Title:
The Princess Diana: HEY, WANNA BUY SOME PIX?

Word Count:
1438

Summary:
Hollywood celebrities were cropping up so often on TV talk shows last week that you would have thought it was Oscar time. They were grieved, of course, over the tragic death of Princess Diana. But they were also eager to gripe about the paparazzi, whose aggressive tactics may have played a role in her death. Elizabeth Taylor called them murderers. Tom Cruise recounted how he and his wife Nicole Kidman had been chased by photographers through the very same Paris tunnel. Everyone from George Clooney to Whoopi Goldberg chimed in; boycotts were advocated; legislation proposed. Some stars reportedly even want to investigate the private lives of tabloid editors, to give them a taste of their own medicine.

Keywords:
Diana, Princess, Princess Diana, The Princess, The Princess Diana

Article Body:
Hollywood celebrities were cropping up so often on TV talk shows last week that you would have thought it was Oscar time. They were grieved, of course, over the tragic death of Princess Diana. But they were also eager to gripe about the paparazzi, whose aggressive tactics may have played a role in her death. Elizabeth Taylor called them murderers. Tom Cruise recounted how he and his wife Nicole Kidman had been chased by photographers through the very same Paris tunnel. Everyone from George Clooney to Whoopi Goldberg chimed in; boycotts were advocated; legislation proposed. Some stars reportedly even want to investigate the private lives of tabloid editors, to give them a taste of their own medicine.

There was a self-serving side to all this, of course. Hollywood stars would like nothing better than to cow the press into docility, thus clearing the way for nonstop coverage of their thriving careers, happy home lives and unflagging concern for the spotted owl. Yet in this instance, Hollywood perfectly tapped

into the public mood. The week of mourning that followed Diana's death also saw an outpouring of revulsion at paparazzi tactics, prompting a fresh round of self-appraisal by publications that use their photos and, tacitly at least, condone their excesses.

Paparazzi--the celebrity photographers who trail stars looking for shots of them in unguarded moments--have been around for decades, dogging the tracks of people like Elizabeth Taylor and Jacqueline Onassis. But the game has grown increasingly fierce in recent years, as media outlets devoted to celebrities have proliferated, and new technology, such as digital photo transmission, has come into use. And lately, the absence of wars and other world crises (as well as skimpier budgets for covering foreign news) has forced many photojournalists to do celebrity work just to make a living.

There's big money to be made. Two weeks before Diana's death, the Globe tabloid ran eight pages of photos of her and Dodi Fayed on their vacation off the island of Sardinia, and boasted in a note to readers of paying $210,000 for them: "It was a big payday for photog Mario Brenna, who stands to make as much as $3 million worldwide." Lured by such sums, paparazzi are resorting to ever more aggressive tactics--sometimes even provoking confrontations with stars in order to catch their temper tantrums on film. "About a year ago there was a real increase in invasive kinds of pictures," says Valerie Virga, photo editor for the National Enquirer, "people really going over the edge to get the picture--climbing roofs, scaling buildings, super-super long lenses into people's backyards. We've turned down hundreds of pictures over the last year for that reason."

U.S. photographers blame their European counterparts for upping the ante. "They are ruthless," says Scott Downie, the owner of Celebrity Photo, an agency that covers official show-biz events. "Those who came here in the '80s laughed at us as babies: 'You don't know how to get a good photo. We're here to get them in a private moment, not in diamonds at an event.'" Yet every paparazzo is familiar with the pressures. "It's a collective hysteria," says Mark Saunders, who has covered Diana for the past five years. "It's the adrenaline flowing and that desperate need to get a photograph. I've seen [U.S. photographers] in action outside John Kennedy Jr.'s house. If America wants a tragedy on the same scale, just allow that to continue."

Saunders says Diana's death confirmed a decision he made six months ago--to get out of the paparazzi game altogether. But most other paparazzi, and the agencies that hire them and peddle their photos to magazines, were incommunicado or unrepentant last week. "I feel no responsibility, legal or moral," says Goksin Sipahioglu, director of the Paris-based Sipa agency. "Of course, I'm sad, because someone we all adored is dead. But when you become Princess Di, you are a public person." In a telling irony, several of the agencies representing photographers detained by French police after the accident would not release photos of them to the press. And some agencies supplying pictures of Dodi and Diana to magazines last week specifically asked that they not be given the usual credit line.

Yet editors of publications that rely on paparazzi are taking a fresh look at how far their intrusive tactics should be allowed to go. Shortly after the accident, Steve Coz, editor of the National Enquirer, publicly vowed not to buy any photos taken at the scene, while claiming that his tabloid had instituted a policy a year ago of not using so-called stalkerazzi pictures. (The Enquirer issue on the newsstands when Diana was killed, however, featured several candid shots of the princess with Fayed, trumpeted by the cover line DI GOES SEX-MAD. The issue was pulled by a number of newsstands after her death.) Dan Schwartz, editorial director of the more freewheeling Globe, also promised to toughen standards. "We're going to become more conservative about our assessment of what will offend people, because we have to," he said. "People's consciousness of what is paparazzi and what isn't has been raised."

Mainstream publications are hardly exempt from the debate. Dozens of publications, including TIME and Newsweek, used paparazzi shots to illustrate their stories on the tragedy last week. A news photo of Diana's two sons glimpsed inside a car after her death--a shot that could easily be regarded as intrusive--ran even in the sober New York Times. Though editors and publishers say clear-cut rules are hard to set, the tragedy has heightened their sensitivity to the issue. "You have to exercise judgment when you know competitive forces are going to exercise less judgment and less taste," says Mort Zuckerman, publisher of the New York Daily News. In a letter to readers in this week's PEOPLE (published by Time Inc.), managing editor Carol Wallace writes that decisions on whether or not to use paparazzi photos are made "on a

case-by-case basis, weighing the news value of a picture against a story subject's right to peace and privacy."

Such self-policing is unlikely to satisfy the paparazzi's sharpest critics. California legislators like Tom Hayden are planning to introduce legislation to curb paparazzi exploits, such as requiring photographers to maintain a certain distance from their subjects. Such laws, however, might have a tough time passing constitutional muster because of the threat they pose to freedom of the press. (Not to mention the freedom of any grandmother at Disney World to snap pictures of a famous person who passes by.) Legal experts point out, moreover, that most abuses can be dealt with by current criminal laws (against trespassing and assault, for example) or by civil lawsuits, as Jacqueline Onassis brought when she won injunctions against photographer Ron Galella.

Both legislation and self-regulation have been tried overseas, with mixed results. A French law enacted in 1970 allows the courts to punish press actions that are deemed an "assault on intimacy or privacy." Actress Isabelle Adjani used the law to win a judgment against the tabloid Voici in 1995 for running photos taken without her permission. Still, French paparazzi are widely perceived to be among the world's most brazen. In Britain, meanwhile, the Press Complaints Commission, established in 1991, has drawn up a code of practice to prevent invasive press tactics. Though hard to enforce, the rules have succeeded in removing at least some paparazzi shots from the raucous British tabloids.

The campaign against paparazzi has its dangers. Almost by definition, journalism involves some measure of intrusion--investigating matters that the subject would rather not be publicized. In covering Hollywood, moreover, journalists must battle a sophisticated armada of publicists, who seek to manage every jot and tittle of media coverage of their client. "The paparazzi have become more aggressive because celebrities and their publicists have got so controlling," says Steve Sands, a New York City-based celebrity photographer.

Nor are the stars above using the paparazzi for their own purposes. When the Kennedy family gathered for a family outing in Hyannis Port, Mass., two weeks ago, photographers snapped pictures of the happy clan playing touch football.

Far from shooing away the nosy cameras, the family clearly welcomed the coverage as a chance to let the world see their togetherness in the wake of recent family troubles. Then there are the people who buy the newspapers and watch the TV shows that keep the paparazzi in business. These consumers of celebrity news got lectured last week by those same celebrities for not curbing their appetites. They may yet listen. But for now, they are too busy paying their last respects to the biggest celebrity of all.