

Media frenzy



Todd Munson is a junior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Print media disgrace profession

Don't you love it when the enigma known as the media refers to itself as "The Media"?

Every so often, with growing regularity, the tech-geeks from TV, news-fiends at newspapers, and the savvy linguistic stylists at magazines call their practices and methods of news gathering into question.

I really hate to beat a dead horse, or at least a dead princess, but when Princess Diana was killed, it was gut-check time for the media.

On TV and in print, journalists questioned whether or not they stepped past the line in causing her death. It was kind of like daring your kid brother to shoot your youngest sister with a slingshot. When he hits her just right, or wrong for that matter, and accidentally kills her, whose fault is it? Yours for daring him to shoot her or his for actually going through with it?

A good example of this analogy comes from ABC's Sam Donaldson during the first week of the Monica Lewinsky bit. As is the case with news organizations, reporters don't appear at an event on their own, they are sent there by order of a superior. During a weekend edition of "Nightline," Sammy wowed viewers with a story that took them behind the scenes. What unfolded was a literal media mosh pit.

Sam pointed out ABC's front line cameraman. He was in the thick of it, swinging elbows and shoving people as if he were at a White Zombie concert instead of the White House lawn. Donaldson's narration explained why the cameraman was such a bad sport: "If he doesn't get that shot, he answers directly to the news chief. He doesn't want that to happen."

There was Sam Donaldson, on national television, telling viewers ABC News does whatever necessary to get the picture or the perfect sound bite.

But let's get back to Princess Di. Her death put the media in an interesting position. With their mighty egos begging to be bruised, the "respectable" journalists of America pointed the finger at their red-headed stepbrother, the paparazzi. Both TV and print joined hands for a moment and told the vultures of journalism to go to hell.

The paparazzi stayed in hell a few short days.

Every major television news organization ran stories about the paparazzi in action. Most of the video used in their stories came from file footage. Hmm ... to get pictures of the paparazzi in action, one must be near the paparazzi at the same event. But, the network news is obviously much better, because they don't sell their story or video to the highest bidder. Instead, they just charge the bejeezus out of advertisers.

I wasn't the only one who noticed. Newspapers lambasted television for giving the paparazzi so much exposure.

Recently, though, The Associated Press did a nice impersonation of the paparazzi when they sent some of their reporters to cover Monica Lewinsky's stay in Los Angeles. They followed her every move, so closely that the driver of the AP's vehicle rear-ended the van in which Lewinsky was traveling. That sounds more like stalking than news reporting.

I'll admit TV sucks, especially the news, but newspapers suck worse.

As a broadcasting student, I've taken a truckload of crap from the news-ed majors down here at the Daily Nebraskan. It's usually good-natured crap. "Go report for 'Hard Copy,' you talking head," they say.

"Go write for the 'Weekly World News' or take photos for 'People,'" I retort.

I believe the hostility manifests itself from the fact news-ed people are jealous of those majoring in broadcasting. Writing a story is ridiculously easy. If something isn't correct, just revise it until it flows like the mighty Platte River. Before I started writing this column, I had no experience with working at a newspaper. I would like to see a newspaper reporter go shoot a story for a television newscast, write it, edit it together and finally report it live with no backspace key to be there in case he or she screws up.

Finally, we're prettier and in the cooler side of the media.

The last time America went to war, did you wait until the morning paper to find out what happened? No. You turned on CNN and watched it live courtesy of the broadcast media. Did you ever stop to think how much of a pain in the butt it was to arrange a live satellite broadcast while a war was happening all around you? Could a newspaper reporter keep his composure the way Peter Arnett did during the bombing of Baghdad? You'd think his blood was morphine by how calmly he looked out his hotel window and gave a bomb-by-bomb commentary as buildings were blowing up mere blocks away.

How about the "Miracle in Missouri." What did you think was more exciting, soiling your pants as you watched it live and drooling at the many replays from different angles, or reading about it the next day?

Or how about the Winter Olympics? The written word of a sportswriter couldn't match the excitement of watching Picabo Street bomb down a mountain with her ovaries hanging out, on her way to her first giant slalom victory and a gold medal.

Fans of newspapers argue television is a fleeting moment, gone in the blink of an eye, but a newspaper can be saved and kept for posterity. The only saved newspapers I ever saw were used to line my cat Spud's litter box back at my mother's place.

And what print folks are most jealous of is the entertainment television provides. What's more fun, reading a story by some kook who uses words larger than a school bus, or watching the "Late Show with David Letterman" as Monica Lewinsky suck-starts a Harley Davidson on "Stupid Human Tricks"? Sweet glorious television, is there anything you can't do?

But if newspapers suck so bad, then why am I here?

For the money, baby. Oh yeah ... sweet beautiful cash.

Broadcast journalists taint media



CLIFF HICKS is a news-editorial and English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

You know who's been getting on my nerves lately? Journalists.

(Take a long look at your tagline, Cliff.)

Oh, I see that! Believe me, I'm hoping the whole profession overhauls itself before I get too tangled up in it. I'm starting to lose respect for it.

But the more we move forward, the faster people want information. So when the news happens, they want it right then. Right then.

Even the broadcast media has delays of some kind. The Internet is the worst, because as fast as you can get something typed in, people can access it. It doesn't even have to be done happening yet.

The same for broadcast journalists. They, in my not-so-humble opinion, rank toward the bottom of the food chain along with algae. Maybe lower; I haven't yet heard algae lie, but you see something new every day.

See, it's not that broadcast journalists are bad people. Some of my best friends are broadcast journalists. I know quite a few of them. It's just the profession itself that is inherently wrong.

Sometimes they jump the gun:

"News flash! I'm Stone Phelps! Someone's just been shot! Let's go to our correspondent on the scene, Mountain Warst! Mountain?"

"Thanks, Stone! We don't know who has been shot yet, but there has been a shooting in the restaurant. Police aren't on the scene yet, but we already have someone inside, Bluff Faks. Bluff?"

"Thanks, Mountain! I'm in the kitchen of the Late Dinner where we believe a gunshot has gone off. We're going to peek into the main dining room now."

"What does he see, Mountain?"

"I don't know, Stone. What do you see, Bluff?"

"Oh, it looks like ... oh, it was merely some plates falling."

"We apologize for the interruption and now"

return you to your regularly scheduled program."

A lot of times they retract what they say. "Hi, I'm Forrest Winter, and everything we told you last hour is false. During this hour ..."

And we all know broadcast media is objective ...

"Welcome to our special - 'The President: World Leader or the Man Who Can't Keep It In His Pants And Is Going To Be The Father Of Half Of The Next Generation Of Our Country?'"

"Next week - 'The Iraq Crisis: Can't Saddam See We're Going to Kick His Ass?'"

They never dwell too long on anything, do they?

"We interrupt your regularly scheduled Oralgate update to bring you an episode of 'ER.'"

And they certainly don't compete for ratings. "We have a total of SIX people here to debate the O.J. Simpson trial today, instead of all those OTHER networks, who only have THREE."

Or: "News so fresh, we almost made it ourselves. Tonight: Our cameraman is arrested for smashing in the window of a police cruiser. Should she have been incarcerated, or is this restricting the freedom of the press?"

And has anyone noticed the talking heads on these news shows are getting more generic?

"Good evening. I'm John Brown, this is Julie Smith, and you're watching 'Plain-Label News.'"

Pretty soon, all we'll have are a pair of computer-generated faces that are custom-designed for the type of news we want to watch.

And is it REALLY necessary to watch every moment of a war? Like, for example, the Persian Gulf War. Amidst all the cries of "This is for your own good!" and "You people want to see it!", I was left at home, entranced by all the violence and death, wondering where was the compassion of man. Where was the human face of it?

Why was the war footage interspersed with beer commercials and football stats?

Instead of seeing the horror of war, I got to watch rockets fire, troopers say what a great thing they were doing and shots of the survivors walking with their hands on their heads. Oh, great. Score one for the good guys. News isn't news anymore - it's entertainment.

Let's not exclude radio from this, either.

Everything is becoming talk radio these days. People want to call in and argue about everything. Radio stations are branching out their news hours, even doubling them in some cases, to allow them to take calls from "the people affected." So instead of getting 20 minutes of things you want to know, you get five minutes of things you want to know and 35 minutes of opinions from some yahoos you couldn't give two cloned sheep droppings about.

"Well, let me tell ya what I think about that darn feller we got up thar' in th' Ovary Office!"

I'd really rather you didn't, sir. Thanks, though.

And I can't say the print media isn't guilty of this. Heck, what do you think we have headlines for? In giant letters you see "COLUMNIST KILLS THOUSANDS!" and beneath it you see in teeny-tiny letters "then realizes it is merely a dream."

I would also be remiss if I didn't lambaste the McPaper, USA Today.

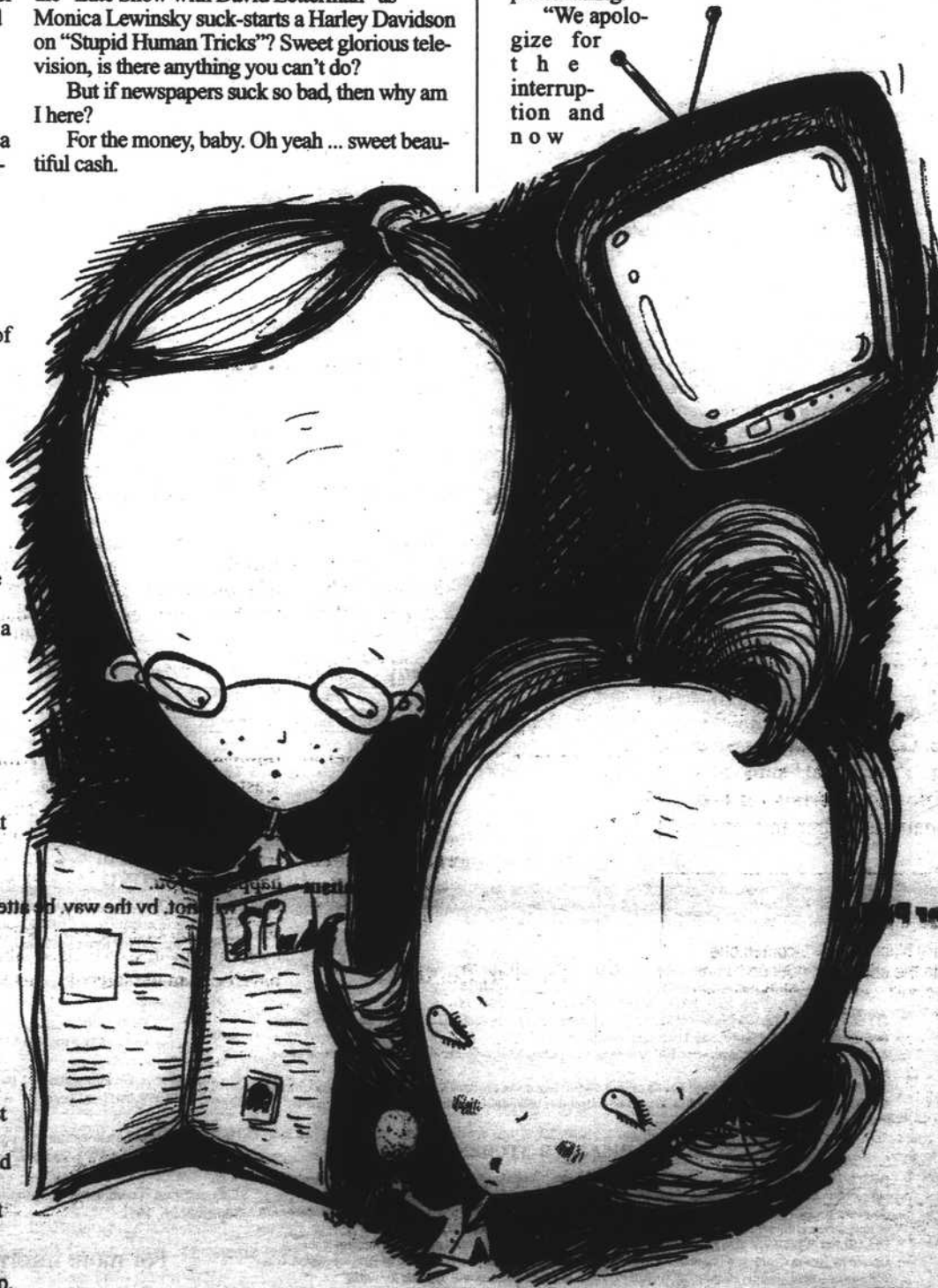
"Eighty-four percent of America thinks 48 percent of the 32 percent of you reading this have no clue what 68 percent of American butchers think about coffee grinds!" Uh, what?

It's divided up into so many graphs, charts, pictorials, expanded cutaway detailings and thoroughly bizarre sketches, that if there's actual body on the paper, it's melted into the ink. I'm sure there's a writer working there somewhere.

And we in the print media are guilty of covering something to death just as much as anyone else. I'm still seeing "Di-ploitation Watch" in Time every few weeks. It's over, ladies and gents, she's dead. Deal with it.

So what am I doing going into the media? Think of me as the Martin Luther to the Catholic Church of Mass Media. I'm gonna rebuild this house from the ground up. I'm gonna reform the whole business. I'm gonna change the way the media works!

Or maybe I'll just write a book about it and go on "Good Morning, America."



AMY MARTIN/DN