

Queen of Hearts (and Communications)

How Elizabeth I and Princess Diana Related With Their Publics

Queen Elizabeth I once said, “We come for the hearts and allegiance of our subjects.”¹ More than 400 years later, Princess Diana expressed a similar sentiment during a BBC interview: “I’d like to be a queen of people’s hearts.”² These comments highlight a certain irony in that these historical figures never met the vast majority of the people who were having their affections so pursued. Both women, therefore, relied upon public relations strategies through whatever media outlets existed at the time.

Elizabeth, as the established monarch, tended to use her public relations to react to events as they occurred during her reign. Diana, as the challenger to the established monarchy, relied more upon proactive public relations to try to set agendas and create public responses. Literary and historical analyses indicate that these differing approaches influenced the immediate media reactions to these historical figures after they died. The media response over Elizabeth’s death was muted and her achievements minimized. Only later did Elizabeth experience a resurgence in public

opinion. Diana, however, appeared in the media after her death as a woman “empowered” and overcoming obstacles. Examining their public relations strategies illustrates how these women in positions of national power (or in Diana’s case, in the national spotlight) depended upon the media to shape their image for their publics — the people of Britain — and ultimately, the world.

The research methods combined several disciplines — from literary and historicist criticism to strategic journalism, particularly contemporary public relations research. To understand both women’s different public relations approaches, one must distinguish between proactive and reactive public relations. The Webster’s New World Dictionary of Media and Communications defines reactive public relations as “[a]n after-the-fact campaign ... conducted in response to events that have already occurred.”³ Robert Heath, in his study of strategic issues management, explains that a reactive approach “focuses on the search for obstacles.”⁴

The Elizabethan administration

SHANXI UPSDELL is a 2008 graduate from the English Department at the University of Kansas.

was generally reactive in searching for challenges to its authority. For example, writers of sixteenth-century historical chronicles, or “histories” of the English monarchs, experienced governmental pressure to write favorably of the regimes in power. Richard Lant the chronicler “was sent ‘to warde’ for publishing an Epitaphe upon the Death of Quene Marie”; afterward, “[t]he ballad was later tactfully altered to include verses in praise of Elizabeth.”⁵

Another news outlet consisted of the Elizabethan news pamphlet, or news quarto. Paul Voss writes that news quartos began to appear in great numbers when civil war broke out in 1589 in France. These pamphlets sent from France to London painted gruesome details of the war and warned readers “about the dangers of civil conflict.” Voss argues that most news pamphlets were not state-manufactured reports even though they reflected such “orthodox positions” as patriotism and civil order, thus serving government interests. The people who produced these quartos included servants, printers, publishers, messengers, translators, and scribes. Like modern-day newspapers, these were “ephemeral publications not intended to survive” because of the nature of their news.⁶

Other Elizabethan forms of mass communication, which shall be considered unofficial media outlets, included slanderous rumors and “libels,” or what Fritz Levy describes as “placards, manuscript poems circulated among friends or posted in conspicuous places — in other words, informal, unofficial, and highly unregulated publication” that the government could not control. These appear to be the tabloid’s ancient ancestors. News now “replaced (or at least supplemented) clothes as the new social marker... . [Informants] became the market for news, whether passed

on by gossip, letter, or print.”⁷ Importantly, written materials reinforced traditional oral communications, as alehouses became “provincial post offices” for knowledgeable writers in London to send “private correspondence” to their friends in the rural areas. These would become fodder for oral transmission in the provinces. Finally, because both verbal and written intelligence at the time were easily distorted or inaccurate, “there was often little qualitative difference between the sources of the educated elite and those readily available to the lower orders.” Political and national news would circulate through domestic and personal gossip, including “[a]llegations about people’s personal lives and sexual misdemeanors.” For example, one rumor in the early years of Elizabeth’s reign claimed that her brother, Edward VI, had been wrongfully imprisoned in the Tower of London, thus challenging her queenly authority; another rumor suggested she had given birth to several children from an alliance with the earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley.⁸

All these forms of mass communication, because of their extent and abundance, suggest that the Elizabethan government was less effective — and also less interested — in censorship than has been commonly supposed. Instead of a massive campaign that examined all books before publication, Susan Clegg writes, about half of all texts printed during Elizabeth’s reign in England did not receive government scrutiny — censors keeping largely to areas of “personality, patronage, and national interest.” Clegg also investigates the eleven royal proclamations concerning censorship during Elizabeth’s reign to conclude that their effectiveness to censor printed texts has been overestimated, as they “held no force in the common law courts.” Furthermore, Elizabethan subjects did not always comply with censorship regulations. Clegg records the public’s



The “Rainbow Portrait” of Elizabeth I by Isaac Oliver can be viewed at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, England. This image, courtesy of [marileecody.com](http://www.marileecody.com), depicts the queen (who was then in her 60s) as an ageless archetype of Astraea, “the virginal heroine of classical literature.” From: <http://www.marileecody.com/eliz1-images.html>.

response to Elizabeth’s proclamation in 1573 requesting that books of religious reform be surrendered to the queen’s Privy Council or to the bishop of the diocese: “Archbishop Parker complained ... ‘Her Majesty’s proclamation took none effect: not one book brought in.’ ” This historical evidence suggests that the Elizabethan policies of prohibition and censorship — both extremely reactive public relations strategies — had limited effectiveness. Opportunities for negative portrayals of the queen existed, though not to the same extent and degree as in the twentieth century. As a result, Clegg describes the Elizabethan administration as incapable of complete censor-

ship and image control — more “reactive rather than proactive” in its public relations.⁹

As these and other “slanders” increased during the last years of Elizabeth’s reign — the time, Christopher Haigh contends, when Elizabeth was most reactive in her press relations — so did the state’s restrictions on public expression.¹⁰ One servant, a Henry Collins, was imprisoned in 1592 for threatening to kill the queen. Another laborer, Thomas Farryngton, declared in 1598 that the queen was “Antichrist” — a remark that earned him time in the pillory and caused his ears to be cropped.¹¹ I would argue that the queen’s withdrawal from public com-

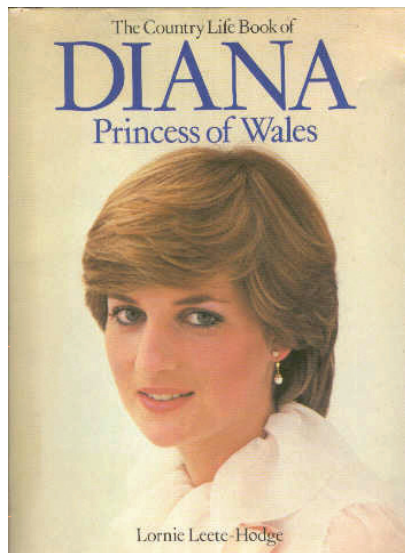
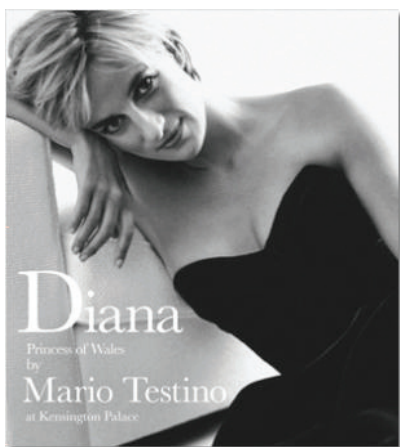
munications during the years before her death directly affected the popular perception of Elizabeth I when she died. Because Elizabeth did not take proactive steps to establish strong public relations among her subjects in her declining years, many responded with indifference or even contempt to her death. Haigh writes that on the evening of March 25, 1603, when Elizabeth's death was announced, the general populace lit bonfires and street parties in celebration of James' accession to the throne. Only afterward in the 1630s did several writers, now disillusioned with Stuart kings, laud her as "the paragon of all princely virtues — principled, as James had not been, and wise, as Charles had not been."¹²

In contrast, a proactive approach involves "anticipating a situation and being prepared to execute a planned communications program (such as an advertising campaign)."¹³ Issues management is a two-way process — communicators fare better if they provide information that their audience wants to hear. For businesses and other organizations to survive and thrive, Heath writes that they "must respond with information each public wants."¹⁴ The Princess of Wales showed a remarkable readiness to provide details of her life that she expected would interest her audience — including her bouts with bulimia and her rocky relationships with the House of Windsor.¹⁵ Michael Levine contends that Diana showed her most proactive public relations strategy during the now-famous 1996 BBC Panorama interview — proceeding without the Queen's official permission or knowledge and thus "defying royal precedent." Levine quotes Richard Greene as declaring that the interview was "PR at its best, a brilliant move to have everything controlled, from keeping the interview to one hour to picking who would ask the questions." This is the essence of proactive public relations — anticipating

and controlling events to influence their outcome.¹⁶ Peter Stothard, former editor of *The Times*, writes that Diana showed an acute sophistication about media relationships to be "as 'on message' as the most disciplined determined New Labour apparatchik."¹⁷

After Diana's separation from Charles, Jude Davies argues that the former Princess of Wales "sought to develop a more dynamic and influential public role" by identifying herself more "as a businesswoman or an independent divorcee." Interestingly, Davies writes that newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* and the *Mail* helped support this reimagining with newspaper features, headlined with titles such as "Diana — the business" and "Diana: her own woman." Books such as the controversial 1992 *Diana: Her True Story* by Andrew Morton portrayed Diana as a victim of an "oppressively patriarchal" monarchy who had now overcome that institutional repression "to generate a redeeming and empowering relationship with the public through her image."¹⁸ It is interesting to note that Andrew Morton, less than a week after her death, claimed that his source for the book had been Diana herself.¹⁹

As a result, posthumous media representations have tended to emphasize this portrayal of Diana as evolving along "a trajectory from weakness and naïveté to strength through the control of appearance." Through it, Diana is given personal agency over deciding what sort of image to project through her clothing and physical appearance — "coming to power over self-representation."²⁰ After her death, Diana is characterized no longer as an empty airhead, but as an independent woman who "eventually used her power to confront the infidelity of her husband and the failings of the Royal Family."²¹ This may be a type of wish-fulfillment on the part of the media, especially after the negative atten-



These photos of book covers about Diana illustrate the fluid public image of the Princess of Wales during her lifetime. Scholars such as Jude Davies and Michael Levine have explored the history of Diana's iconic persona, from "shy Di" to the now-famous "Queen of Hearts."

tion that the paparazzi drew after Diana's death. But it is significant that Diana's handling of the press, while alive, holds strong potential for media manipulation.

Some scholars argue that Diana's proactive relationship with the media, therefore, led to the apparent mass hysteria that followed Diana's death. J. Mallory Wober writes that Great Britain "was not, after all, as it had been described in the week and month after the death, universally wrung out in grief." Wober argues that print and broadcast media helped whip up a "feeding frenzy" during the week between her death and her funeral, with "special editions looking back on Diana's life and analyzing most conceivable aspects of it" as well as focusing on the visible crowds, "who soon became an important part of the news." In this way, Wober contends that the media reinforced the notion of a public unified in its grief by reporting on

the "similar emotions visible amongst very many of the (visible) public" to conclude that "everyone thought and felt alike."²²

The influence of Elizabeth and Diana's differing public relations approaches upon their post-mortem images cannot be extended beyond the immediate aftermath of their deaths. Scholar John Watkins notes, "What finally allowed writers to sustain their contradictory admiration for the Queen of famous memory was their ever greater historical distance from her." Thus, Elizabeth I underwent many image makeovers in the relatively short period of Stuart England. During James' reign, people wanted to link him with Elizabeth to provide an appearance of "sovereign continuity to mitigate the experience of dynastic rupture," conveniently minimizing the king's "foreign birth, his inexperience with English legal institutions, his descent from Mary, Queen of Scots

and the Guises, and recurrent suspicions that he might be soft on Catholics." Still later, proto-constitutionalists desiring to limit the monarchy's power tried to mold Elizabeth's image as "an advocate of the rights of free-born Englishmen," presenting her not as "a powerful monarch whose administrative brilliance sealed her people's affections" but as "a queen in a perpetual state of abdication" in favor of empowering her citizens. During the Restoration period, speculations about Elizabeth's private life exploded with the publication of "secret histories," or novels claiming to reveal her secret romances. Watkins argues that novels such as *The Secret History of the Most Renowned Q. Elizabeth and the E. of Essex* recast the queen as a celebrity figure: "For an emerging bourgeois readership, Elizabeth's politics mattered less than her identity as a woman who transgressed increasingly rigid assumptions about women's place in society." Because of her many images, Elizabeth could play virtually any role from "virtuous princess perpetually mourning her mother's death to a homicidal fury poisoning her erotic rivals."²³ It is important to note, however, that images of Elizabeth were predominantly negative immediately after her death. Some reports of her deathbed suggest she was torn up with guilt over the Earl of Essex's execution, the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots, or her refusal of the Earl of Leicester's courtship. One of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, Lady Southwell, recounted that her "disemboweled, putrefying body exploded in its casket," which confirmed to then-living Catholics that Elizabeth's "Protestant corruption" had consumed her physical remains. Only afterward was she presented in more favorable and endearing images, showing the ephemeral nature of public memories.²⁴

Likewise, the collective "memories" of Diana are also beginning to di-

verge according to people's ever-fainter recollections of her life. Interestingly, the memories appear to be falling the opposite way to the post-mortem images of Elizabeth I — overwhelmingly passionate and loyal at first, but slowly waning to a more tempered, dispassionate approach. Jill Chancey argues that avenues for negative representations of Diana in the media appeared to decline after she died. Chancey writes that "the living and complicated Diana defined by scandals, eating disorders, and friction within the royal family" has slowly been altered to a figure more like the traditional fairytale princess, "codified ... as mother, princess, wife, humanitarian, beautiful, and never, ever, 'inappropriate' or 'unfeminine.'"²⁵ As a result, Diana's image loses any threat it may once have posed to the royal establishment. Immediately after Diana's death, CNN documented intense loyalty to Diana, then seen as an antagonist to the traditional monarchy, in the form of anti-royal sentiment — one poll showing public approval of the queen at 47 percent, with Prince Charles at less than 33 percent. A 2007 poll, however, gave the queen an 80 percent approval rating, with Prince Charles at 62 percent.²⁶ If Diana's public relations campaign had worked to win sympathy at the expense of the royal family's public image, her death effectively quelled that strategy for the long term. Ten years later, Michael Elliott speculated in a *TIME* magazine article that Diana's death instituted an "age of emotion" in traditionally stoic Britain with its legacy of Victorian reserve. After the 2005 terrorist attacks in Britain, Elliott writes, this emotional openness subsided and Britain returned to its former stoicism as "the virtues of reason, reserve and order became apparent." Elliott argues that after the brief, intense mania over the Princess of Wales' funeral, Britain was right to adapt to "sterner times than the mid-

1990s,” concluding that “[y]ou can’t fuel a society on flowers alone.” This tribute to Diana mutes the sentimentality of the immediate mourning period and downplays the manipulative, skillful edge that Diana demonstrated in her interactions with the media during her lifetime.²⁷

A reactive approach to public relations, as demonstrated by Elizabeth I, tends to minimize that person’s achievements in the public eye simply because the public may not recognize or appreciate them. Elizabeth focused mainly on countering obstacles to her administration; this strategy, however, did not prove overwhelmingly effective. Her subjects found ways to avoid compliance with her authority, especially in her last years on the throne. Only later, in the long term, have people begun to rediscover the significance of Elizabeth’s actions in the context of the educational, social, and political upheavals that were then taking place in early modern England.

A proactive approach to public relations, as exemplified by Diana’s experience, has immediate and often dramatic results. As Diana demonstrated, engaging the media over top-

ics that appealed to a wide variety of cultures and tastes gave her power to set agendas for press coverage and elicited far more public support for her than the traditional monarchy ever received during her life. A proactive approach thus tends to make people appear powerful, especially in the short term. The outpouring of media attention helped Diana seem more influential immediately after her death than she really was. The royal family’s renewed approval ratings, more than 10 years after Diana’s funeral, belie the mass mourning that occurred in 1997.

These two women who both wanted to win the hearts of their respective publics — separated by time and technology — differed radically in their public relations methods, resulting in outcomes almost completely opposed to each other. Only time will tell whether Diana enjoys anything close to the kind of post-mortem fame that Elizabeth I has encountered throughout the centuries. Nevertheless, their professed desire to rule over the “hearts” of their subjects provides an unusual bridge between the Virgin Queen and the Princess of Wales.

END NOTES

1. *Hibbert, Christopher, The Virgin Queen: Elizabeth I, Genius of the Golden Age (Cambridge: Perseus, 1991), 133.*
2. *PBS, “Diana’s 1995 BBC interview.” The Princess and the Press, 1995 13 April 2007 <www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/royals/interviews/bbc.html>.*
3. *Weiner, Richard, Webster’s New World Dictionary of Media and Communications (New York: Macmillan, 1996), 474.*
4. *Heath, Robert L., Strategic Issues Management (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), 81, 84.*
5. *Metzger, Marcia Lee, “Controversy and ‘Correctness’: English Chronicles and the Chroniclers, 1553-1568,” Sixteenth Century Journal 27.2 (1996), 450.*
6. *Voss, Paul, Elizabethan News Pamphlets: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe and the Birth of Journalism (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001),*

34-35, 37, 8, 25, 13, 54, 61, 13, 20.

7. Levy, Fritz, "The Decorum of News," *Prose Studies* 21.2 (1998), 21, 17.
8. Fox, Adam, "Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England," *The Historical Journal* 40.3 (1997), 608, 609, 598, 601, 614, 598.
9. Clegg, Cyndia Susan, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: University Press, 1997), 19, 31, 67, 72.
10. Haigh, Christopher, *Elizabeth I* (Singapore: Longman, 1998), 165.
11. Levin, Carole, "The Heart and Stomach of a King": *Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 116, 117.
12. Haigh, 162, 168.
13. Weiner, 473.
14. Heath, 191.
15. Stothard, Peter, "A Perrier With the Princess," *Times Online*, Sept. 2, 1997, 4 March 2008 <www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article2348440.ece>
16. Levine, Michael, *The Princess and the Package: Exploring the Love-Hate Relationship Between Diana and the Media* (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 1998), 144, 145, 160, 162, 164.
17. Stothard.
18. Davies, Jude, *Diana: A Cultural History* (Great Britain: Palgrave, 2001), 118-119, 144.
19. BBC Timeline, "1992: Controversial Diana Book Published," *BBC Online*, 4 March 2008 <news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/june/16/newsid_2514000/2514329.stm>.
20. Davies, 146-7.
21. Hubert, 131.
22. Wober, J. Mallory, "Feeding Frenzy, or Feeling Friendsy? Events after the Death of Diana, Princess of Wales," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34.1 (2000), 127, 129, 130, 131.
23. Watkins, John, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England* (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 221, 32, 36, 38, 150, 151, 157.
24. Dobson, Michael and Watson, Nicola J., *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14, 15.
25. Chancey, Jill, "Diana Doubled: The Fairytale Princess and the Photographer," *National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Journal* 11.2 (1999), 172.
26. CNN, "Poll: Americans Love the Queen," May 7, 2007, 18 March 2008 <www.cnn.com/2007/US/05/07/royal.polls/index.html>.
27. Elliott, Michael, "The Diana Effect," *TIME* 2007, 19 March 2008 <www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1650830_1650872_1655713,00.html>.