

Before the season started, I made a comment to Pat O'Brien of Access Hollywood that I thought the volume of media coverage of the Kobe Bryant trial would result in higher TV ratings for his games and for the NBA in general (turns out I was right). USA Today ran a headline saying that I said, "rape was good for NBA." Which I never said. USA Today knew that this headline would gather attention, so they went with it.

The media jumped all over it and made the headline, rather than what I said in the story. It was picked up everywhere. Access Hollywood jumped in the fray and proactively sent out copies of the tape, using out of context sound bites that played to the coverage of the USA Today headline. Access Hollywood and USA Today got what they wanted: free advertising. Hundreds of thousands of media impressions quoting or referencing USA Today, Access Hollywood or both.

The question I had then, is the same question I have now? What is the goal of these media outlets? How do they define what is "newsworthy." It sure appears to me that the news media has evolved from "all the news that is fit to print" to "How much free publicity can we get from this story?"

We are now in an era where media searches for stories that will generate media coverage of the story. Stories are written not for the value they bring the readers, viewers or listeners, but rather the volume of coverage they will bring.

Which leads me to the coverage of Kevin Garnett's war metaphors. Maybe you think his comments comparing his perspective on Game 7 to war as inappropriate, maybe you don't care. That is not the issue to me. My question is the role of the media.

They all stood there with their recorders on as KG spoke and took in his comments. Did a single person standing around him ask him if he was sure he wanted to go on the record with those comments? Did anyone jump in and remind him that some might consider the comments insensitive? That maybe he wanted to recant or go off the record so the media wouldn't quote him?

Let's think this through. If the problem was that families of those serving our country would be offended by the comments, why didn't a single media member put the feelings of those people above their need to have a headline?

Everyone in the media has a "headline generator" in their mind when they are doing an interview. They are never surprised by the headlines. They knew exactly what would happen. They would write the story, and the headlines would be KG's war metaphor. Then KG would have to apologize, and that story would be carried worldwide. The story about the story.

And what about all the newswires that distributed the comments to every media outlet in the world and the outlets that ran, read or presented those comments? Where was the sympathy for the families that KG is accused of not having? If these comments are so insensitive, why run them? What KG said was heard by not more than 15 people. He didn't put out a press release.

If someone standing with a microphone in KG's face was insulted by the comments, he or she could have said so and KG could have apologized to them. Beyond the media in the room, if the family of a service member is upset because of what they read, saw or heard in the media, why isn't the company or person who distributed the comments responsible?

It's typical media hypocrisy with a sad conclusion. We say it not because there is information that we feel our customers want to know, but rather because all of media has become so self-serving that a new media quid pro quo has evolved. You run our vapid stories with attribution and we will run yours.