety of issues, social, economic and political, and serve as a representative sample of participatory reporting's contribution to journalism.

According to the journalism-theatre parallels discussed earlier, where journalists create stories, actors create characters. As some theatre research has examined the relationship between actors and their characters, this research seeks to examine whether or not there is a similar dynamic between journalists, or, more specifically, participatory reporters, and their stories. Thus it is important to identify clearly the specific subjects of the stories, issues, events, environments, situations, people or persons under investigation, in order to complete the journalist-story relationships. In the samples, the journalists seek to examine specific social or cultural subsets or groups of people by attempting to live lives as similar as possible to those of the people in their stories, and these social groups, in keeping with the journalism-theatre dynamic, serve as sorts of "characters" which the journalists "play." The dynamics between the journalists and the people in their stories are important, because it is precisely those relationships which are under examination in this research. An attempt to illustrate them is demonstrated in table 5:

Table 5. Research samples

date	journalist	book	people in story	topic
2001	Conover, Ted	<i>Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing</i>	prison guards	social
2001	Ehrenreich, Barbara	<i>Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America</i>	minimum- or low-wage workers	economic
2005	Taibbi, Matt	<i>Spanking the Donkey: Dispatches from the dumb season</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• presidential political campaign journalists• religious, Southern, conservative Republican presidential political campaign volunteers	political

Again, the above samples were chosen for use in this research because they are exemplary in participatory reporting method and execution and are meant to serve as a representative, but by no means exhaustive, sample of the participatory reporting technique. They are examined for effects of participatory reporting on journalists similar to the effects of method acting on actors discussed in Chapter Two, Literature Review, of this research and summarized in table 2 on page seven of this research. More specifically, Conover’s book *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, is analyzed from the point of view of the journalist’s relationship to his “role” as a prison guard. Ehrenreich’s work *Nickel and*

Dimed: On (not) getting by in America is analyzed from the point of view of the journalist's relationship to her "role" as a person trying to make ends meet on low- to minimum-wage jobs. And *Taibbi's book Spanking the Donkey: Dispatches from the dumb season*, in which the author actually plays multiple roles, is analyzed from the point of view of his two principle participatory reporting projects, for which the "roles" he plays are a presidential political campaign journalist and a religious, Southern, conservative Republican presidential political campaign volunteer.

The books are examined for evidence of effects on the journalists which are similar to the documented effects of method acting on actors discussed in Chapter One, Introduction, and Chapter Two, Literature Review, of this research and summarized in table 2 on page seven of this research. The emotional and psychological effects of the projects on the journalists, if there is evidence of any, are subsequently analyzed for the participatory reporting's potential contribution to the larger body of journalistic work.

Chapter Four

Findings and Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter, this research's theory is applied to the samples. The samples, three book-length, contemporary journalistic products featuring "participatory reporting," are examined for similarities between "method acting's" effects on actors and participatory reporting's effects on journalists, as evidenced by their products.

Specifically, the books are examined for evidence of the following effects of participatory reporting on journalists: emotional and psychological involvement in projects; personal growth resulting from self-discovery and/or increased self-knowledge and/or -understanding; empathy resulting from increased understanding of other people; boundary blurring resulting in identity confusion; extreme boundary blurring resulting in emotional distress; freedom of thought, feeling, speech or behavior due to an awareness that situations are temporary and not real; or "double consciousness," an ability to think critically all while having an emotional and psychological experience. These effects are summarized in table 2 on page seven of this research.

Again, this research seeks to determine whether similarities exist between the journalistic technique of participatory reporting and the theatrical technique of method

acting in terms of their effects on their practitioners, as evidenced by their products, and whether those similarities, if they exist, might indicate participatory reporting's contribution to journalism.

Ted Conover. *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*

Introduction

In *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, Ted Conover refers to his background in anthropology, comparing his reporting technique to an anthropological research method called “participant observation” (2001, 243). Participatory reporting, according to the author, is not so much a combination of journalism and theatre but of journalism and anthropology (2001, 18). “By combining journalism with anthropology, I’ve tried in previous writings not simply to observe but to participate in the lives of railroad tramps, illegal Mexican immigrants, Kenyan truckers, and even the elite of Aspen, Colorado” (2001, 18). In part, *Newjack* is an anthropological experiment to examine the lives of prison guards³ (2001, 18).

When Conover was denied repeated requests to examine the prison system as a traditional journalist, for example, by observing and interviewing guards, he opted instead to become a guard himself (2001, 22). The book chronicles the author's experiences in approximately seven weeks of training as a prison guard (2001, 12) and months of work at New York's infamous Sing Sing prison (2001, 317). Part of the book

³ The preferred term for a prison guard, according to Conover, is “corrections officer” (2001, 20).

was originally published in *The New Yorker* (2001, 311). It is important to clarify *Newjack* seeks to document prison life from the viewpoint of guards, not prisoners. As stated in the book, “While everyone knows that prison can warp or distort the personalities of prisoners, few stop to consider how it can do the same to those who work inside” (2001, 107).

Effects

Personal growth

It is not clear from Conover’s book whether or not he experienced any personal growth, either temporary or long-lasting, from his project, in terms of discovering and learning things about himself which contributed to temporary or long-lasting changes in his thoughts, feelings, speech or behavior. If the author did indeed experience personal growth from his project, there was not sufficient evidence in his book to warrant mention and analysis here.

Empathy

A more noticeable effect in the text is that of empathy, which Conover does express in his book as having developed through his project. The author approaches his project with preexisting sympathy for his study group, prison guards. He overtly expresses his intent in undertaking the project to help dispel cultural stereotypes about

prison guards, whom he perceives to be a misunderstood and unfairly judged group of people (2001, 18-19). Even with such an open-minded attitude from the beginning, Conover appears to emerge with an even deeper understanding of the difficulties and struggles of prison guards. He illustrates how prison guards, who are stereotyped in popular culture as the insensitive and even sadistic “bad guys (2001, 19),” would have a hard time emerging untouched by prison culture, an environment of constant threats, danger and violence, not to mention the high stress and inadequate reward of prison work, which can warp the personalities of those with even the best of intentions (2001, 207).

Identity confusion

Early on, Conover explains how prison work can be a high-stress job (2001, 20). Prison guards, the author is told, have the “highest rates of divorce, heart disease, and drug and alcohol addiction – and the shortest life spans – of any state civil servants, due to the stress in their lives. They fear not only injury by inmates but the possibility of contracting AIDS and tuberculosis on the job” (2001, 20). The dangerous nature of the job seems to necessitate guards maintain strict boundaries between their public and private lives (2001, 113-114, 243). He is advised by an experienced academy instructor not to “take it home to the wife and kids” (2001, 113-114). In another passage, guards are warned to “Leave it at the gate. ... Don’t bring it home to your family” (2001, 243).

In order not to “take it home,” Conover tries to maintain a strict boundary between public and private personas, work and home, project and “real life” (2001, 243).

As for that real life, the author discloses he has a wife and two small children, he lives in the Bronx, he is white, privileged, educated (2001, 243). He goes home to his family every evening, lending a duality to his life (2001, 243). Underscoring this boundary, his movement between these two worlds is marked by physical and mental preparation, much like an actor getting in and out of character (2001, 245). “In the locker room, I searched around for my game face, found it around the time I strapped the gear onto my belt: baton, latex-gloves holder, key clips – the tough stuff, the accoutrements of guard identity. ... I put the emotions away, and punched in” (2001, 245). Similarly, Conover develops a sort of detoxification ritual upon returning home from work in order to prepare himself for interaction with his family (2001, 243). The author spends two hours alone before greeting his children to get prison out of his system, or, as he puts it, “to get healthy, because the kids were pure and I was dirty” (2001, 243).

Despite his efforts to maintain boundaries, Conover is affected by his project. The author has emotional responses to his project⁴. He feels anger, sadness, humiliation, pride. While acknowledging the importance of perspective, Conover still allows himself to feel. At times, Conover’s emotions are signs of larger internal changes resulting from his project. For example, on at least three separate occasions, the author finds himself sympathizing with other guards in conflicts with prisoners, whereas before he thinks he might have found the guards’ attitudes or behavior brutish (2001, 93, 256, 282). Upon hearing the story of how an officer beat an inmate to the point of “prolonged cries of pain,” he is not repulsed. “A month earlier, I would have reacted negatively to a story like

⁴ At least part of Conover’s emotional involvement in his “role” might be due to his serious approach to his work. The gravity of the situation, for prison is a dangerous place, and his desire not to be “outed” as a journalist, combined, perhaps, with some sort of moral obligation, might have contributed to his work ethic.

that. But now, seeing how outnumbered officers were and feeling more like prey than predator, I found in the tale a grain of comfort” (2001, 93). Of his response to another officer’s story of relative strictness at a different prison, where the inmates “get the fucking shit beat out of them,” Conover writes, “The possibility no longer bothered me as it once had” (2001, 256). And the author is relieved at the news guards who assaulted a former inmate outside of prison are not punished (2001, 282).

In a particularly emotional moment, Conover expresses feelings of inadequacy after a series of embarrassing rookie blunders, including losing his keys, the “cardinal sin” of prison work (2001, 82). The incidents lead the author to question his ability to do the job well and to marvel at how his attitude is becoming different from what it was in his “real” life (2001, 82).

During various crises in my prior life, I had responded well, keeping cool when a friend broke his leg skiing or when a girlfriend lacerated her leg in a fall from a motorcycle or when something in the oven caught fire. I was the guy who, when someone tripped over a cord, caught the falling lamp.

Somehow, that didn’t seem to translate to prison work. I wondered about the reason. During those other incidents, my starting point was a calm, which was then interrupted. The starting point in prison, however, was stress, much of it born of hostility. Early indications were that I didn’t handle it so well. (2001, 83)

Emotional distress

Newjack exhibits examples of excessive emotional and psychological involvement, or emotional distress, in at least three passages of the book. Once, when taking care of his children after work before his wife comes home, Conover, in anger, grabs and yells at his two-and-a-half-year-old son, making him cry (2001, 114). Later, the

author has a nightmare about being “keeplocked,” or confined as a prisoner in a cell (2001, 114), and, on a three-day vacation with his wife to Jamaica, he has another prison dream (2001, 115). His project is literally getting inside his head. “All I knew then,” Conover writes, “was that even though my body was two thousand miles away, my mind was still trapped in Sing Sing” (2001, 115).

In a chapter entitled “My Heart Inside Out,” problems with Conover’s family worsen (2001, 242-303). When the author again yells at his disobedient son in anger, this time spanking him, which he has never done before, he describes his actions in prison terminology (2001, 244). The spank was a “use of force,” because his son “refused to comply” (2001, 244). Conover expresses ambivalence toward supposed quality time spent with his children (2001, 243). It is no longer exclusively a joy, because, the author states, “I’d been dealing with difficult children all day long. ... All day long I was disrespected by criminals; I felt that home should be different” (2001, 243-244). In the same passage, he describes himself as “mean” and “vulnerable” (2001, 245).

Months of prison work also adversely affect Conover’s marriage and social life (2001, 246). “We have a strong marriage that thrives on mutual curiosity about the world. Even so, the strains grew. Our social life suffered, sometimes because of my schedule, sometimes because mentally I just couldn’t handle certain kinds of Manhattan parties or dinner dates after a day of work in the prison. ... I was overwhelmed” (2001, 246.)

Communication between Conover and his wife suffers (2001, 246). The author deliberately hides from her the full reality of his work life and finds increasing impatience for listening to her “trivialities” (2001, 246). “ ... [I]t just seemed best to keep it inside,” he writes. “But inside is a bad place for stress. ... Black moods would come

from out of nowhere and envelop me. I tried to hide them by acting civil, but ‘civil’ came off as chilly and robotic” (2001, 246). The end of the chapter illustrates an argument between Conover and his wife following a “panic attack” about the job which he suffers on a rare weekend off with his family (2001, 246). The project has wrought a serious change in the author’s character, and his wife, kept in the dark, does not like what is happening but can not understand it (2001, 247).

The final passage of this very personal chapter details the events of one of Conover’s last days at Sing Sing, the day he submits his resignation (2001, 296-303). It is an account of how a relatively good mood sours, eventually damaging what had been an earnest work ethic (2001, 296-303). As usual, the author is overwhelmed by prisoners (2001, 297). When the hot water mysteriously goes off, there is conflict over prisoner showers (2001, 297). Then, he gets a visit from a mean sergeant who questions his capability, challenges his authority and engages him in power struggles (2001, 298). Conover experiences paranoia the sergeant is “badmouthing” him and deliberately trying to embarrass him in front of the prisoners and other guards (2001, 298). Later, there is a fire on the gallery which turns out to be harmless but is nonetheless unnerving to the author (2001, 299). Problems with prisoners continue (2001, 300-301). There are power struggles with some (2001, 300-301). The defiance of one embarrasses him in front of another officer (2001, 301). Toward the end of this escalating run of bad luck, Conover reports a “splitting headache” (2001, 300). “ ... [T]he afternoon took the form of an ever-growing pile of aggravations” (2001, 299). Ultimately, the author’s relief, who is about half an hour late, turns out to be brand new, a rookie, just as the author himself was months prior (2001, 302). Seemingly out of moral obligation, he begins to show the new

guard the ropes but, realizing the process could take as much as an hour, leaves in resignation, effectively throwing the novice to the lions (2001, 303). Among Conover's parting words are "Fuck it," a phrase repeated throughout the passage (2001, 303). In all, the passage contains at least twelve such expletives, uncharacteristic for the author's otherwise relatively tame writing, sticking out like red flags this job, which offers little more than too much stress for too little pay, has at least temporarily corrupted him (2001, 296-303). As the book states, "Prison got into your skin, or under it. If you stayed long enough, some of it probably seeped into your soul" (2001, 243).

Awareness that project is temporary and not real

On at least one occasion, Conover expresses an awareness that his project is temporary and not real but considers that awareness insufficient for avoiding emotional and psychological involvement in the project (2001, 48). "I had always consoled myself with the knowledge that my career as a guard might easily end after seven weeks, with graduation from the Academy. My real life was still waiting for me. ... But some group feeling was overtaking me. More and more, the thought of leaving now was unimaginable" (2001, 48).

Double consciousness

Conover exhibits a double consciousness when he overtly expresses his conscious effort not only to maintain strict boundaries between the project and his "real life," but to

stay aware of those boundaries. “My whole project, after all, was to keep one foot in and the other out, to be self-consciously aware that what I was doing was an experience, not my life” (2001, 243). With the use of the word “aware,” the author expresses his intent to think critically about his project before taking it too personally or getting “carried away” because of his emotional response to it. While double consciousness is meant to function as a mechanism for controlling emotion, as demonstrated above, he at times does have uncontrollable emotional responses before he is able to check them on an intellectual level.

Conclusion

Of the six principle effects of method acting on actors identified for inclusion in this research, Conover overtly exhibits at least five. Though, as stated above, there is not sufficient evidence of personal growth on the part of the author in his book to warrant discussion in this chapter, he does develop empathy, experience identity confusion and emotional distress, and exhibit an awareness that his project is temporary and not real and double consciousness. This suggests that, at least in this case, many, if not all, of participatory reporting’s effects on journalists are similar method acting’s effects on actors.

Barbara Ehrenreich. *Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America*

Introduction

Nickel and Dimed began as a participatory reporting project to find out how workers survive on low wages or the minimum wage (2001, 1-2). For the project, Ehrenreich worked as a restaurant server, hotel cleaning person, maid, nursing home aide and retail clerk in Key West, Florida, Portland, Maine, and Minneapolis, Minnesota; lived in cheap lodging ranging from a trailer to motel rooms; and reported on the success or failure of her efforts to make ends meet. Originally intended as a magazine article, parts of *Nickel and Dimed* were published in *Harpers* (2001, 1-2).

Effects

Personal growth

On at least one occasion in the book, Ehrenreich's severe emotional distress and the attitudinal and behavioral changes which result from it appear to lend themselves to self-discovery on her part, in that she learns something about herself of which she says she had previously been unaware or might have been unwilling to acknowledge (2001, 169). Through the author's inappropriate response to the stress of the project which manifests itself as an emotional outburst, she learns things about herself which are not exactly pleasant but eye-opening all the same (2001, 169).

I leave that night shaken by my response. ... [E]ven worse is what I thought. Am I turning mean here, and is that a normal response to the end of a nine-hour shift? ... This is not me, at least not any version of me I'd like to spend much time with. ... What I have to face is that 'Barb,' the name on my ID tag, is not exactly the same person as Barbara. 'Barb' is what I was called as a child, ... and I sense that at some level I'm regressing. Take away the career and the higher education, and maybe what you're left with is this original Barb, the one who might have ended up working at Wal-Mart for real if her father hadn't managed to climb out of the mines. So it's interesting, and more than a little disturbing, to see how Barb turned out – that's she's meaner and slyer than I am, more cherishing of grudges, and not quite as smart as I'd hoped. (2001, 169)

Empathy

Like Conover, Ehrenreich approaches her project with preexisting sympathy for the people in her project whose lives she is attempting to experience (2001, 1). Even with an initially open-minded attitude from the outset, the author finds some of her own remaining misconceptions about low-wage workers, similar to those of the culture at large, are challenged as a result of her project (2001, 220). She admits to having previously believed the conventional wisdom that poor people are poor because they simply do not work hard enough (2001, 220). Over the course of project, however, Ehrenreich finds low-wage work is neither easy nor “unskilled” but backbreaking and mind-numbing and still finds it impossible to get ahead or even survive. In other words, the author finds, it is a lot tougher than she thought. It can be said she thus emerges with empathy resulting from deeper understanding of low-wage workers after experiencing their difficulties herself.

Identity confusion

From the beginning of *Nickel and Dimed*, Ehrenreich exhibits a strong sense of identity (2001, 2). The author writes about her character, personality, likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, habits, expectations and limitations. She mentions her family of origin, including her parents, siblings and even her ancestors, which serves to further establish identity and boundaries (2001, 2). One early passage about Ehrenreich's family almost reads like an unsolicited justification, prompted by some codependent guilt about her own privilege, for why she has a blue-collar profession and not a low-wage job (2001, 2). "In my own family, the low-wage way of life had never been many degrees of separation away. ... So to me, sitting at a desk all day was not only a privilege but a duty: something I owed to all those people in my life, living and dead, who'd had so much more to say than anyone ever got to hear" (2001, 2).

Ehrenreich establishes boundaries between herself and the people in her story from the outset by detailing the many ways in which she is different from them (2001, 6).

I am, of course, very different from the people who normally fill America's least attractive jobs. ... With all the real-life assets I've built up in middle age – bank account, IRA, health insurance, multiroom home – waiting indulgently in the background, there was no way I was going to 'experience poverty' or find out how it 'really feels' to be a long-term low-wage worker. (2001, 6-7)

The author lists other advantages she has before the project (2001, 7). She is white, a native English speaker, has a car, no young children and a lifetime of health care

resulting in overall better health⁵ (2001, 7). “I had everything going for me” (2001, 7). Physical health is a particularly distinguishing characteristic (2001, 90). “Not that I ... imagine that I am a member of that oppressed working class. ... If I am now a productive fake member of the working class, it’s because I haven’t been working, in any hard physical sense, long enough to have ruined my body” (2001, 90-91). Sans young children, Ehrenreich is aware her domestic life is different from that of a single working mother, of whom there are many in the low-wage work force (2001, 7). The author also acknowledges what is perhaps the biggest difference of all (2001, 8). “There was, of course, the difference that only I knew – that I wasn’t working for the money, I was doing research for an article and later a book” (2001, 8).

While some differences are obvious to Ehrenreich from the start, others are discovered over the course of the project. The author learns, despite her Ph.D., she is not always as good at “unskilled” labor as she had anticipated (2001, 193). “From the first day on, I find that of all the things that I have left behind, such as home and identity, what I miss the most is competence” (2001, 17). Though she feels she can work just as hard at writing, at least in terms of time, seven days a week, for her “real” work she gets recognition and approval, something she finds to be critically lacking in the low-wage world (2001, 17). There are other, subtler differences. Ehrenreich is not a smoker, but most of her co-workers are (2001, 31). The author lives in humid Key West and works out, so she is used to sweating a lot, but in low-wage jobs which entail physical labor, fluids do not get replaced, and sweating is a discomfort (2001, 82-83). She is also

⁵ In the same vein, though Ehrenreich doesn’t mention it, she is also a United States citizen, which surely, at the very least, made things easier for her than for non-citizens.

accustomed to washing dishes, again, because of her family background, but finds at least one dishwashing occasion overwhelming (2001, 63-64). The meticulous cleaning methods Ehrenreich learned from her mother make those used by a cleaning service for which she works appear inadequate (2001, 75). And physical pain, one of the most prevalent side effects of low-wage work, must also be dealt with differently than in her “real” life (2001, 33-34).

The constant underscoring of how Ehrenreich the writer is different than the woman who works these jobs and lives like this creates an image of a double life, almost like two foreign worlds, between which she weaves in and out. At times, the author describes her project as such, like a trip to a “parallel universe” (2001, 11) where she is but a temporary visitor (2001, 6). “I was only visiting a world that others inhabit full-time, often for most of their lives” (2001, 6).

Ehrenreich’s low-wage life often does not seem real, and sometimes she doesn’t even seem real to herself. Upon meeting an acquaintance in Minneapolis, a “real” member of the working poor, a black single mother who relocated from New York, the author writes, “... [S]he is the original – the woman who uprooted herself and came out somehow on her feet and who did all this in real life and with her children – while I am the imitation, the pallid, child-free pretender” (2001, 133). The differences, however, between her and her co-workers are not so severe she feels as if she has to “act” (2001, 7). “Certainly I made no effort to play a role or fit into some imaginative stereotype of low-wage working women. ... [T]here was no reason to invest in a whole new life” (2001, 7).

Ehrenreich exhibits perhaps some of the firmest personal boundaries of any of the three journalists discussed in this research. Though the least emotionally expressive of the three writers, the author nevertheless does have emotional responses to the living and working conditions to which she is exposed. She expresses anger and distress. Like Conover, Ehrenreich has a work ethic, which she almost seems to equate with a violation of scientific objectivity (2001, 18). “ ... [D]espite the scientific detachment I am doing the best to maintain, I care” (2001, 18). The author is emotionally and psychologically involved with bosses and co-workers, feeling toward them anger and compassion. She wakes up in the middle of the night in anxiety over job-related issues (2001, 18). Threatened by increasing emotional and psychological involvement in her project, Ehrenreich often makes efforts to quickly reestablish psychological boundaries before the involvement becomes extreme. For example, when an employer tells the author something she doesn't like, she writes, “ ... [F]ear and indignation rise in my chest. I want to say, ‘Thank you for your time, sir, but this is just an experiment, you know, not my actual life’” (2001, 16). When she finds herself getting paranoid about some perceived backstabbing on the part of a co-worker, she tells herself, “Whoa, girl, time to get a grip!” On another occasion, threatened by encroaching excessive emotional and psychological involvement, Ehrenreich writes, “Message to me from my former self: Slow down, and, above all, detach” (2001, 101).

Because most of the jobs Ehrenreich holds entail intense physical labor, perhaps the greatest sign that the project is getting to her is a physical one: pain. The author's body hurts (2001, 33). She gets headaches, stomachaches and a rash (2001, 87-88, 162). Ehrenreich develops a nervous habit of plucking at herself, the same habit her

grandmother had, another throwback to her former self and another boundary reminder (2001, 162). The physical hardship and fatigue are at times overwhelming. “I am not tired at all, I assure myself, though it may be that there is simply no more ‘I’ left to do the tiredness monitoring” (2001, 46). The physical effects of the work sometimes extend beyond fatigue and pain. On at least two occasions, the author catches glimpses of herself in mirrors and is shocked at the change in her physical image (2001, 43, 186).

Ehrenreich recognizes the physicality of the project can overcome and even eclipse her ability to think at all (2001, 33). “... [B]urn, burn, burn! Ideally, at some point you enter what servers call a ‘rhythm’ and psychologists call a ‘flow state,’ where signals pass from the sense organs directly to the muscles, bypassing the cerebral cortex, and a Zen-like emptiness sets in” (2001, 33).

Despite Ehrenreich’s best efforts to avoid emotional and psychological involvement, she acknowledges her “objectivity” is at times compromised (2001, 4). “In the spirit of science, I first decided on certain rules and parameters. ... I tried to stick to these rules, but in the course of the project, all of them were bent or broken at some time” (2001, 4). Even the author’s strong sense of self sometimes gives way to identity confusion, bringing her low-wage persona to the fore (2001, 9). “People knew me as a waitress, a cleaning person, a nursing home aide, or a retail clerk not because I acted like one but because that’s what I was. ... ” (2001, 9). With time, lessons from her low-wage life lead her to question her “real” one, where some things she once considered reasonably affordable now seem to cost too much (2001, 34). “... [A]s the days go by, my old life is beginning to look increasingly strange. ... ” (2001, 34). The realization of attitudinal changes resulting from the project is not always pleasant. In one example,

when a co-worker is accused of stealing, and Ehrenreich feels he is innocent, she is disturbed by her own uncharacteristic failure to act on his behalf (2001, 41). “So why didn’t I intervene? Certainly not because I was held back by the kind of moral paralysis that can mask as journalistic objectivity. On the contrary, something new – something loathsome and servile – had infected me ... In real life I am moderately brave. ... ” (2001, 41).

Emotional distress

In at least two passages in the book, Ehrenreich’s involvement in her project becomes extreme, resulting in emotional distress. In one passage, after conflict with the author’s cleaning service co-workers, she expresses she is thinking of quitting (2001, 113). When she is encouraged to stay, she argues she would be easily replaced, because anybody can do this job (2001, 113). When the co-worker with whom she was in particular conflict bristles, defending the test which is supposed to ensure some measure of professionalism in new hires, Ehrenreich, already angry, goes over the edge, screaming an obscenity. “The test ... is BULLSHIT!” (2001, 113). With this reaction, the author has hurt the feelings of at least one co-worker and offended the sensibilities of all (2001, 113). “It’s an inexcusable outburst. ... Where’s my professionalism, anyway, the journalistic detachment that was supposed to guide and sustain me every inch of the way?” (2001, 113).

In another passage, Ehrenreich describes a shift, this one at Wal-Mart, which, much like the day Conover submitted his resignation, starts out well and goes downhill

(2001, 165-166). At the beginning, the author is “the very picture of good-natured helpfulness. ... But then,” partly affected by physical hardship, “ ... a Dr. Jekyll / Mr. Hyde transformation sets in” (2001, 165). She admits to “hating the customers” for their sloppiness which makes her work harder and even for their fatness (2001, 165). “At this point, ‘aggressive hospitality’ gives way to aggressive hostility” (2001, 165-166). Ehrenreich is surprised at the grotesque psychological changes overcoming her as the shift drags on and she grows increasingly tired, hungry, cranky (2001, 165). The author entertains a kind of obsessive delusion that she owns the store and its merchandise, indicating she is rapidly losing perspective (2001, 166-167).

On another night, Ehrenreich, already tired, snaps at a supervisor when she is reprimanded and has a quarrel with an unknown co-worker who interferes in her work, disrupting the control which had become a necessary sole means of comfort to her in the job’s monotony (2001, 168). The author is curt with this co-worker, too, and finds herself internally wishing her ill, not her last bout of “mental wickedness” (2001, 168).

Awareness that project is temporary and not real

Ehrenreich expresses an awareness that her project is temporary and not real but considers that awareness insufficient for avoiding emotional and psychological involvement in the project (2001, 186-187). “Yes, I know that any day now I’m going to return to the variety and drama of my real, Barbara Ehrenreich life. But this fact sustains me only in the way that, say, the prospect of heaven cheers a terminally ill patient: It’s nice to know, but it isn’t much help from moment to moment” (2001, 186-187).

Double consciousness

Ehrenreich's double consciousness, or her ability to think critically about her project all while allowing herself to have an emotional and psychological experience, is implicit throughout many of the aspects of her book discussed above. The author's sharp sense of self and related continual effort to establish boundaries between herself and the persona she feels she is adopting for her project can be attributed to double consciousness, in that a preexisting sense of identity allows her to view her project from the outside i.e., rise above emotion to think critically about it and analyze it. Nevertheless, as in the case of Conover, even her strong sense of self and fierce boundaries, which together serve as a double consciousness, are not sufficient to prevent emotional and psychological involvement, or even severe overinvolvement, in her project.

Conclusion

Of the six principle effects of method acting on actors identified for inclusion in this research, Ehrenreich overtly exhibits all, suggesting, at least in this case, participatory reporting's effects on journalists are similar to method acting's effects on actors.

Matt Taibbi. *Spanking the Donkey: Dispatches from the dumb season*

Introduction

Unlike *Newjack* or *Nickel and Dimed*, *Spanking the Donkey*, a collection of independent articles, some of which were originally published in *The New York Press*, *Rolling Stone* and *The Nation*, does not adhere to a continuous narrative. Most of the pieces, some of them largely opinion, others satirical or even fantastical, can be read by themselves. Taken as a whole, the book is not seamless, and its breadth makes it difficult to isolate the singular issue, institution or individual under journalistic investigation. The subject is mostly political, and much, though not all, of the book focuses on the 2004 presidential campaign. Overall, the book seeks to demonstrate how the American political system, and the news media which report it, are corrupted.

It is important to point out that *Spanking the Donkey* as a whole is not consistently participatory. Not all of the pieces included in the volume were written using participatory reporting. However, participatory reporting was used in some of them. In the book, Taibbi inserts himself directly into the narrative as a participant on multiple occasions. The author takes part in demonstrations, accompanies political campaigns and volunteers for a political party (2005, 2-14, 41-126, 220-262). Like Conover, he compares his reporting technique to anthropology, albeit indirectly, with a reference to Dian Fossey and a paraphrasing of a sort of identity confusion which can occur, too, in anthropological participant observation (2005, 221). “As a professional misanthrope, I believe that if you are going to hate a person, you ought to do it properly. You should go

and live in his shoes for a while, and see at the end of it how much you hate yourself” (2005, 222). Taibbi frequently uses role-playing as a reporting method. For example, in *Spanking the Donkey*, when the author is accidentally given someone else’s name tag at a press conference, he briefly assumes that identity to fool a peer (2005, 44-45). In New Hampshire, he disguises himself as a member of the military, complete with fatigues, for the express purpose of attracting the attention of John Kerry to expose that candidate’s obsession with veterans as excessive (2005, 109). And Taibbi lands his biggest role of all when he spends seven weeks in Florida during the 2004 presidential campaign season with a made-up name and identity as a volunteer for the Republican party (2005, 220-262).

Effects

Personal growth

It is not clear from Taibbi’s book whether or not he experienced any personal growth, either temporary or long-lasting, from his project, in terms of discovering and learning things about himself which contributed to changes in his thoughts, feelings, speech or behavior. If the author did indeed experience personal growth from his project, there was not sufficient evidence in his book to warrant mention and analysis here.

Empathy

Unlike Conover and Ehrenreich, Taibbi does not appear to approach his project with preexisting sympathy for the people in his stories. Quite the opposite. From the outset of his project, the author expresses overt bias against his two principle “study groups,” presidential political campaign journalists and religious, Southern, conservative Republican presidential political campaign volunteers. Repeated anecdotes from his experiences traveling with other journalists on the campaign trail point to his obvious dislike of and disrespect for many of his peers. Taibbi finds them shallow, of questionable ethics and motivated by ego (2005, 68-126). Likewise, the author holds very little patience or sympathy for the southern religious conservatives he encounters in Florida. The picture he paints of those people is also one of vanity and superficiality, not to mention stupidity and judgment (2005, 221-262).

Even with such preexisting attitudes, after having experienced firsthand the psychological pain (stress, challenges, struggles, problems, difficulties, etc.) of these two groups of people, Taibbi expresses sympathy for them, or at least a deeper understanding of why they are the way they are (2005, 186, 257-258). Though he clearly does not respect their work, the author concedes presidential political campaign journalists have difficult lives and develops an understanding of why producing quality on the campaign trail is difficult at best:

Campaign reporters have a tough life. It's tiring as hell, and there's never enough sleep. Some reporters go through long stretches, weeks if not months at a time, where they never have a day off, never sleep in their

own beds. You feel lousy most of the time: They feed you eight times a day, and you spend most of your time sitting on your ass, which incidentally is usually housed in clothes that haven't been laundered for quite a while (2005, 186.)

Similarly, after a participatory reporting project in a Southern Protestant community, he begins to understand the motivations behind some of the attitudes and behavior of religious conservatives – particularly their hatred toward liberals – he had previously dismissed:

I did change my views about a few things. Like I'm no longer sure about the New York feminist who wears a "Keep Your Laws Off My Body" T-shirt and then tells Christians in Georgia how to run their schools ... That's something that starts to seem striking after a while: how much, from this point of view, the East Coast liberal ethos looks like a celebration of indulgent selfishness as a way of life (2005, 257-258.)

Identity confusion

Like Ehrenreich, Taibbi recognizes himself as an outsider, an individual separate from the larger group. In *Spanking the Donkey*, however, there is not one boundary but several. The author distinguishes himself from Russians, from other Americans and from other journalists. In describing his experience in Russia, where he lived for about ten years, Taibbi expresses greater detachment from his stories because of his nationality (2005, x). The author is not Russian and says he was not bothered as much by disturbing stories about that country as he feels a Russian might have been (2005, xi). About a participatory reporting project for which he endured appalling conditions as a construction laborer in a Russian monastery, he writes,

Because the work was so hard, I didn't particularly enjoy that experience, but in observing it I felt untroubled by the outrage and disgust and shame I might have felt if I had been Russian. Instead the chief emotions I felt were sympathy and fascination. I was a witness to something terrible, but I was not an accomplice to it. What happened in Russia was not, ultimately, my problem, not so long as I could leave. (2005, xi)

Conversely, Taibbi's boundaries are poorer in America than they were in Russia (2005, xi). Because the author does not enjoy the same detachment in his own country, where the boundary between him and his compatriots is weaker, and he becomes emotionally and psychologically involved (2005, xi). Less detached, he responds more emotionally to stories in his own country than in a foreign one (2005, xi). "No longer personally disconnected from the subject, I found that everything I tried to write about (in America) was corrupted with a sense of disgust, self-loathing, disappointment and shame" (2005, xi). Taibbi is set up for emotional and psychological involvement simply by being in America. "Here I was not an impartial observer, but a walking, breathing element of the whole complicated scenario, a compromised player by birth with a definite role. ... " (2005, xii). The author acknowledges his emotional and psychological attachment to American culture with regret and laments the emotional and psychological distance he enjoyed abroad (2005, xiv). "I was never able to find that same method I used in Russia. I was never able to find that area of sympathy to organize my thoughts around, not even deep within myself, as an American who was involved" (2005, xiv).

Taibbi puts up particularly strong boundaries between himself and other journalists (2005, 186). In *Spanking the Donkey*, "presidential political campaign journalist" is actually one of the "roles" the author plays as a participatory reporter. And

like other participatory reporters, he feels that boundary, too, weakening, struggles to resurrect it and fights excessive emotional or psychological involvement. The difference between him and other journalists is starkly illustrated in a question-and-answer session of candidate Howard Dean (2005, 61). While Taibbi surprises the candidate with substantive questions about economic issues, such as how government can help small businesses compete with big corporations, other journalists take over before Dean can give a meaningful answer, interrupting the session instead with questions about whether Dean paints his own house, uses a brush or a roller, really plays the harmonica, etc. (2005, 61).

Repeated episodes like that leave Taibbi with barely concealed disgust for his peers, and he thus begins a struggle to construct boundaries between himself and them. To a certain extent, the drug-related antics and comedic stunts which pepper the author's writing seem like rebellion, in other words, a fight against conformity and for his own identity. In New Hampshire, he starts following Kerry around in a gorilla suit, because, he says, "I had gotten frustrated enough to start wearing it to events, as a sort of protest" (2005, 119). After a particularly outlandish episode similarly involving drugs and a costume, as well as self-induced starvation, Taibbi expresses a feeling of victory at having reclaimed his self from the risk of losing his identity to conformity (2005, 186). "Previously I was one of them (other presidential political campaign journalists), a beginner, but a twit; now I was a twit, but at least not one of them" (2005, 186). Overwhelmed with feelings of disgust and revulsion toward what he witnesses in American politics and the surrounding media environment, the author finds his participation in the process as a journalist so painful he makes repeated, earnest attempts

to force the most severe boundary of all, however impossible, that of negating his own existence (2005, 175). “ ... [T]he only original conclusion that I could reach was that participating in the campaign at all was counterproductive, and that the only way to really express the horror of it in a proper way was to reject it openly and entirely, that is, to not be there” (2005, 175).

Emotional distress

Taibbi’s fight for preservation of self is fierce. Nevertheless, the author is seriously emotionally affected by what he experiences, particularly on the campaign trail. His responses to his surroundings include anger and despair. The psychological damage is severe. Taibbi entertains a temporary eating disorder and considers suicide more than once (2005, 178, 189). The project, the author fears, risks driving him literally insane (2005, 177).

A normal human being concerned with maintaining his sanity is going to have a difficult time on the campaign trail. ... I gave up trying. ... I was relegated instead to taking steps to preserve my actual sanity. I needed, purely for the sake of keeping my own head on straight, to simply behave in a way that made me feel like I was not participating in the process. (2005, 160, 177)

Like Conover, Taibbi finds the emotional and psychological changes wrought in him by the project adversely affecting his closest personal relationships (2005, 177). “ ... [M]y personal life was unraveling. My relationship was falling apart. ... Like all depressed people, I was becoming a burden even to my loved ones” (2005, 177) Asking

for understanding and feeling none, the author grows estranged from his family and, again, with no option of exiting what he finds to be an excruciatingly painful situation, chooses a living death, nonexistence, as a defiant attempt at boundary resurrection (2005, 177-178).

I was all alone. I was fucked. I was locked in a death battle with life and I was firing back with two fists of nothing. From time to time on the trip, I went through the melodramatic process of planning my suicide. ... I hit upon the idea of going on a hunger strike. I was going to be on the plane, but I was not going to accept food or anything else from the campaign. ... Just the simple act of exercising some willpower in some direction gave me something to focus on. And so, for the rest of my time on the campaign – nearly seven days – I didn't eat one bite. ... By my second-to-last day on the campaign trail, I was nearly deranged with hunger. ... (2005, 177-178)

Taibbi's emotional and psychological involvement becomes extreme when it takes the form of mental illness (2005, 178). The author is already distraught by the behavior of politicians and other journalists which he witnesses on the campaign trail. "I was frustrated and depressed, alternatively fantasizing about committing acts of terrorism and teaching English to underprivileged inner-city kids – anything that wasn't this assignment" (2005, 162). But he reaches the "edge" when, traveling with Kerry's campaign, he finds out one of the candidate's press handlers, David Morehouse, once held a prominent position in the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (2005, 179). Taibbi writes he was once an active drug user and still takes drugs (2005, 102, 204). "... [W]hen I found out about Morehouse, I made a decision. I decided that as a gesture to every person who'd ever been busted for possession in this country, I would eat a ton of acid, then dress up in a Viking costume, interview Morehouse in a state of

plain derangement, write about it in a gigantic national magazine, and, well, fuck him” (2005, 180).

And Taibbi does exactly that (2005, 181-185). Already suffering from days of self-induced starvation, the author takes two tabs of acid of questionable quality, puts on a Viking costume and attempts to interview Morehouse (2005, 181-185). Aspects of the incident, such as the eating disorder and the costume, are mentioned above as examples of his attempt at reestablishing weakened boundaries through rebellion, but the psychological devastation is so severe it classifies as emotional distress.

There are psychological repercussions, too, from Taibbi’s other principal participatory reporting project, when he volunteers for seven weeks with the Republican party in Florida (2005, 221-262).

The stress of the assignment caused a lot of strange behaviors, none of which I could control very well. At times I would just get exhausted. ... And at other times I would seem to be fine and perky during the day ... only to wake up screaming later that same night after long nightmares. ... It was strange. ... There were the days when I’d wake up just feeling bitchy. (2005, 241-242)

Taibbi is not narcissistic enough to think he is the only one adversely affected by his environment. The author is careful to note, here and elsewhere, that he observes that others feel the same way (2005, 241-242).

Awareness that the project is temporary and not real and double
consciousness

As illustrated in the examples analyzed above, Taibbi does exhibit extreme emotional responses to his project. However, the author expresses little of any initial effort to avoid this, often appearing instead to submit effortlessly to his emotions without first exercising the intellectual capacities of awareness that his project is temporary and not real and double consciousness. Altogether, there is insufficient evidence in his book of either of these effects on his part.

Conclusion

Of the six principle effects of method acting on actors identified for inclusion in this research, Taibbi overtly exhibits at least three. Though, as stated above, there is not sufficient evidence of personal growth, an awareness that the project is temporary and not real and double consciousness to warrant discussion and analysis in this chapter, the author does develop empathy and experience identity confusion and emotional distress. This suggests that, at least in this case, some, if not all, of participatory reporting's effects on journalists are similar to method acting's effects on actors.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter, “participatory reporting’s” effects on journalists similar to “method acting’s” effects on actors, if any, as evidenced by the analysis of the samples, three book-length, contemporary journalistic products featuring participatory reporting, are discussed as a possible indication of participatory reporting’s contribution to journalism. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are also included.

Again, this research seeks to determine whether similarities exist between the journalistic technique of participatory reporting and the theatrical technique of method acting in terms of their effects on their practitioners, as evidenced by their products, and whether those similarities, if they exist, might indicate participatory reporting’s contribution to journalism.

Summary of results

To recap, the documented effects of method acting on actors include varying degrees of emotional and psychological involvement in roles which manifest in the following phenomena: personal growth resulting from self-discovery and/or increased self-knowledge and/or -understanding; empathy resulting from increased understanding of other people; boundary blurring resulting in identity confusion; extreme boundary blurring resulting in emotional distress; freedom of thought, feeling, speech or behavior due to an awareness that situations are temporary and not real; or “double consciousness,” an ability to think critically all while having an emotional and psychological experience. These effects are summarized in table 2 on page seven of this research.

In comparing the effects of method acting on actors to the effects of participatory reporting to journalists, this research draws from the above-mentioned phenomena to pose the following specific questions: Do participatory reporters experience personal growth resulting from self-discovery and/or increased self-knowledge and/or -understanding? Do participatory reporters develop heightened empathy for and understanding of other people as a result of their projects? Does participatory reporting result in identity confusion and emotional distress for the journalist? Do participatory reporters think, feel, speak or behave differently because they are aware that situations are temporary and not real? Do participatory reporters exhibit a “double consciousness,” the ability to think critically all while having an emotional and psychological experience,

in other words, thinking and feeling at the same time? These questions are summarized in table 3 on page nine of this research.

Effects

As far as the samples are concerned, the answers to the above questions appear to be largely affirmative, in that evidence of a majority of the effects was found in the books as a result of the analysis conducted in Chapter Four, Findings and Analysis, of this research. Above all, there is unmistakable emotional and psychological involvement, highlighted by the journalists' highly personal writing styles, which lend an emotional and psychological timbre to their voices. Their descriptions of their projects are characterized throughout by emotional responses to their projects. The projects affect the journalists' personal lives, particularly in the cases of Ted Conover and Matt Taibbi, whose personal relationships suffer because of the emotional and psychological effects their projects have on them.

Personal growth

In terms of personal growth, only Barbara Ehrenreich overtly expressed discoveries made or lessons learned about herself of which she felt she might have been previously unaware or might have been previously unwilling to acknowledge. All the same, because all three books were analyzed as finite research samples, it is not clear

whether or not any self-discovery or personal growth, if there was any, led to long-lasting changes in any of the journalists' lives or work.

Empathy

Empathy is evidenced in all three books, in which the journalists exhibit a deeper understanding of the people in their stories at the end of their projects than expressed at the beginning. All three manage to dispel at least in part some of the societal or personal stereotypes or misconceptions about their targeted study groups, largely by experiencing for themselves the psychological pain (stress, challenges, struggles, problems, difficulties, etc.) of the people in their stories; witnessing how that pain affects their own thoughts, feelings, speech and behavior; and consequently coming to a better understanding of people who experience the same pain.

Identity confusion

Though all three journalists initially exhibit relatively strong identities and senses of self, most often by underscoring their awarenesses of the boundaries between themselves and the people in their projects, or how they are different from other people, the boundaries of all three are weakened and/or destroyed on more than one occasion despite their attempts to maintain them, and their identities are confused or threatened. Even strong senses of self do not appear to be sufficient to avoid identity confusion.

Emotional distress

For all three journalists, emotional and psychological involvement escalates into emotional distress, taking slightly different forms for each journalist. For both Conover and Ehrenreich, stress manifests itself in violent, angry outbursts at others, which the journalists feel is uncharacteristic of their natures. In Conover's case, this violence is physical. Taibbi, on the other hand, largely internalizes the stress of his project, which manifests in the form of self-abuse and suicidal thoughts, both signs of depression, which is ultimately repressed anger.

Awareness that projects are temporary and not real

Both Conover and Ehrenreich include passages indicating their awarenesses that their projects are temporary and not real and that, because of those unique situations, the journalists think, feel, speak and behave differently than they would if their projects were their "real" lives that were continuing indefinitely. Taibbi expresses less of such an awareness. For his project as a presidential political campaign journalist covering how other journalists cover the campaign, even though he works hard to establish boundaries between himself and other journalists, the group under investigation in his project, he still appears to take his work very seriously, and the temporal or unreal nature of the project does not appear to affect how he thinks, feels, speaks or behaves. And though he approaches his other participatory reporting project as a religious, Southern, conservative Republican presidential political campaign volunteer very much like an acting role,

complete with an invented name, identity and “character” (2005, 254), it is not clear whether he exhibits any thoughts, feelings, speech or behavior he would not risk in a “real” situation.

Double consciousness

As for double consciousness, another faculty of critical thinking which is meant to curb emotional and psychological involvement before it becomes excessive, both Conover and Ehrenreich exhibit intellectual analysis of their projects all while remaining emotionally connected to them. In other words, they think while simultaneously allowing themselves to feel. Taibbi exhibits less of a double consciousness, in that he appears to submit to full emotional and psychological involvement without initially checking his feelings on an intellectual level and analyzing them to forestall identity confusion or distress. The results found in Chapter Four, Findings and Analysis, and discussed above are summarized in table 6:

Table 6. Effects

	Conover, Ted. <i>Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing</i>	Ehrenreich, Barbara. <i>Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America</i>	Taibbi, Matt. <i>Spanking the Donkey: Dispatches from the dumb season</i>
personal growth	insufficient evidence	discovers and learns things about herself of which she feels she had previously been unaware or which she had previously been unwilling to acknowledge	insufficient evidence
empathy	despite preexisting sympathy, develops empathy for prison guards, having experienced their emotional and psychological pain (stress, challenges, struggles, problems, difficulties, etc.) himself	despite preexisting sympathy, develops empathy for low-wage workers, having experienced their emotional and psychological pain herself	despite preexisting antipathy, develops some empathy for both presidential political campaign journalists and southern religious conservatives, or at least a deeper understanding of them, having experienced their emotional and psychological pain himself
identity confusion	initially exhibits strong sense of identity through constant underscoring of differences between self and people in project, but still experiences weakening of boundaries over course of project	initially exhibits strong sense of identity through constant underscoring of personal history and differences between self and people in project, but still experiences weakening of boundaries over course of project	initially exhibits strong sense of identity through constant underscoring of differences between self and people in project, but still experiences weakening of boundaries over course of project
emotional distress	experiences extreme emotional and psychological involvement in project in form of inappropriate speech and behavior	experiences extreme emotional and psychological involvement in project in form of inappropriate speech	experiences extreme emotional and psychological involvement in project in form of mental illness
awareness that project is temporary and not real	expresses an awareness that project is temporary and not real which is nevertheless insufficient for completely avoiding emotional and psychological involvement in project	expresses an awareness that project is temporary and not real which is nevertheless insufficient for completely avoiding emotional and psychological involvement in project	insufficient evidence
double consciousness	exhibits double consciousness which is nevertheless insufficient for completely avoiding emotional and psychological involvement in project	exhibits double consciousness which is nevertheless insufficient for completely avoiding emotional and psychological involvement in project	insufficient evidence

Conclusion

If the three samples can be considered representative of the participatory reporting technique, then it can be stated affirmatively participatory reporting does have many of the same effects on journalists method acting has on actors. Participatory reporters become emotionally and psychologically involved in their stories. They develop increased empathy for and understanding of other people, particularly the groups under investigation in their projects, specifically by experiencing the emotional and psychological pain (stress, challenges, struggles, problems, difficulties, etc.) of those people themselves, albeit by proxy. Some make discoveries about themselves which increase their self-knowledge and -understanding, though it is not clear whether those discoveries lead to long-lasting personal or professional growth which extends beyond their projects. Though they initially exhibit strong identities and senses of self, often by establishing boundaries which distinguish them from the people in their stories, their emotional and psychological involvement in their projects eventually weakens those boundaries, resulting in identity confusion. When boundary blurring becomes excessive, participatory reporters experience emotional distress, essentially getting “carried away” by the feelings brought about by their projects, resulting in inappropriate thoughts and/or behavior. Some temper or mitigate their identity confusion and/or emotional distress by their awarenesses that their projects are temporary and not real and by their double consciousnesses, their abilities to think critically about and analyze their situations all while having emotional and psychological experiences. Unfortunately, even intellectual

capacities of awareness and critical thinking appear not to always be effective in preventing emotional and psychological involvement.

Participatory reporting is characterized, at least in part, by emotional and psychological intensity on the parts of the journalists themselves. When journalists undertake participatory reporting projects, they report not just on the physical and material conditions of the situations under investigation. They write about how those situations can have emotional and psychological effects, too. If the situations can be painful, stressful, uncomfortable or difficult, it is evidenced by how the people in them, particularly the journalists, are emotionally and psychologically, not just physically, affected. In other words, participatory reporters report not only on their stories, but on the emotional and psychological dynamic of their relationships to those stories. They write about their personal feelings and emotions which arise from their participation in their projects. In that respect, it can be said participatory reporting, as represented by the samples in this research, is distinguished in part from other forms of reporting by its inclusion of the journalists' own personal emotions and psychology. The journalists' thoughts, feelings, speech and behavior are included as information just like any other gathered during the reporting process.

It is not clear whether participatory reporters' experiences can be extrapolated to apply to the other people in their stories. In keeping with the journalistic criterion of accuracy, it is perhaps more ethical for journalists to report on their own thoughts and feelings instead of making assumptions about those of others. Indeed, reporting on other people's inner thoughts and feelings has been a point of debate in literary journalism. Participatory reporters, however, can report with certainty the emotional and

psychological aspects of stories because they have experienced those emotions themselves and thus know them to be true, a luxury perhaps not afforded to journalists who employ traditional reporting methods of observation and interviewing alone.

In sum, the emotional and psychological effects projects have on participatory reporters serve as supplemental information to the stories. Psychology is information that adds to the story. The journalists deem it worthy of including in their books. It can be argued in their view, at least, it makes a contribution.

Limitations of study and suggestions for further research

Before participatory reporting's emotional and psychological effects can be fully considered the technique's contribution to journalism, it is necessary to find out whether the same results are achievable via other reporting methods, particularly the traditional journalistic reporting methods of detached observation and interviewing. Conover did, indeed, try to get the story using traditional techniques and was rebuked (2001, 22). Journalism traditionalists might argue by dint of sheer perseverance, for example, by waiting outside prison walls to waylay exiting guards, or hanging out in night spots where guards congregate, Conover could eventually have befriended them enough to access their personal experiences of their jobs. The same might be said for Ehrenreich, in the case of low-wage workers, and Taibbi, with other journalists and with religious conservatives.

Additional research on participatory reporting might entail a comparative study juxtaposing stories about the same subjects but written using different reporting

techniques. Such a study could be used to determine reader preferences and/or exactly how the participatory reporting technique is different from other reporting methods. Are the same results obtainable using traditional journalistic techniques? Ultimately the question is, “If these experiences have these effects on journalists, are the effects the same for other people in the same situations?” Are journalists, using traditional reporting methods, able to document the thoughts and feelings of people in certain situations with the same degree of accuracy and completeness as when the journalists have those experiences themselves?

However, the effects of double consciousness and an awareness that a situation is temporary and not real would be absent by default from the experiences of “real” people, who are not “acting” or “playing a role” as participatory reporters do. They might lack the “outsider status” necessary for critical thinking, the ability to rise above or transcend emotional and psychological experiences through an intellectual capacity which observes, thinks and analyzes, about their own experiences, and would thus be unable to express or articulate what participatory reporters who possess that faculty might realize. As a result, the findings in reports on “real” people might be clouded, less conclusive and less revelatory than those in stories by participatory reporters, who are more likely to have double consciousnesses and “outside” awarenesses, about their own experiences.

Another aspect of participatory reporting not addressed in this research is whether the emotional and psychological effects experienced by journalists extend beyond their projects. After the projects are completed, are the effects long-lasting or even permanent? Perhaps more importantly, do participatory reporters’ experiences change the way they

approach their work, the way they do journalism? These questions might better be answered by interviews with participatory reporters.

Finally, this is an interdisciplinary study attempting to link journalism and theatre. While the comparisons between the two disciplines are interesting, a more relevant study might involve a comparison to the anthropological technique mentioned by Conover termed “participant observation.” Whereas theatre was chosen for this research for its psychological aspects, thus focusing more on the human individual than the group, society or culture at large, participant observation might add an anthropological component to any further research on participatory reporting, thus placing it in a larger social or cultural context, also an important and relevant consideration for journalism. In addition, because of the heavy emphasis on psychology, included in this research through theatre, a study directly connecting and comparing journalism and psychology might also be useful and interesting.

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