# Princess Diana’s double-edged use of the media shaped her tragic legacy



Princess Diana remains a compelling figure in the narrative of the British monarchy, her life and choices having a profound impact on royal dynamics and the relentless media landscape of her time. Recent discussions about her relationship with the press reveal a complex interplay of vulnerability and manipulation, a duality that shaped not only her public persona but also her tragic fate.

In her biography, *The Palace Papers*, royal author Tina Brown posits that Diana's relationship with the media was far from one-sided. Despite her public cries of persecution, Brown asserts that Diana strategically engaged with the press to exert control over her image and even to provoke jealousy in her romantic interests. For instance, it is claimed that Diana tipped off paparazzo Mario Brenna to capture an iconic picture of her with Dodi Fayed during their last holiday, effectively sending a taunting message to her former lover, Hasnat Khan. As Brown notes, this kind of behaviour was “classic, authentic Diana - tricky, seductive, playing a double game.”

Diana was not only aware of the power of the media; she actively manoeuvred within it. Nicholas Coleridge, former president of Condé Nast, recalls a lunch attended by Diana in 1996, soon after a controversial topless photograph of her had been published. Instead of shying away, Diana confirmed her attendance and even sought Coleridge's opinion on her physical appearance, leading him to later believe she was in pursuit of publicity. This anecdote underscores how entwined her public persona was with her private desires, revealing a woman who, while often victimised by the press, also knew how to wield that attention as a tool.

The relentless pursuit of her image became a double-edged sword. Following her death in a car crash in 1997, which was exacerbated by the paparazzi chasing her vehicle, public sentiment towards the media shifted dramatically. The anger directed at photographers underscored a broader reckoning regarding privacy in the media landscape, subsequently leading to stricter regulations. A notable turning point occurred when tabloid sales waned due to public outrage over their role in Diana's demise, prompting a gradual change in how the press interacted with the royals.

Diana's proactive engagement with the media, as documented throughout her life, further reflects how she sought to shape public narratives surrounding her. Reports indicate that she frequently invited tabloid editors and photographers for discussions at Kensington Palace, blurring the lines between victim and collaborator. This complex relationship is exemplified in Diana's alleged encouragement of former lovers to engage with the press, reinforcing her intention to control how her stories were told.

Her two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry, have continued to navigate their own fraught relationships with the media, very much influenced by their mother's experiences. William's anger at the treatment of his wife, Kate Middleton, particularly during intimate moments captured by photographers, illustrates the lasting effects of Diana's tragic story. William's pursuit of legal action against a magazine for publishing topless photos of Kate echoes his mother's struggle against intrusive media attention. Meanwhile, Harry's vocal condemnation of tabloid culture marks a stark departure from his mother's more nuanced engagements, demonstrating a generational shift in the approach to public scrutiny.

While the impact of the camera on Diana's life is undeniable, her complex relationship with the media continues to evoke mixed emotions. Brown captures this ambivalence: "The camera was Diana's fatal attraction and her most potent weapon - the source of so much power and so much pain." The nuances of her approach to managing her image reveal not only the depth of her character but also the perilous game of celebrity that ultimately contributed to her tragic end. Diana's legacy, intertwined with the evolution of media engagement, reminds us of the challenges faced by those who live under the ceaseless eye of public scrutiny.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: Source [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/royals/article-14647223/princess-diana-privacy-newspapers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://time.com/4914324/princess-diana-anniversary-paparazzi-tabloid-media/), [[6]](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/diana-and-the-media-she-used-them-and-they-used-her-until-the-day-she-died/2017/08/24/c98418ca-812d-11e7-b359-15a3617c767b_story.html)
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* <https://time.com/6335670/mario-brenna-paparazzi-diana-the-crown-season-6/> - This article examines the portrayal of Italian paparazzo Mario Brenna in the final season of 'The Crown.' Brenna is depicted as the photographer who captured intimate photos of Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed in 1997. The piece discusses the aggressive paparazzi culture of the time and how Diana's strategic use of the media to convey personal messages is portrayed, highlighting the complex relationship between the royal family and the press.
* <https://time.com/4914324/princess-diana-anniversary-paparazzi-tabloid-media/> - This article explores how Princess Diana's death in 1997 led to significant changes in the British media landscape. It discusses the public's outrage over the paparazzi's role in her death, the subsequent decline in tabloid sales, and the implementation of stricter privacy regulations. The piece also touches on the royal family's evolving relationship with the press in the years following Diana's passing.
* <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/royals/readings/tabloids.html> - This reading from PBS's 'Frontline' series delves into Princess Diana's interactions with the British tabloid press. It details her proactive approach to media relations, including inviting tabloid editors to Kensington Palace for discussions. The piece highlights Diana's strategic efforts to manage her public image and the media's role in shaping her narrative.
* <https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/princess-diana-used-these-3-genius-tricks-to-outsmart-the-paparazzi.html/> - This article reveals three strategies Princess Diana employed to outsmart the paparazzi. It discusses how she wore the same sweatshirt to gym sessions to devalue repetitive photos, faced away from cameras to avoid unwanted shots, and used a clutch to cover her chest when exiting vehicles to prevent cleavage shots. These tactics showcase Diana's ingenuity in managing her public image.
* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/diana-and-the-media-she-used-them-and-they-used-her-until-the-day-she-died/2017/08/24/c98418ca-812d-11e7-b359-15a3617c767b_story.html> - This article examines the complex relationship between Princess Diana and the media. It discusses how Diana actively engaged with the press to shape her public image, including leaking information and orchestrating photo opportunities. The piece also explores the media's role in her life and the mutual benefits and exploitation inherent in their interactions.
* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rainerzitelmann/2019/12/02/princess-diana-master-of-self-marketing/> - This article analyzes Princess Diana's strategic use of public relations to manage her image. It highlights her proactive approach, including the 1995 BBC interview with Martin Bashir, and discusses how she crafted messages to influence public perception. The piece underscores Diana's understanding of media dynamics and her ability to navigate them effectively.