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1. CBQ REVIEW ESSAY:

Tabloid Journalism Redux:

English Language Sources, 1996-1998

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The following essay updates my **TABLOID JOURNALISM: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SOURCES** (Westport, CT: Greenwood "Bibliographies and Indexes in Mass Media and Communications, Number 10," 1996 — \$65.00, ISBN 0-313-29544-1, 187 pp.) which treated relevant literature published through June 1995. Both the book and this update define tabloid journalism as news reporting that appeals primarily to the emotions, often in an excited or exaggerated manner. Such sensationalism has a long history, tracing its origins back to the lurid 17th-century English broadsides and news ballads. America's penny press of the mid-19th century was condemned by the journalistic establishment because it specialized in human interest stories and reported crime realistically. Hearst's "yellow journalism," the phototabloids of the 1920s — specially Bernarr Macfadden's *New York Evening Graphic* with its "composographs" (composed photographs)—all paved the way for the supermarket tabloids of today.

The 819 monographs, dissertations, and periodical articles (scholarly, law review, trade, and magazine) listed and summarized in **TABLOID JOURNALISM** cover a broad range of disciplines including history, sociology, anthropology, political science, and law in addition to journalism and communication. This serves to indicate that media sensationalism has permeated our society, influencing the manner in which we relate to one another. As a result, scholars feel the need to address the phenomenon, attempting to define, explain, and evaluate it.

This update, covering 1996-1998, suggests that tabloid journalism is continuing to extend its influence and spark scholarly debate. Biblical archaeologists report on the manner in which their field is treated. Hong Kong, re-acquired by China, finds that its burgeoning tabloid press is testing the limits of Chinese tolerance. Documentaries, once the domain of respected investigative journalists like Edward R. Murrow and Bill Moyers, increasingly pander to the demand for entertainment. In attempting to determine sensationalism's societal impact, scholars continue to debate anthropologist Elizabeth Bird's contention that tabloid journalism ultimately supports society's status quo. The 20 items listed include monographs and articles in scholarly journals, law reviews, and magazines. The fields of anthropology, archaeology, communications, economics, journalism, law, and sociology are represented. I have personally examined each of the sources. The update's arrangement parallels the topical categories used in my 1996 book, arranged by author within each subject.

A. U.S. Print Journalism

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IT'S ALIVE! HOW AMERICA'S OLDEST PAPER CHEATED DEATH AND WHY IT MATTERS by Steven Cuzzo (New York: Times Books, 1996 — \$25.00, ISBN 0-8129-2286-7, 342 pp.) chronicles the decline and rebirth of the New York Post, rescued from oblivion by Rupert Murdoch. Chapters cover the last years of Dorothy Schiff's stewardship, the first appearance of Murdoch, the tenure of Peter S. Kalikow, and Murdoch's return. Cuzzo maintains that tabloid culture succeeds in illuminating life's paradoxes better than scholarly inquiry and suggests that exposure to sensationalism may prompt more serious study of human impulses and their consequences. Cuzzo, a longtime Post employee, explains how he became executive editor by default.

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"Reversing the Romance: Class and Gender in the Supermarket Tabloids," by Theron Britt (Prospect, 21: 435-451 [1996]), asserts that supermarket tabloids serve as vehicles for combatting romantic, female stereotypes by negatively portraying young, culturally attractive women and depicting men as cruel or ridiculous. Britt argues against the contentions of Elizabeth Bird in FOR INQUIRING MINDS: A CULTURAL STUDY OF SUPERMARKET TABLOIDS (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992) that a radical reading of the tabloids is not possible. Instead, he adopts a "compensatory exchange theory" in arguing that the tabloid reader is offered an image of resistance to romantic stereotype in return for her passive consumption. Britt includes a critical analysis of cultural theories posed in Frederic Jameson's THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), Ellen McCracken's DECODING WOMEN'S MAGAZINES (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), and Janice Radway's READING THE ROMANCE (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

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"Virgins, Vamps and the Tabloid Mentality," by Linda Fairstein (Media Studies Journal, 12: 92-99 [Winter 1998]) contains the text of an interview conducted by Robert W. Snyder of Linda Fairstein, Chief of the Sex Crimes Prosecution Unit in the District Attorney's Office of New York. Fairstein contends that when the press covers rape, titillation — not education — is the result. Sensationalism serves to obscure the true nature of rape and the understanding of specific cases. In the interview, Fairstein traces the history of rape coverage by the press, suggesting that the Jennifer Levin "rough sex" murder (1986), appearing on page one of the New York Times, transformed the manner in which such crimes were reported. She decries the media's tendency to portray a rape victim as either virgin or vamp and warns that impact of the press on rape cases is greatest during the pretrial period. She recommends that law enforcement officials cultivate newspaper reporters who are willing to trade information, thereby assisting prosecution of sexual offenders.

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SCOOPED! MEDIA MISS REAL STORY ON CRIME WHILE CHASING SEX, SLEAZE, AND CELEBRITIES by David J. Krajicek (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998 — \$24.95, ISBN 0-2311-0292-5, 230 pp., bibliographical references) argues for more crime reporting and for fewer crime stories, which Krajicek (a former crime reporter for the New York Daily News and now a faculty member at Columbia University) characterizes as drive-by journalism. Krajicek

claims that current practice alarms rather than informs and that policymakers base decisions on sensationalist crime reporting that devotes more effort to hyping aberrant incidents rather than documenting current trends. Six chapters examine tabloidization of the news media and its impact by focusing on crime, crime news, and crime policy. Chapter 2, "Rupert, Amy and O J," chronicles sensational journalism in the 1990s and the pivotal role played by tabloid journalist Steve Dunleavy.

B. U.S. Television

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"The World Outside: Local TV News Treatment of Imported News," by Raymond L. Carroll and C. A. Tuggle (*Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 74: 123-133 [1997]) is a study of whether market size influences the manner in which news is reported on television. The authors determined that major large- and medium-market stations devoted a higher percentage of their news reporting to sensationalism. Smaller markets, however, imported a larger percentage of sensational news than larger ones. They also imported more such stories than they originated locally.

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"Tabloid TV, Courtesy of the Education Department," by Steven Drummond (*Teacher Magazine* 9; 14-15 [April 1998]) discusses whether the U.S. Department of Education should continue to caption tabloid TV shows such as Jerry Springer for hearing-impaired students. Drummond summarizes arguments by proponents (provides education in subtleties/nuances of spoken English; fosters vocabulary development/spelling/language acquisition; and familiarizes the deaf with television culture) and opponents (tabloid TV doesn't qualify as "enriched educational and cultural experience" as specified in Department of Education guidelines and represents a misuse of taxpayers' money).

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THE JOURNALISM OF OUTRAGEOUSNESS: TABLOID TELEVISION NEWS VS. INVESTIGATIVE NEWS by Matthew C. Ehrlich (*Journalism and Mass Communication Monographs*, No.155 [1996]) addresses the question of how different the "new news" of tabloid television is from the "old news" of traditional investigative reporting, and attempts to explain its popularity. Ehrlich studies *A Current Affair*, *Inside Edition*, and *Hard Copy*, employing a framework for qualitative studies introduced in J. J. Pauly's *A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO DOING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN MASS COMMUNICATION* (*Journalism and Mass Communication Monographs*, No. 125 [1991]). He finds many similarities between the new and old journalism: human interest storytelling and muckraking driven by competition for profit. He warns, however, that respect for truth, openness, and diversity of opinion must be maintained.

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"Presumed Innocent? A Comparative Analysis of Network News, 'Newsmagazines' and Tabloid TV's Pretrial Coverage of the O. J. Simpson Criminal Case," by Steven A. Esposito (*Communications and the Law*, 18: 49-72 [December 1996]) examines O. J. Simpson's claim that prejudicial media coverage is responsible for the public's refusal to accept the jury's verdict of "not guilty." Employing content analysis and narrative theory studies, Esposito concludes that news

coverage, especially television's, was manipulative, portraying the case as an entertainment event rather than a news story. The article contains tables ranking TV news themes by sub-genre (network news, primetime news magazines, and tabloid TV) and providing mean ranking of all themes. The article is based on Esposito's doctoral dissertation at Wayne State University.

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"Tabloid and Traditional Television News Magazine Crime Stories: Crime Lessons and Reaffirmation of Social Class Distinctions," by Maria Elizabeth Grabe (*Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 73: 926-946 [1996]) studies differences between "highbrow" (60 Minutes) and lowbrow (Hard Copy) TV newsmagazine crime reporting. Finding that tabloid telecasts are more likely to feature crime stories and to focus on middle or upper-class criminals, Grabe concludes that tabloid TV news serves to reinforce cultural distinctions by communicating different stories to different social classes. Her research supports the findings of Elizabeth Bird's *FOR INQUIRING MINDS: A CULTURAL STUDY OF SUPERMARKET TABLOIDS* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992). Grabe believes condemnation of tabloid news to be unwarranted, characterizing the phenomenon as a "benign artifactual form" that actually supports highbrow culture. The paper includes statistical tables.

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TABLOID TELEVISION: POPULAR JOURNALISM AND THE "OTHER NEWS" by John Langer (London: Routledge "Communication and Society," 1998 — \$24.99, ISBN 0-4150-6636-0, 192 pp., appendix, bibliographical references) argues that sensational news is as important as hard news and that tabloid stories are presented as cultural discourse indicative of national identity. A senior lecturer in communication at Victoria University (Melbourne, Australia), Langer traces and discusses analytical studies of tabloid television's nature. He updates Andy Warhol's statement regarding fame: in the future, everyone will need to be famous for 15 minutes in order to verify one's existence. An appendix charts the percentage of television news devoted to tabloid stories.

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"Human Nature and Crime Control: Improving the Feasibility of Nurturant Strategies," by Bryan Vila (*Politics and the Life Sciences*, 16: 3-21 [1997]) identifies media sensationalism as a principal cause of America's preoccupation with violence, drug abuse, and street crime. Vila contends that such a fixation diverts attention from fundamental problems that should be addressed — those associated with the health, education, and welfare of the nation's children. He believes it likely that increased spending on external crime control serves to increase the crime rate by denying funding to nurturant programs that build self-control. Vila employs the evolutionary, ecological approach to criminology introduced in L. Cohen and R. Machalek's "A General Theory of Expropriative Crime" (*American Journal of Sociology* 94: 465-501 [1988]) and surveys competing strategies for crime control and the feasibility of nurturing strategies. He argues that the media's sensational treatment of crime should be countered by public education programs. An appendix discusses individual-level factors affecting development of criminality.

C. Legal Implications

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"Get That Camera Out of My Face!": An Examination of the Viability of Suing 'Tabloid Television' for Invasion of Privacy," by Eduardo W. Gonzalez (University of Miami Law Review 51: 935-953 [1997]) analyzes the applicability of "intrusion upon seclusion" and/or "public disclosure of private facts" approaches as legal methods for combating tabloid TV's practice of invading one's privacy. Gonzalez traces the inception of the privacy tort from its first suggestion in Warren and Brandeis's classic "The Right to Privacy," Harvard Law Review, 4: 193 [1890]) and argues that First Amendment limitations do not apply because tabloid TV shows are not "news;" Supreme Court decisions do not prevent invasion of privacy actions; and First Amendment limitations do not apply to intrusion actions.

30:149

"Punishing the Press: Using Contempt of Court to Secure the Right to a Fair Trial," by Stephen J. Krause (Boston University Law Review 76: 537-574 [1996]) argues in favor of Congress enacting legislation similar to Britain's Contempt of Court Act (1981) in order to control prejudicial, pretrial media coverage of sensational court cases. Krause maintains that it is likely the accused's right to a fair trial has been compromised by the media in many instances (he cites Oliver North, Marion Barry, Leona Helmsley, Pamela Smart, O. J. Simpson, Theodore Kaczynski) and that unfettered media coverage of sensational events creates a conflict between First Amendment freedom of speech and Sixth Amendment guarantee of a fair trial which must be resolved.

30:150

"The Confluence of Sensationalism and News: Media Access to Criminal Investigations and the Public's Right to Know," by Jimmy R. Moye (CommLaw Conspectus, 6: 89-99 [1998]) discusses the historical basis of the public's right to information, and when it is in society's interest to forbid such access. Moye argues that restriction of public access to information during active criminal investigations is a legal necessity, citing media coverage of Princess Diana's death, the Michael Irvin/Erik Williams alleged rape case, the Jon-Benet Ramsey murder case, and the Centennial Park bombing in Atlanta. Moye suggests application of the principle enunciated in *Globe Newspaper v. Superior Court* (457 U.S. 596 [1982]) in order to resolve such questions and maintains that the right to a fair trial is a compelling interest warranting limits to public access in cases of this sort.

D. International Perspectives

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"Public Discourse/Private Fascination: Hybridization in 'True-Life-Story' Genres," by Ib Bondebjerg (Media Culture & Society 18: 27-45 [1996]) examines the manner in which tabloid/human interest journalism has elevated private life stories to the level of public discourse, altering forms of journalism in the process. The article includes coverage of crime, disaster, illness, accident, and female-oriented talk shows from an international perspective. Bondebjerg concludes that a more democratic selection of topics has replaced middle class/public service culture, but commercial exploitation of life situations for entertainment purposes drives the process.

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"Anthropology in the Body Shop: Lords of the Garden, Cannibalism, and the Consuming Desires of Televisual Anthropology," by Rosalind C. Morris (American Anthropologist, 98: 137-146

[1996]) analyzes the ethnographic film *Lords of the Garden* which sensationalizes the subject of cannibalism in order to appeal to demands for entertainment. Morris maintains that marketability of a film is dependent on its ability to stimulate consumption, and that cannibalism represents the potential pathology of modern consumerism. Noting that the sensationalist anthropological film fails to maintain necessary objectivity in the treatment of its subjects, Morris fears that indigenous peoples are endangered by western consumption of their culture which presents itself in the guise of identification with it.

30:153

"The Media's Impact on International Affairs, Then and Now," by Johanna Neuman (*SALS Review*, 16: 109-123 [Winter/Spring 1996]) argues that innovative media technology exerts little influence over the manner in which international relations are conducted. McLuhan's message is incorrect: the message has always mattered more than the medium. Neuman maintains that television's promotion of the sensational (the O. J. Simpson trial, for example) encourages viewers to view history as merely another photo opportunity. She calls for a "voice of authority" to reassert principles of diplomacy and manifest leadership through effective communication. Neuman is foreign editor of *USA Today*. The article is adapted from her *LIGHTS, CAMERA, WAR: IS MEDIA TECHNOLOGY DRIVING INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

30:154

"Core of the Problem: Newspaper's Fate Will Gauge More Than Press Freedom," by Andrew Sherry (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 160: 61-63 [3 July 1997]) discusses Hong Kong's tabloid broadsheet, *Apple Daily*, the city's newspaper with the second largest circulation. Sherry suggests its sensationalism and occasionally critical attitude toward Beijing will test China's stated policy toward Hong Kong: "one country, two systems." Lurid crime stories, celebrity gossip, combined with local and international news have boosted readership and attracted advertisers.

(Editor's note: CBQ welcomes review essays of this type — on either wholly new topics or (like the one above) updates of existing reference works to help readers stay current with the ever-expanding literature in communications, information, and telecommunication. If you would like to contribute one, please contact Chris Sterling directly.)