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English 100

A Journalistic Piece on Journalism

“Well, see, being a journalist, you get to bring these stories into the world, how cool is that? You know these people who are just living their life and don’t have an outlet and you give it to them.”

Experienced journalist Tereza Joy Kramer dove into yet another incredible story from her years working as a newspaper journalist for the Wire Service— this time she told a smiling story about the first of four times that she got to observe the Dalai Lama.

Kramer looked back on that first encounter admitting, “In hindsight, I realize how big of a deal that was.” As a learning and committed Buddhist herself, Kramer appeared to still be excited about the opportunity to attend an event that was an interest for her both professionally and personally.

“[It was] a two week teaching and blessing of peace in the world and the Dalai Lama does it all over the world and it was happening where I was, so I covered it... so I sat fairly close to where he was when he was leading his teaching, which was phenomenal. And then on the stage there was just a regular stage and he was in the middle of the stage and there were four

journalist chairs [on the stage] and I don't even know why we were on the stage, but that's my claim to fame with the Dalai Lama.”

This was only one of the many incredible experiences that Kramer selected and shared with me during the interview that I conducted with her. The opportunity to talk with a journalist like Tereza Joy allowed me to peek into the life of a newspaper journalist and discover more on what it's like to be in the journalism profession.

My relationship with Tereza Joy began in 2014, my first year at St. Mary's College on the third floor of freshman dorm De La Salle. She was my Resident Director and one of the first names I taught myself to remember. I hardly interacted with her until the middle of the semester when I saw posters throughout the dorm halls for “Meditation Time” on Wednesday nights. Intrigued, I attended one of these sessions next door to my room in the lounge area. She was there, directing the session, which consisted of brief introductions and a 20 minute guided meditation that began and ended with the deep gongs of a singing bowl that resonated evenly throughout the room without being distracting. My relationship to my Resident Director stayed at that level for the rest of the semester, only meeting on the nights of meditation, and ending on the day that I moved out for summer vacation.

It wasn't until the Fall of 2016 that we were reunited and our relationship expanded from one of brief interaction to one of deeper acquaintanceship when I registered to take the January Term class that would be visiting Nepal. We talked about our shared interests and hobbies, and during the trip to Nepal, we— as individuals and as a group— got to know each other on a much deeper level. As my instructor, Tereza Joy spent the majority of the days with us and through

that time, I was able to learn so much more about her that surprised and inspired me. In specific, her experience as a journalist was most interesting to me. As a developing writer myself, her stories about her experiences in the journalism world and advice about following what really matters heavily impacted the way I thought about my own future and what the possibilities were. I hadn't been an English major for long, and the only things I knew about journalism were that which I had seen in movies or been told by past teachers and professors.

I, myself, as an evolving young adult and college student, thought I knew what I wanted to do ever since I started high school. My job throughout high school as an assistant in the art program at the San Diego Zoo was a dream come true—working closely with my father, helping young aspiring artists hone their skills, encountering exotic animals closely, exploring the possibilities an environment like a Zoo could offer a young teenager. Being around such incredible animals so often fueled my desire to study Zoology once I got to college. I geared my classes in high school and my extracurriculars always had something to do with animals. I walked onto campus my first day of classes freshman year of college already declared a Biology major. Along with my first math classes and introductory science courses to build towards my Biology degree, I was also required to take a couple English classes to fill core requirement of the college. I sailed through my English classes with ease and interest, while I spent hours in the library and offices of my science professors trying to get a handle on the information in the courses. I struggled with every math and science course I took, but I just thought that was because science is a hard subject.

I justified my decision to limit English and to keep pursuing Biology by telling myself that everyone is good at English and science is hard for everyone. So of course it was going to take time for the material to make sense to me, right? I barely gave any importance to the fact that I was receiving circled A's on my essays and scribbled "see me" notes at the bottoms of my lab reports until a year later. I went in to talk to my Biology advisor to figure out whether or not I could work at a Biology-Psychology split major. When she asked me how my classes were going that Fall semester of sophomore year, I gave her a brief rundown of my classes; Biology was hard and I was already falling behind, math was fine, seminar was seminar and my poetry class was really exciting and I was really looking forward to writing more that semester. I walked out of her office, split major proposition in hand, and realized I had been forcing upon myself that which did not fit.

I had chosen to blindly navigate a scholastic path that wasn't totally right for me because I had been too blind to acknowledge that there are so many more options than just teaching that can come from a degree in English. I toyed with the idea of switching to English and leaving my science days behind, and with each day that passed where I woke up excited to go to poetry and dreading going to Biology, I realized that the change was necessary. It was one of the most nerve-wracking decisions and changes I had ever made, but once the decision was made and I began all of my new classes, I knew that I had made the right decision.

It still left one question open: what was I going to do with an English degree? The default answer was teacher but I knew I couldn't bear to be around children for nine months out of the year, so what else was there? I learned from a creative writing class that I took that I found a

surprising amount of interest in writing and creating stories. The only things that I knew were based on media and teachers, and I wasn't sure how accurate those depictions were. There were so many things out there; how was I supposed to know what to do, where to go, which information to trust? It is this exact reason, this lack of information that propelled me to investigate the truths of newspaper journalism.

I went about investigating the specific genre and discourse community of newspaper journalism using the framework that is set up by activity theory. Since activity theory can be applied to a community and/or a text, I decided that it would be most useful to adapt in my expose on newspaper journalism. A large part of the activity theory is talking to people in the specific community and genre, questioning their tacit knowledge. It is through these interactions that it reveals the aspects of a system to lead to better understanding of the nature of the activity; it analyzes the ways in which parts of the system work together, it provides a clear, unblemished look into the reality of the genre that it is applied to.

I adapted this theory for my research on what newspaper journalism is and how it produces the types of writing that it does through interview and research. My interview gave me a firsthand look into the life of a newspaper journalist, and the survey that I put together and conducted confirmed the fact that a knowledge gap exists, as well as provided a clearer idea of how exactly newspaper journalism is understood by the general public.

I put together a brief, eight-question survey through the platform of SurveyMonkey, an online site that allows you to create your own quiz and keep the results and participants

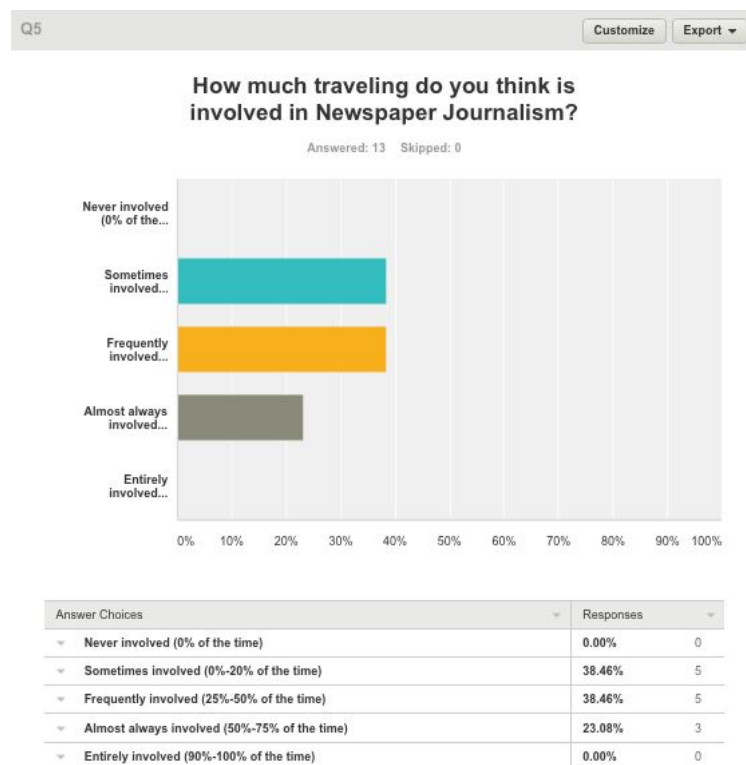
anonymous for the utmost discretion and validity. I posted the link to my Facebook page because the people who have the ability to view my page range from all grade and age levels, all occupations, all knowledges, all communities—the best platform to get a random collection of answers. The results of that survey showed me a *lot* about what people know— or don't know— about newspaper journalism.

To begin with the analysis and explanation of the survey results and other findings during the research process, I will briefly profile those who participated in the research to validate the random selection. Two questions in the survey served to provide a way for me to know and prove that the participants were of various backgrounds: What is the highest level of education you have completed? and What is your area of focus in school? The former question revealed that the people who took my quiz were at least in college to some degree— 69% had “some college,” 23% were “college graduates,” and the remaining 7% had completed “graduate school.” The latter question revealed that within the group, there was a very wide variety of academic focus, ranging from business to art.

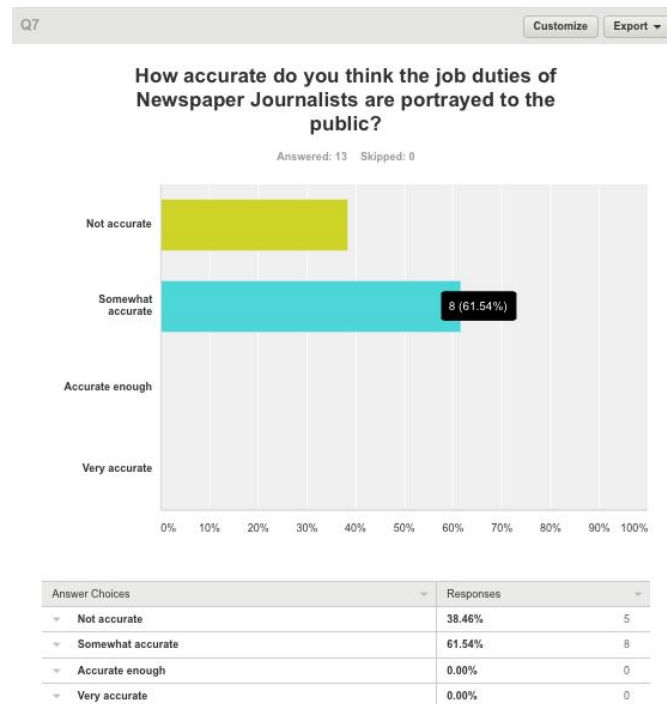
The remaining six questions in the quiz were geared towards getting an idea of what the individuals thought newspaper journalism consisted of, and whether or not they believed newspaper journalism was depicted correctly in society. The results showed me that there exists an ambiguity of what newspaper journalism really entails. One of the questions on the quiz was “In your own words, and based solely off your own knowledge, how would you define newspaper journalism?” The answers were vague and varied and to be quite honest, even humorous. One respondent wrote in that newspaper journalism is “daily news,” another that it's “research stories and interviews,” another that it's “a dying art that needs to be revived,” another

that it is simply, “writing.” The vagueness of the responses showed me that even those who indicated that they have experience and knowledge of newspaper journalism, there still exists some sort of wall that creates an ambiguity around the genre.

Another question was how much traveling they believed was involved in newspaper journalism. The results showed that 38% of the participants thought it was “sometimes involved,” 38% believed it was “frequently involved,” and 32% believed it was “almost always involved.” While it is accurate that all the responses indicated some type of travel time in newspaper journalism, the variety of the results was still pretty widespread. When I spoke with Tereza Joy about her time as a newspaper journalist, she mainly talked about her experiences where a story had taken her somewhere other than her office, even out of the country at times. She stated that, depending on what you’re covering, “a lot” of traveling is involved in newspaper journalism.



Another question revealed more insight into what the public thought about the accuracy of newspaper journalist depictions. The results to this question made it very clear that individuals who responded did not necessarily believe that the ways in which newspaper journalism is portrayed are not accurate, not truthful. During my interview with Tereza Joy, she confirmed my thoughts around whether or not there are any fallacies surrounding journalism, stating that “yes, I do...I think you’re right. They sugar coat things...”



To fill this gap, this ambiguity is the reason why I decided to conduct both a survey and an interview. Tereza showed me what it’s really like to be a newspaper journalist, showed me that “curiosity is huge, sense of adventure is huge, and of course interviewing skills, writing skills,” are some of the most vital skills newspaper journalists and even aspiring newspaper journalists should have. In explaining the importance of persistence in the genre, she recounted

the “many times” she had to repeatedly ask for information from an individual. Her advice was this: “If they don’t call you bad, you go and knock on their door. If they’re not there, you send them a text message. Persistence is huge.”

One thing that Tereza Joy admitted was accurately depicted in the media and in the movies was the actual workplace. She used the movie “All the President’s Men” as an example of a movie that was successful in representing what it was like to be in the environment of a newspaper journalist. While a large portion of the work and research is done out in the field, going to news conferences, looking for stories, interviewing various sources, it all comes back to the office.



A scene from the movie, “All the President’s Men,” showing the environment of a newspaper journalist

The jobs that are offered in today’s society are way more diverse than ever before and ever-expanding. While that may be an advantage that allows diversity for the growing population, it also creates a veil of ambiguity over those occupations which have not been

extensively researched. How does a college student who is hurtling towards graduation and onto their newborn real-world legs know the truth about the profession they wish to enter? The obvious answer is an internship, right? But let's go a little bit before that; how does one figure out what is even in store at those companies, those jobs, those areas that you find interesting? There is a *lot* of information out there, making it extremely easy to be misled and to construct ideas about various professions just based off of what we think and what we see and what we hear, which can often be pretty off-base.

It takes a certain type of person to willingly set foot in a not-so-familiar territory and, beyond that, set out on a search for the unique, the concealed, the reality. Being a journalist can literally, physically put you out of your comfort zone, but isn't that the point? How else are you supposed to find out the answers to the questions that nobody will ask, or are asking the wrong people? Writers in this genre are tasked with scenarios that might or might not require immersing themselves in a culture, an environment completely foreign to them and discover that which is beneath the surface so that they can construct a piece of writing that stands out amongst the cliché-ridden articles of fellow "explorers." Their office is the outdoors and the uncomfortable, whether it be two towns over or two countries over. Tereza Joy's interview and my own research allowed me to confirm that, yes, there is a knowledge gap that exists of what newspaper journalism really entails, and also allowed me to begin to fill that gap.