

Food for the masses: The death of Diana

The untimely death of Princess Diana has generated an assortment of reactions. There was the puzzling despair of the millions of people in Britain and beyond, there was the forced sympathy of world leaders such as Bill Clinton, and closest to home, genuine apathy amongst young adults.

For those affiliated with journalism, sociology or even ethics for that matter, the tragic passing of a 36 year old woman due to the zeal and lack of restraint of a couple of reporters brings forth the important question of "How far is too far?"

The "scoop" has always been a fascinating and necessary component of journalism. What separates one periodical or informative TV program from another is often its ability to provide what the other has failed to give.

As for the British tabloid market, people could not get their fill of Diana's personal life, and those tabloids provided a ready influx of facts and photos equally balanced with gossip, rumours and innuendo. Whichever publica-

tion provided the freshest photos of Diana with her new-found beau could probably count on some sort of sales advantage for that particular week.

This is the background for a cutthroat industry, where hungry journalists and photographers risk everything — from their dignity to their lives — while searching for the next scoop.

Like all ethical dilemmas, the question as to what responsibilities a reporter has to his/her subject is fit for debate. Most people would agree that the photographers who gave chase to Di and her unlucky companions went too far, as plenty of lives were put in danger and two innocent people were killed. Needless to say, those reporters getting criminally charged for taking pictures instead of helping the dying princess also crossed the line.

But what of phone-taps, or even of more restrained actions of the paparazzi? It is a case of the democratic ideals of free press in conflict with the utilitarian ideals of personal liberties. So long as the

public wanted, or still wants, to know the idiosyncrasies of the lives of the rich and famous, celebrities will have to endure the perpetual intrusion of reporters.

History has shown us that progressive democracies such as those of Canada, the United States and Great Britain tend to, at least publicly,

value the happiness of the masses more than those of the few. By that guideline, there are few instances in which consensus can be reached that a reporter has gone too far. Those indirectly responsible for the death of Princess Di did go too far, as did the reporters who figured career enhancing photo's of a mor-

tally wounded Di held priority over saving a woman's life.

Sohrab Farid

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