

The Princes and the paparazzi

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Channel 4's documentary on the role of photographers in the death of Princess Diana was one of the best examinations of journalism on TV that I have seen in a while. [The Witnesses In The Tunnel](#) did not reveal any stunning new facts about the events of August 1997 but it did clear up some myths and shine some light on the ethics of photojournalism. The [controversy](#) around the programme centred on the decision to show some photos of a fatally-injured Diana in the crashed car. Her sons had made an unprecedented appeal for them not to be shown – not an option available to the average viewer. Channel 4 turned this down on the basis that the pictures had been previously published, were not displaying Diana herself, and were integral to telling the story. I think Channel 4 were just about right.

What the programme made clear thanks to the testimony of the photographers who were there – and crucially, of the medics who came to aid Diana – was that the paparazzi did not *directly* cause Diana's death by chasing her nor did they get in the way of those people trying to treat her.

But here's the important bit. *The photographers were doing their job.* They are not medics. Snappers don't stop during a war to try to prevent a conflict or to treat the wounded instead of recording the carnage. There is nothing in the Geneva Convention let alone the Highway Code that says that photographers are not allowed to take pictures of nasty things and that they should drop everything to solve the world's ills.

It's not a nice job. They are people who did not come out of the programme with haloes around their heads. They are money-chasing, fame-seeking, ambitious professionals like most of us. For obvious selfish and human reasons, a lot of people like Mohammed Fayed were desperate to pin the blame on someone else for this horrible event. And as usual the Great British public which avidly consumes the most prurient and intrusive pictures, was full of hypocritical rage against the news media. From the evidence of this programme, they were wrong.

I am not saying this was the most important programme of the week, but it was a relatively sensible bit of journalism (especially by some of Channel 4's more lurid attempts at the genre) and the discussion led ably by the ever-sceptical Krishnan Guru-Murthy put on afterwards was an excellent way to allow the debate to continue.

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