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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: MARTIN KAPLAN DISCUSSES JOURNALISM AND THE
ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

ANCHORS: DAVID BRANCACCIO

BODY:

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor: Today there's a story of journalism meets the entertainment industry, just the beat of MARKETPLACE contributor Martin Kaplan, associate dean at the communications school at USC. Marty, tell me, who is this fellow George Christy?

Dr. MARTIN KAPLAN (USC): Well, for 26 years, he's written a column called The Good Life, a gossip column that's pretty much the most popular feature in the Hollywood Reporter. And everybody looks there to see whether they exist.

BRANCACCIO: Now Mr. Christy's on leave from the paper because of questions surrounding pension benefits he received from some acting work that may or may not have been appropriate. And the Hollywood Reporter's own staff did a piece about this controversy that didn't get run; it got spiked by the newspaper's publisher. The reporters have now left the paper. But my question for you, Marty, is why does anybody really care about this little gossip column? Apparently, there's tiny little head shots of all the executives each day, dozens of these things.

Dr. KAPLAN: Well, people care for two reasons. One is because everyone in Hollywood is incredibly insecure, and they wake up every morning trying to figure out whether they are on top of the world or in the bottom of the toilet. And the only way they can find out is by figuring out what other people say about them is true.

BRANCACCIO: There are allegations that Mr. Christy may have received perks as his apparent power in his role as a columnist increased over the many years. The journalists who cover the entertainment industry are a special breed. They've often been in bed with each other over the years.

Dr. KAPLAN: Well--and one could make the case that many of them still are today. Whether entertainment journalism really is journalism is a lively topic. The trade press gets singled out because they seem to be particularly susceptible of running rip-and-read kind of stories straight from the publicist's typewriter. But I'm not sure that's as much the case now as it used to be. But the truth is that Hollywood is all about manipulation, all about image and I'm afraid to say all about deceit. A producer or a studio executive would have no compunctions about lying to a reporter if he or she thought it would get the right kind of story, and in fact, they're often appalled when they get called on it. They can't imagine what the problem was.

BRANCACCIO: Now if you were an entertainment reporter, you do want the plum interviews, and if we wanted Gwyneth Paltrow right now on MARKETPLACE and I got a hold of her publicist, I would probably have to make questions. Apparently, this is how it's done in the entertainment business.

Dr. KAPLAN: Celebrity journalism involves preconditions--getting on a cover can be a precondition for having an interview. Excluding realms of topics, getting a reporter who's known to be friendly as opposed to someone who's going to press hard.

BRANCACCIO: Still, it is striking. The Los Angeles Times very vigorously tries to cover Hollywood with Pulitzer Prize-winning reporters in this particular beat, and there was a quote from somebody in a recent LA Times piece about the George Christy matter in which the point was made, 'Well, look, we're not covering a cure for cancer here. This is just the entertainment business, and so standards should be essentially different.'

Dr. KAPLAN: If you're covering a business that makes \$ 100 billion a year, you have the same responsibilities to shareholders and to the poor folks out there who depend on you for the news as if you're covering a widget business. On the other hand, the people in the widget business are not nearly as accomplished in manipulating you with blue smoke and mirrors.

BRANCACCIO: Marty Kaplan, thank you.

Dr. KAPLAN: Pleasure.

BRANCACCIO: Dr. Kaplan is the director of the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California.

Coming up, summer reading for the vacation-deprived.

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