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## MARKETPLACE

SHOW: Marketplace (6:30 PM ET) - SYND

August 23, 2001 Thursday

LENGTH: 646 words

HEADLINE: Connie Chung's upcoming interview with Gary Condit

ANCHORS: DAVID BRANCACCIO

BODY:

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor:

ABC Television today is full of the big-voiced guy talking about the network's big exclusive.

Announcer: Gary Condit, mystery, suspicion, accusations.

BRANCACCIO: Connie Chung will ask the California congressman about the disappearance of intern Chandra Levy. This is about journalism and the big scoop, but it's also fair to say that television is very good at turning tragedy into revenue. Here to discuss are Max Robins, critic at TV Guide in New York, and Marty Kaplan, associate dean at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication. Max, first, what about the ground rules for this interview? ABC has agreed to run it uncut, right?

Mr. MAX ROBINS (TV Guide): Indeed, but within a 30-minute time frame. Look, it's a legitimate interview to do. What happened to Chandra Levy? What involvement Congressman Gary Condit did or didn't have certainly has been like-it's been topic A all summer. But, also, too, with this, David, is that they don't have any opportunity to edit the tape down. So, really, Connie Chung, who's conducting the interview, is going to have to really be thinking on her feet, and she's going to have to be a good counterpuncher, if you will.

BRANCACCIO: Well, Marty Kaplan, USC, there's a certain C-SPAN charm to letting an interview run uninterrupted. At least it's not sound bite journalism.

Mr. MARTY KAPLAN (Associate Dean, Annenberg School for Communications, USC): No, I think it's less C-SPAN, more "Perry Mason." I mean, everyone hopes that at a certain point, he's going to say, 'I did it! I did it!' But, in fact, probably that's not going to happen. There's probably a series of

choreographed talking points that he'll be going through, and we'll spend all of our time watching it, wondering, 'How is he doing? How is she doing? And how are we doing, we lurid voyeurs?'

Mr. ROBINS: And I think you also have to ask, 'How much has Gary Condit been coached?' Everybody, I'm sure, has done their mock interviews, both on the ABC News side and on the Condit side.

Mr. KAPLAN: And then we'll have the pre- and post-game shows, with analysis of what's she going to ask, what's he going to say and then afterward, on all the networks, 'How did they do?'

BRANCACCIO: The Los Angeles Times ran an editorial today saying what the media will tend not to tell you is the back story of this Gary Condit interview. Here we are talking about it. It's not like the rest of the media has also missed the back story.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes. And, in fact, David, by asking that question, we are now talking about the media not talking about talking about the back story. So we all inhabit this sort of Borgesian hall of mirrors, which is what postmodern culture has become. There is no content anymore; there's only stagecraft and manipulation and the discussion of that.

BRANCACCIO: Now there is a term of art for the big interview in this television context. What's it called, Max?

Mr. ROBINS: We call it the 'get.'

BRANCACCIO: The 'get.' You're trying to 'get' the big name. The biggest name of all time, apparently, for television was the Monica Lewinsky interview that Barbara Walters did back in '99. It did pretty well, didn't it?

Mr. ROBINS: Oh, it did Academy Award-Super Bowl numbers.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes. And, in fact, Connie Chung is something of an expert on this. Not only is she demonstrating her chops tonight by getting this get, she has written a paper for the Shorenstein Center at Harvard called 'The Business of Getting the Get: Nailing an Exclusive Interview in Prime Time.' For me, the most fascinating moment in it comes when Connie gets to interview Walter Cronkite to ask him whether he thought that when she got Tonya Harding, whether that was a legitimate piece of news, or was she just another thuggish, kneecaping ice skater who only belonged in tabloid journalism? And Walter Cronkite said, 'It is journalism. It is legitimate news.' And Connie said she could have kissed him at that point.

BRANCACCIO: Well, Max, you going to watch it tonight?

Mr. ROBINS: Oh, of course.

BRANCACCIO: Yeah.

Mr. ROBINS: And I think this is--I think Marty and I, David, as—as we're--as we're demonstrating right here, we're participants in this.

BRANCACCIO: Max Robins, TV Guide; Marty Kaplan, USC, thank you.

A definition of the Borgesian hall of mirrors will be posted on the  
MARKETPLACE Web site, [marketplace.org](http://marketplace.org).

LOAD-DATE: August 24, 2001