Motivated by the desire to increase listening, viewing or reading audiences, the print and broadcast media, all too often, trespass on the rights of individuals, momentarily forgetting their own true purpose for existence.

This paper will address itself to the excesses engaged in by the media. At no time does this author forget or devalue the media's role as watchdog or analytical middleman. However, it is this author's contention that the media frequently abuse their power by acting on impulse and in a sensationalist manner, with little regard for long range consequences.

Peter Newman, speaking from the journalistic perspective, defines the freedom of the press as "the public's right to know and the journalist's right to tell" (1) Edwin Diamond goes one step further. He points out that "the right to know now has a corollary: the right to undemanding entertainment." (2) This corollary, on occasion, is used by the media as an excuse - as justification, in fact, for the misuse of their power.
Surely, there are great differences between the right, the need and the desire to know? Is it not the responsibility of the media to choose and present material which will better prepare their audiences for change and decision-making rather than simply feeding the general public's insatiable appetite for gossip?

Ted Schrader in *This Business Is News* asserts that:

"Forty years ago, newspapers were somewhat irresponsible. Publishers discovered the possibilities of making big money by selling sensational news. Those were the days of wealth, women and war. Few newspapers were interested in crusading for social betterment. They didn't care who they hurt or what damage they did. The people clamored for sensational news, true or false, and they got it." (3)

The situation hasn't changed a great deal in the intervening forty years. Residue from the past still influences media performance.

A case in point is the drama which unfolded in a small community fourteen miles east of London, Ontario in January of 1975. This event was to catapult the small community of Thamesford to a position of national — even international — significance for three days.

Stef Donev of the Toronto Star points out that the big stories — "the major plane crashes, bombings, axe murders (a perennial favorite), gangland executions and all the human interest yarns guaranteed to make a city editor start salivating" (4) — are a rarity. O.P.P. Constable Paul Valliere, a principal character in the crisis which was to develop, echoed Donev's words when in amazement he commented that "sure it happens on Adam 12 and Police Story. But how many shootouts do you have around London?" (5) A shootout, indeed — one with elements guaranteed to create media
interest. These elements, described here in point form, are included to set the scene for the basic issue of media action and reaction. They are as follows:

A. Participants:

1. Wayne Cline:
   - 22 years of age.
   - a childhood friend of George Field.
   - raised in an atmosphere of turmoil, confusion and upset by a father he little respected and a mother who failed to provide him with the security he needed.
   - sentenced in March of 1972 to 4½ years in Millhaven's minimum security prison for armed robbery, assault causing bodily harm, possession of stolen guns and car theft.
   - walked away, illegally, without challenge from Millhaven in October of 1974.

2. Marie Field:
   - mother of 5 children.
   - wife of George Field.
   - had visited Cline once every other week while he was in Millhaven (340 miles from London).
   - had written Cline weekly while he was in the institution.
   - asserted that she had attempted to warn police officers of Cline's presence in her home.

3. George Field:
   - childhood friend of Wayne Cline.
   - later to be arraigned for possession of stolen merchandise.

4. David, Kim, Donny and Bobby Field:
   - 4 of the 5 children of Marie and George Field.
   - held hostage for 20 hours by their former babysitter, Wayne Cline.
   - David, Donny and Kim were released at the farmhouse when the demands were met.
   - Bobby was kept hostage during the escape ride to Toronto and back, then released.
5. Gail Guest:
- Wayne Cline's girlfriend.
- arrived at Field's farmhouse approximately 2 hours after siege began.
- assisted in Cline's attempted escape.

6. Ronald Peter Whetstone:
- nicknamed 'Red'.
- former cellmate of Wayne Cline's.
- offered to assist police in the negotiation for the safe return of the Field children in return for anonymity.
- drove the escape car.

7. Detective Schell and O.P.P. Constable Valliere:
- police officers sent to investigate a car found abandoned near the Field's house.
- held at gunpoint by Cline
- forced to turn over their service revolvers.
- fired at, at point blank range.
- Schell allowed to leave to order other officers to back off.
- Valliere made a successful leap for freedom when Cline was distracted.

B. The Action Timetable: (6)

Tuesday, January 21, 1975

1:00 p.m. - a car was stolen in London about 14 miles west of Thamesford.

3:10 p.m. - an IGA store in Thamesford was robbed by 4 armed men who escaped with $789. when they discovered their primary target, the Royal Bank branch next door to be closed.

3:47 p.m. - police roadblocks were set up in area.

4:30 p.m. - the get-away car was found abandoned near the Field's house.
- police approached the building. They were confronted and disarmed by a gunman. The officers escaped.
- Marie Field was sent out by the gunman to talk to the police.
- police refused to allow Mrs. Field to return to the house to be with her 4 children who were hostages elsewhere.

6:45 p.m.- 3 of the 4 robbery suspects were captured.

6:55 p.m.- Gail Guest arrived at the farmhouse.

7:05 p.m.- the gunman, by now identified as Wayne Cline, demanded $10,000 ransom money and an escape car. He issued the first of several deadlines.

11:15 p.m.- George Field left his work in Dunnville and arrived home after learning of his children's plight.

Wednesday, January 22, 1975

Early a.m.- police entered the second half of the duplex farmhouse and escorted two occupants to safety.

4:30 a.m.- police announced that the ransom money was being collected.

6:45 a.m.- ransom arrived.

7:30 a.m.- police prepared a second escape car after the first sat running in the driveway overnight and ran out of gas.

1:20 p.m.- the ransom was paid and 3 of the 4 children were released.

2:00 p.m.- the getaway car left heading north. It was later believed heading east.

afternoon - the car was sighted in Toronto where an occupant was reported to have shot at a police car.

& evening 8:30 p.m.- the police released to the media their decision.

Midnight - police announced that the car was heading west on the 401.

Thursday, January 23, 1975

1:30 a.m.- Bobby Field and Red arrived at O.P.P.

4:00 a.m.- police armed with rifles and tear gas cordoned off a residential London area.

4:53 a.m.- Cline surrendered without a struggle.
C. Intrigue and Rumor-Mongering:
The personal lives of the major participants in this crisis-event came under close scrutiny. The media assumed almost a 'tabloid' mentality in discussing:

1. Marie Field's Involvement With Wayne Cline:
   Was Marie Field, a married woman and mother of 5 children, having an affair with Wayne Cline? If not, how could she explain the frequency of her trips to Millhaven and of her letter-writing to Cline while he was under detention?

2. Marie Field's True Intentions:
   Was Marie Field's attempt to return to the house, after giving the police the details of Cline's demands, an attempt to return to Cline's side rather than the effort of a mother concerned for the welfare of her children?

3. Wayne Cline's Love Life:
   Was Wayne Cline burning the candle at both ends by having affairs with both Gail Guest and Marie Field, females who had little tolerance for one another?

4. George Field's Involvement In The Incident:
   Was George Field an accomplice in the Thamesford robbery? Was he allowing his house to be used as a drop point for the stolen merchandise? Was he aware of his wife's close personal involvement with Wayne Cline?

5. Ronald Peter Whetstone's Assistance To The Police:
   What was the identity of the ex-convict assisting the police? Did he have any ulterior motives in offering to negotiate the release of the Field children? What were the details of his life since being released from prison? Was his family aware of his past?
D. Availability and Accessibility (to media representatives) of the Major Participants in the Drama:

The January 22nd edition of the London Free Press carried the observation that at one point during the drama, it appeared that anyone who wished to telephone Cline at the Field home did so. O.P.P. Superintendent Kenneth Wilson had revealed that Cline was taking kindly to the publicity. (7)

As the details of the crisis are examined, the suspicion arises that as Cline became convinced of the hopelessness of his escape, he resolved to play out the drama for the media. The interaction, then, was between Cline and the media - not between Cline and the police. And there is no doubt as one peruses media items that the eventual winner was to be Cline. The media had been drawn to the scene by excitement, human interest, colour and accessibility. They, by their undisciplined actions, would create a form of folk hero - one who could excite.

It was at this point that in addition to reporting on events, the mass media became intermediaries and actors in the crisis. The media had entered the drama initially in the role of spectator but as the knowledge of the accessibility of the Field farmhouse spread, the role of the media shifted. Numerous newspapers, radio and television stations including several in the United States (8) turned their interest and energies towards Thamesford, Ontario.

The activities of the media during the siege took various forms:

At the scene of the siege, reporters, camera crews and television from authorities and comments from the principals. Interviews were granted. Marie Field and the three children, initially released by the gunman, underwent detailed questioning by "the hordes of newsmen" (9) present. The presence of both print and broadcasting media representatives did not go unnoticed by Wayne Cline. He was to place these individuals under
fire - in the most literal sense. Cline, shortly before his escape bid, pinned five newsmen behind two vans with his gunfire. "Dale Goldhawk of Global TV said he and his cameraman took cover behind their white van when Cline opened fire. He said the cameraman was outside filming the Field home when a shot whizzed three to four feet past the driver's seat."(10) Occupying the ditch were local media personnel who had taken cover earlier. The initial reports indicated that the shots had been fired on two people - possibly newspaper reporters - who were making their way through the field to the house.(11)

Away from the actual scene of the drama, reporters and researchers were investigating the background and actions of the major participants, were tracking down pictures of the Field family, were seeking permission for the release of pictures of Cline and were interviewing his lawyer, relatives, teachers and cellmates. One of the most significant of these activities involved the use of the telephone.

At 6:15 p.m. on Tuesday, January 21st, not quite two hours into the siege, Gene Florcyk of the London Free Press discovered that it was possible to call Cline at the Field's farmhouse. He was subsequently to make two more calls - the details to be printed in the London Free Press, eventually coming under criticism by public citizens as well as government representatives. In these telephone conversations, Florcyk talked to the oldest of the Field children, Bobby, and was able to obtain first hand information about Marie Field's release, as well as details concerning the welfare of the four children being held hostage. In discussion with Cline, himself, Florcyk requested permission to be the intermediary between the police and Cline. As he was to do many times over, Cline entered into an agreement which would never be carried through. He informed Florcyk of the ransom demands and the deadline to be set for the meeting of these demands. In his zeal, Florcyk inadvertently informed Cline of the presence of
other occupants in the farmhouse - the couple who rented the other half of the duplex and who for two hours had been cautiously guarding their every movement in order to keep the knowledge of their presence from Cline until the police could manage their rescue.

As Florcyk's conversation with Cline became known to other media personnel, the telephone calls increased. Representatives from radio stations - CFPL, CJBK, CHUM and CBC (Toronto); newspapers - The London Free Press, The Toronto Star and The Globe and Mail; as well as, the Columbia Broadcasting System (New York), to name only a few, interviewed Cline using telephone equipment. During these conversations,

"city and provincial police took turns...listening in on the many calls gunman Donald Wayne Cline received from the media and grew wary as his talk changed from drivel to dangerous threats...Police were using party line phones to monitor his almost constant conversation. Much of it was repetitive but the man's mood changed radically from early evening to early morning...Constantly he assured the media the children were all right, were in no imminent danger and were safe in another room...Around 4 a.m. (Wednesday, January 22nd), there was a lull which lasted about an hour, in which no calls were placed to the home and none went out...A call from New York's CBS finally brought Cline back to the phone. This time, he took a stronger, more threatening tone. He told them he didn't believe he would get away. He said he wouldn't hurt the children if he didn't have to, but he stressed he would carry out earlier threats of violent retribution if he felt the need."(12)

In subsequent conversations, Cline was reported to have made threats to cut off a child's hand and to throw it outside;(13) to shoot the arms and legs off of
a St. Thomas police officer who he requested be brought to him;(14) to blast two of the children out of windows with shotgun fire;(15) and to increase the ransom demand from $10,000 to $150,000.

This latter remark was made in a conversation with Bill Brady of CFPL Radio (London). Just before running the tape of the conversation with Cline, Brady admitted the stupidity of his blunder in questioning the smallness of the demanded ransom. However, pressured by the presence and performance of competition, CFPL radio compounded the injury by allowing Brady to play the tape so that hundreds of listeners were able to hear the conversation:

Brady: "Why did you ask for so little? Wouldn't it have been just as easy to ask for twenty-five or fifty thousand dollars?"

Cline: "That's right. Maybe I will. You've just given me an idea."

Brady: "I sure didn't mean to do that."

Cline: "We'll make it...why not...why don't we go for the big one - how about 150 Gs, that sounds more like it, don't it? It's an excellent idea, really."

"Brady then told Cline he hoped Cline would reconsider what he had just said."(16)

"Damn irresponsible"(17) was the comment made by O.P.P. Deputy Commissioner James Erskine in response to Brady's remark to Cline. Erskine had had, at a crucial stage in the negotiations, difficulties getting through to Cline because of the abuse of the telephone lines by the media. Brady's call broke the camel's back. Erskine immediately cleared all the lines and restricted all further calls to police business only.(18)
Difficulties had been created by the media's involvement. As actors in the drama, the media had interfered with negotiations; had disclosed information which the police had hoped to withhold; had tied up telephone lines and had created a climate within the community making it difficult to assure the defendant, Wayne Cline, of a fair and unbiased trial.

The public and political reaction, though small, was highly critical of media performance. In a letter to the editor of the London Free Press, Bill Mayberry stated that:

"meddling in such a potentially volatile situation by persons so totally incompetent and insensitive should never be allowed. Leave the job to experts and keep us informed second hand,"(19) he implored.

Pat Mitchell wrote that:

"when anyone in authority dares speak out against the conduct of the media, the press, TV and radio immediately set up a great hue and cry of shooting the messenger, freedom of the press etc. It is about time the media realized with freedom comes some responsibility...The overall attitude seemed to be 'to heck with who or what we may hurt or hinder, get every morsel we can and get it on the air or in the paper as soon as possible'...It is conduct like this that gives people who would stifle the press grist for their mill."(20)

Mrs. Alton Baynes pointed out that:

"the concentrated attention and publicity given the suspect tended to make him a hero... The media is looked to for leadership in good citizenship but does not always live up to this."(21)
Brady admits 'blunder'

Radio show remark to Cline 'damned irresponsible'

OPP Deputy Commissioner James Erskine said today he has generally had good relations with the news media but a situation arose on a London open line radio show that was "damn irresponsible in my mind... It makes it difficult to negotiate." Just before he ran the tape for his radio audience Mr. Brady admitted he had committed a "rather stupid blunder"... over the $10,000 ransom...

Brady: "Why do you ask for so little? Wouldn't it have been just as easy to ask for twenty-five or fifty thousand dollars?"

Cline: "That's right. Maybe I just gave you an idea." (Brady then said he didn't mean to)

The three guns at the top of the stairs

(The story employs the stereotyped techniques of thriller fiction in the style of "Startling Detective". Thus, it presumes hawkish readers drooling over the human prey and reduces real-life dimensions to the level of craftsmanship and sales.)

"The eyes of the angry young man peered intensely at the cops, his gaunt face framed in straggly sandy hair. The shotgun was held high to his right shoulder. He was tense, nervous, dangerous. Very excitable, panicky, paranoid. Very up-tight, the detective concluded. ...

...He hated prisons, being caged like an animal. Now the "pigs" were at him again. His eyes, narrow and piercing, transmitted the hatred... Cline was a strange breed... Don't move, don't move, "warned the gunman... the eyes, the hate. The revolver exploded in sound.

The headline lies above the story. It says "Fugitive asks reporter to act as intermediary" but the taped interview records this: Reporter: "...the only way I can help you is if you call the police and tell him you want me to be the intermediary." This is the interview where the reporter blabbed out "Isn't there more people in the back in an apartment or something?"

'The kids are going with me'

Fugitive asks reporter to act as intermediary

Mother of four hostages denies being Cline's lover

Free Press, Jan. 14/76. The repentant Free Press covered the trial by playing up a sex angle as any good tabloid would.
A.J. Farmilo warned that:

"the sensational reporting of such incidents is harmful to our society. It gives notoriety to individuals who consider the taking of life to be a sure way of 'getting noticed.' Reporting during the event often prematurely discloses the police plans and hampers negotiations...If the media cannot find responsibility within their own characters, then society should teach them some." (22)

(A few letters actually commended the Open Line Showman, Brady, for being an "intermediary" or for apologizing for his "mistake" - Editor)

On May 27, 1975 during the debate in the Ontario Legislature on O.P.P. estimates, James Renwick of the NDP posed valid queries into police and media actions during the Thamesford incident. He said that he had brought the incident to the attention of the other members of the provincial legislature "because of an increasing use of the media throughout the world as a transmitter of demands during such incidents as kidnapping" (23) and wished to suggest that police and media representatives meet to formulate contingency plans and procedures for the handling of similar incidents in the future, in order "to prevent misunderstanding or conflict in life-and-death situations." (24)

The perennial question of whether or not it is the chicken or the egg which comes first is most appropriate to this discussion. Does society need to develop higher expectations and standards for media performance? Or is the onus on the media to lead the way by adopting and accepting, voluntarily, a role as self-censor?

No one group is to be blamed for the inadequacy of media performance. The public, the media employees and the media ownership equally must accept the responsibility.
As previously mentioned, much of the reaction to the media's management and manipulation of the events surrounding the Thamesford siege was highly critical, though small in number (assuming The Free Press published all the letters it received.) This smallness may have been due to inertia. The numbers disgusted by the media's aggressive behavior may not have equalled the numbers willing to voice dissatisfaction. On the other hand, it is probably safe to say that there were many individuals - in viewing, reading and listening audiences - who lapped up the news coverage rather than blasting the media for its lack of sensitivity and responsibility.

The formula for media reform according to Keith Davey is "consumer initiative". "It is true," he writes, "media owners would respond to an aroused public genuinely concerned about media structure (and performance). But that is and will be a painfully slow process - like not in our lifetime."(26)

If the public fails to question the present standards and ethics of the print and broadcasting media, then it can expect to see the media continue to involve themselves in the playing of a game rather than in facing the very serious issues of life. Borden Spears, "Your Man At The Star", in a recent column, quoted a release from the International Press Institute which stated that:

"however bad, biased or cowed a press may be, it is better for the people than no press at all."(27)

However, one of the editorial aims of the Toronto Star states that the paper is "to report the news in a responsible manner, avoiding exaggeration, distortion, slanting, and sensationalism."(28) This idealism is in sharp contrast to Beryl Fox's contention that the media are "not an information bank - part of what we're supposed to do is motivate, titillate, to anger, to somehow move people off their butts."(29) Fox
admits that as an investigative journalist,

"you often come onto situation where you have to behave like a pig, but you've got to evaluate your actions in terms of who you might be hurting and in terms of what will the larger benefit be...You have to decide who you're going to lie to and who you're not going to lie to."(30)

The journalist does not act alone. All too often, the final product is evaluated in terms of the publisher's lust for profits. Borden Spears, in the Davey Report, reveals that "some publishers are unable, and some are unwilling, to give excellence an equal priority with profit."(31) Ted Schrader draws the analogy that the publisher has a package as surely as Oxydol has a package. They try to make this package as appealing to the buyer as possible. They try to make the contents of the package serve the buyer so he will repeat orders. They have to sell their product. Their buyers want to know what's going on. Their buyers have definite ideas on what they want to read, hear or see.(32)

Technology has supplied the techniques for provision as well as intrusion. To what degree should the media allow themselves to be drawn into the centre of a crisis? And to what extent are they responsible to the public, their employers and to the government?

Borden Spears suggests that:

"the aim of the free press everywhere... can be achieved only on the basis of information openly circulated and decisions openly arrived at."(33)

But Spear's contention that access to all facts is essential for the growth of intelligent and well-informed reading, viewing and listening audiences fails to take
into account coverage of events which stimulate the public's appetite for sensationalism rather than providing insight and opportunity for positive growth.

The events which occurred in Thamesford, Ontario in January of 1975 serve as an example. The information released by the media was not then nor is now vital to personal growth.

FOOTNOTES

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8. Ibid.
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15. The Toronto Star, (January 23, 1975)
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23. "Renwick Queries Police Action In Thamesford Farm Siege Case", The London Free Press (May 27, 1975)
26. Ibid.
27. Borden Spears, "Freedom Of The Press Faces A Challenge Close To Home", The Toronto Star (Feb.21,76)
29. Beryl Fox, "Beryl Fox", The Media Game (1972) p.30
30. Ibid., p.33
31. Borden Spears, op.cit., Good, Bad, Or Simply Inevitable, p.188
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