Aggressive Media Violation Of Privacy: Princess Diana?S Death Essay, Research Paper

Aggressive Media Violation of Privacy and its Consequences

Paparazzi and Their Contribution to Princess Diana?s Death

It was only last August that the familiar world of U.S. evening television programming was interrupted by a terse bulletin, stating only Princess Diana of Wales had been injured in an auto accident in France. However, moments after the first bulletin, a second news flash interrupted, ominous in the complete lack of details, gravely stating that an update on the Princess Diana?s condition was coming. The update, as promised, came, succinctly describing her having recently died in a French hospital, after being removed from the wreckage of a late night automobile accident. Later, other details were added in further reports, especially how motorcycle-riding photographers and reporters had pursued her sedan at high speeds. Some eyewitnesses had also been quoted as saying the motorcyclists had swerved in front of her car, causing the driver veer away from the cyclists and into a wall.

The question soon asked by many, including the French magistrates, was ?who was responsible for Diana?s death? It was not as simple as just negligent motorcyclists involved, as the accident was complicated by Diana?s driver allegedly having a drinking problem, and witnessed as driving much too fast. If anything, the photographers were just a contributing factor to the accident. Certainly, there were people who voiced either one or the other opinion. In some of the first reports after the accident, as related in the BBC news (1), a white Fiat Uno was reported to have been involved in the crash, and pieces of the Uno were supposedly found intermingled with that of the Mercedes. Although it was not known who was driving the Uno, speculation immediately focused on one of the paparazzi as being the driver. However, as also related in the BBC news (1), what was known about the crash was Diana?s driver was both drunk at the time of the accident, and the most likely cause of the accident.

Interestingly, the reports of some additional, mysterious party involved in, and responsible for, the accident, take different forms, but always seeming to involve paparazzi. In one Reuters Internet news release (2), the police took a damaged motorcycle away from the crash scene, and its connection, if any, to the photographers was explored. However, any facts about who the motorcycle owner was, or how the motorcyclist was involved in the crash, have remained unreported, as part of the stealthy investigation conducted by French police. In contrast to the low profile of the police investigation, there have been numerous, blunt assignations of blame to the paparazzi. One of the more voluble people quoted has been British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook: ?It will be doubly tragic if it does emerge that this accident has in part been caused by the persistent hounding of the princess and her privacy by photographers? (2). Similarly, actor Tom Cruise had his opinions of who was responsible, and was not hesitant about voicing them. He stated he had endured harassment by paparazzi, and had been chased in the same tunnel as Diana by photographers; his experience in the past had been very similar to hers (2). Tom Cruise was quoted as saying ?the prices paid for celebrity pictures cause aggressive behavior? (2).

Obviously, there is little or no doubt in some people?s minds as to where the blame should be put for the accident. Mr. Cruise has also provided motive, making the actions of the motorcycle-riding photographers to be deliberate in causing the accident. After all, they were pursuing Diana because photographs of her were very valuable, and were worth engaging in reckless activity to obtain. Perhaps the most interesting comments to date have come from Bernard Darteville, the lawyer acting for Dodi Al Fayed?s father. The lawyer has stated ?the photographers were responsible; last minute hounding of the couple caused nervousness which led to last minute security changes? (3). Relatedly, Bernard Darteville discovered that Henri Paul, security chief at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, had been called from home to drive Diana?s car. He regular driver was assigned a different car, and drove in the opposite direction of Diana?s car as she left the Ritz, to attempt to draw the paparazzi away (3). Lastly, witnesses reported seeing a motorcycle zigzag in front of her car to slow it (3). Taking the above comments, one would be moved to believe the paparazzi were obviously responsible for the crash. However, the evidence contained in the statements is scanty, and much of what has been said is simply opinion, by people who are already prejudiced against the paparazzi. They obviously are not a source of unbiased opinion.

Further comments about the paparazzi?s contribution to Diana?s death have been made by figures as prominent as Helmut Kohl (4). He has questioned the modern role of media in society, and has been quoted at length. ?Princess Diana has become the victim of an increasingly brutal and unscrupulous competitive fight of a section of the media. This terrible accident and her death should give those responsible in the media something to think about ? (4). Please note that Helmut Kohl did not quite assign blame to the paparazzi, rather, he placed it on the media as a whole, with rather circumspect comments about a group within the media being responsible. It may well reflect Mr. Kohl?s experience as both a politician and a statesman that he implied who he thought was responsible, instead of saying it in so many words. It is also implied in Mr. Kohl?s statement that whoever was responsible did not act deliberately to cause the accident; they were unaware of the consequences of their actions; quote ?her death should give those responsible in the media something to think about.? Mr. Kohl has portrayed the responsible segment of the media as needing to (yet) make the connection between their actions and the accident, only after reflecting on it.

Another view, somewhat more factual than the opinions found in other sources, has emerged (5). Here the obvious lack of eyewitness information about the accident is acknowledged; it was reported that Diana?s bodyguard could not supply information about the crash, as he does not remember it. Doctors who have treated the bodyguard are not surprised at his amnesia, as either the accident trauma, or the anesthesia given for the surgeries, could have suppressed his memories of the accident. Therefore, blame and responsibility cannot reasonably be assigned by conventional methods including eyewitness testimony. One may note the French magistrates involved in dealing with the legal activity about the accident seem to have taken a similar view. The magistrates are not pursuing charges against the paparazzi for causing the accident; the magistrates are targeting the paparazzi for refusing to render aid to the accident victims.

Again, the lack of real evidence supporting charges of responsibility here is slim.

As stated in the beginning of this paper, the paparazzi can only fairly be viewed as a contributing factor in Princess Diana?s death. They were involved, and their past actions did influence changes in Diana?s routine for the evening of the accident. However, the facts also show Diana?s driver being drunk, and driving poorly, which was certainly more important in than the paparazzi in causing her death. One might even make a claim that the paparazzi were simply guilty of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Their invasion of her privacy was no worse the evening of the accident that at any other time, and could be argued as having no greater effect that evening than at any other point in her life. Despite all the opinions placing blame on the paparazzi, there is just not enough evidence to convince, or to convict.

1. BBC News, http://204.71.177.72/headlines/970831/entertainment/

2. Reuter News Service, http://204.71.177.72/headlines/970831/entertainment/

3. Retuer News Service,

http://204.71.177.72/headlines/97091/news/stories/driver\_5.html

4. Daily News, http://dailynews.yahoo.com/headlines

5. American Photo Syndicate, http://www.american-photo.com/cgi/ID:cgi