

In Your Face: *La Dolce Vita* and the Unleashing of *Paparazzi*

By Natalie Finn

“Paparazzo suggests to me a buzzing insect, hovering, darting, stinging.”¹

“The celluloid journalist owns a piece of our national soul.”²

Celebrities trying to have a private moment, interrupted by flashbulbs; photographers closing in on a prominent figure as he’s led from his office in handcuffs; or, most recently on *Law & Order*, a relentless paparazzo chasing a woman into oncoming traffic – a negative image of paparazzi is ingrained in our heads because of the consistently disparaging portrayal of them in popular culture.³ When characters in movies happen to be famous in their fictional world, characters who chronicle the lifestyles of the rich and famous inevitably follow. Unlike the heroic depictions of war correspondents and investigative reporters or the humorous representations of clueless anchormen,⁴ however, the portrait painted of paparazzi is a patently unflattering one. They practice an intrusive, salacious form of journalism, singling out public figures’ worst or most private moments and turning them into headlines. Their pack mentality as they prey on celebrities warrants comparisons to hungry wolves or swarming insects. In fact, the literal translation of the Italian word “paparazzi” is “buzzing insects.” The onomatopoeic resemblance to the Sicilian word “papataceo,” or oversize mosquito, is not a coincidence.⁵

Federico Fellini donated the term to the popular culture lexicon when he directed *La Dolce Vita* in 1959, the first film to prominently feature the photographers who made scandal, tragedy, and famous people their business. Paparazzo is the name of the main photographer in the movie. The characteristics that he and his colleagues exhibit made enough of an impact to permanently instill the term “paparazzi” to refer to photographers who take candid pictures of celebrities, often by relentlessly shadowing them in their public and private activities.⁶ In *La*

Dolce Vita the paparazzi coalesce into one menacing character. They are an expected presence whenever a celebrity character is onscreen. Fellini depicts them as frenzied antagonists, either falling over each other to get the best camera angles of their subject, or anxiously pursuing the next scandal when that subject proves fallible.

Fellini's interpretation of paparazzi proved to be lasting and highly acceptable, onscreen and in real life. The 2004 film *Paparazzi* digests *La Dolce Vita's* image of the scandal-happy shutterbug and mixes it with 21st-century suspicion and distaste for those who don't seem able to let celebrities have a non-documented moment. Photographers sift through garbage, plant surveillance cameras and sound bugs in private homes and threaten celebrities. The movie overdoes its portrayal of cold photographers who have no respect, morals or control, but it is built upon Fellini's foundation.

Both films portray photographers doing journalism a disservice. In either case, the paparazzi are pursuing trivialities with the excuse that they're catering to the public's appetite for scandal and sensationalism. They feed on everyday life, leaving no moment unturned. After *La Dolce Vita's* American debut in 1961, *Time* magazine introduced the term to the public in an article entitled "Paparazzi on the Prowl." Printing pictures of a throng of reporters blocking the car of a princess during her trip to Rome, *Time* referred to them as a "ravenous wolf-pack of freelance photographers who stalk big names for a living and fire with flash guns at point blank."⁷ The eponymous 2004 film shows that the derogatory images presented in *La Dolce Vita* only sharpened in the media's mind over time. Paparazzi have become pop culture icons themselves.

Along for the High-Class Ride

“Lavish lifestyles invite attention.” (Alan Zanger, paparazzo⁸)

In *La Dolce Vita*, actress Sylvia arrives in Rome to film and promote a new movie. A horde of photographers, jostling and elbowing each other, dart toward her plane as it lands. One runs right up the stairs, protesting that he just wants to take one picture as he’s restrained from going farther. They continue to push and lean, straining to get good angles. One man lies on the ground and shoots upward. When Sylvia exits the plane, they start firing directions to her immediately:

“Your glasses! Your glasses! Take your glasses off!”

“No! Go! Go back!”

“Come on, smile.”

This movie star’s entrance in *La Dolce Vita* epitomizes the animalistic image of paparazzi in film. They resemble dogs chomping at the bit, desperately reaching for scraps – a photograph or a sound bite. Each wants the best piece of meat. At this event, however – the anticipated arrival of an internationally famous actress – the paparazzi are expected, even encouraged, to cover the scene.

In *Paparazzi*, the photographers who cover organized events like premieres and award shows are restrained behind velvet ropes, but the pack mentality remains. They snap away at every move the stars make as they traverse the red carpet, all hoping for a unique angle but mostly getting a rehearsed public smile.

These events are staged. Photographers are invited and welcomed, albeit cordoned off so they don’t get too close. When the press covers these Hollywood moments, they are passing on the image that celebrities want their public to see. And the public is always hungry for more coverage.

La Dolce Vita addresses the glamour and excitement surrounding celebrity culture in the late 1950s, including the changing institution of stardom. Famous people became “smudges,” a term coined by the British paparazzi, as they detached their humanity from their public images.⁹ Celebrities became nothing more than pictures to their adoring public. This “society of the spectacle” demanded more visuals and more details, not realizing it was simultaneously contributing to the growing artificiality of pictorial representation, according to John Parris Springer in his article, “Fellini’s Roman Circus.”¹⁰

When Sylvia gives a press conference in her hotel room, the paparazzi continue trying to mold her into their idea of what their viewers and listeners want. They pepper her with inane questions: “Is it true that every morning you bathe in ice?” “Do you ever practice yoga?” “Do you like bearded men?” “How do you feel about neo-realism?” The quest for sound bites and a neatly packaged celebrity image continues.

Few deny that one doesn’t exist without the other, that celebrities are not born, but made – created by the publicity afforded them from paparazzi and other journalists. Aspects of their lifestyle – attending high-profile events, luxurious indulgences – automatically make them fodder for the camera’s eye. This lifestyle is also what separates them from private figures, or those who live without public recognition. Paparazzi go hand-in-hand with celebrities’ public activities.

As gossip columnist Marcello drives away from a nightclub with rich society figure Maddalena in *La Dolce Vita*, a phalanx of photographers takes pictures as they go:

“Here she is, more photogenic than a star!”

“Every night the same story. Don’t they ever get bored?” she wonders. “Paparazzo, enough!” she scolds, waving him away.

“You should be used to it by now,” Marcello tells her. “You’re a public figure.”

Similarly in *Paparazzi*, a photographer tells a new-to-Hollywood young actor that “things have changed. You’re somebody now. You better get used to this.”

The underlying premise is that celebrities should never expect to be left alone when they venture out in public, because their activities are invariably newsworthy. They surrender their right to privacy from society, once that society is paying their salaries.¹¹

Behind Closed Doors

“We’re naked. Can they do this?” (Abby Laramie [Robin Tunney], *Paparazzi*, 2004)

The malicious stalker tendencies that the paparazzi exhibit in the eponymous 2004 film reflect society’s growing appetite for less-glamorous, more-scandalous information about celebrities and public figures. Photographers in this movie relentlessly cater to public demand for titillation and amusement. The impetus of *Paparazzi* is four photographers’ absurd harassment of an up-and-coming young star, Bo Laramie. They work for a tabloid – also titled *Paparazzi* – and will seemingly do *anything* to create juicy headlines and pictures for their magazine.

The conflict begins when Laramie spots paparazzo Rex Harper taking pictures of his son, Zach Laramie, at the 8-year-old’s soccer game. When Laramie confronts Harper and asks him to stop photographing his family, Harper replies, “Kid takes a nice picture. Won’t bring half as much as the ones I have of Abby, changing Zach’s clothes. The steamy ones, by the pool.” With this he establishes the image of paparazzi in this film – they are animals once again. Here they have wormed their way into the minutiae of celebrities’ daily lives, hunting for tabloid fodder.

Everyday activities, whether they’re mundane or highly private, become front-page attractions once you’re in the public eye, according to *Paparazzi*. Pictures of a naked Laramie and his wife Abby on vacation make the cover of *Paparazzi* magazine. A photographer snaps Laramie sitting next to his son’s hospital bedside as Zach lies in a coma. They swarm around him

and Abby as they leave the hospital after visiting Zach. Finally, paparazzo Leonard Clark, an associate of Harper, sneaks into the Laramies' backyard and take pictures of Abby, who is painfully recuperating from a car accident and surgery.

The paparazzi in this film are morally stunted. They take every opportunity and go to machinated extremes to create news. They are the ultimate prowling pack animals, swarming and swooping in at any given moment.

La Dolce Vita's paparazzi do not go to these calculated extremes, but their actions are a precursor to the distasteful behavior onscreen in 2004. Paparazzo and his fellow photographers subscribe to the notion that a celebrity's public actions are everybody's business. Whatever happens behind closed doors is fair game, as well, if they are lucky enough to be privy to it.

Robert, the actress Sylvia's boyfriend, has passed out in his convertible outside a nightclub. Sylvia has run off with columnist Marcello. Four photographers approach the car and start snapping. They pose him in what they feel are the most effective poses: "Turn him! Stay there. Good. Don't you move." One drapes himself over the trunk; another crouches behind the car and captures Robert's image in the rearview mirror. The paparazzi are relishing this moment – a picture-perfect, scandal-ready, drunken, jilted lover.

Marcello and Sylvia drive up, after a night of nothing more exciting than taking a stomp through the Trevi Fountain. The paparazzi descend on them. One photographer wakes Robert, hoping to anger him and provoke a fight between him and Marcello. They continue photographing Sylvia as Robert walks up to them. Luckily for the paparazzi, Robert slaps Sylvia. She storms away and they encourage him to go after her, but he approaches Marcello instead, and hits him.

“Marcello, hit him too, no?” “Marcello, raise your head a bit.” Again they try to direct the scene, hoping for a juicy pictorial story.

The paparazzi do not distinguish between celebrities and average people if the so-called average has done anything unusual or tragic. Once the paparazzi have word of the happening, whoever’s involved should expect to share the experience with the press. First, Marcello and Paparazzo visit the countryside after hearing reports that two children claimed to have seen the holy Madonna. Paparazzo and two other photographers immediately jump the fence of the children’s family home and rush upstairs. The shutterbugs are in paradise as they swarm all over the field where hundreds of wishful thinkers have gathered to see if the children will have another vision. They photograph indiscriminately – young children, babies, the elderly, the injured.

In a nod to the public’s fascination with morbidity and tragedy, Paparazzo encourages Marcello to bring him to a murder site. Steiner, a prominent writer whom Marcello envied and admired, has killed his two children and committed suicide. His friend’s death disturbs him and he does not allow Paparazzo access, despite his persuading: “Marcello, let me in. Tell them I’m your photographer. I’ll give the pictures to your paper for cheap. Let me go in with you...”

Photographers then follow Marcello and a detective to the bus stop to meet Steiner’s wife, who does not yet know what’s happened. “Guys, some compassion please,” the detective pleads to the crowd. “At least this one time. Try to talk to your colleagues, they’re really exaggerating now,” he says to Marcello, the distasteful association contributing to the columnist’s eventual decision to give up sensational journalism. The paparazzi continue loading their film. The detective had acknowledged that it would be unprecedented for them to leave well enough alone, but he had hoped they might grant his wish anyway.

Even on this solemn, wretched occasion, it's all about business and money for the paparazzi. Now and 40 years ago a fast wad of cash could be made selling other people's pain and misfortune to the highest bidder. *La Dolce Vita* and *Paparazzi* capture the most insensitive aspect of the paparazzi's work – the instinct and desire to press on and capture every gruesome angle because it makes for the more lurid story.

Say Cheese

"I'm starting to feel much more in control of my anger... I can't let the fact that four paparazzi nearly killed my family shake my behavior now, can I?" (Bo Laramie [Cole Hauser] after killing a photographer, *Paparazzi*, 2004)

Abby Laramie, Bo's wife and a teacher, is humiliated when she sees pictures of the couple naked, walking on the beach – on the cover of *Paparazzi* magazine. The cover also features photographs of Zach. "God, Bo. My principal, the teachers, my kids' parents. What are they gonna think?!" she shrieks. "How dare they put Zach on the cover of a magazine? There are so many creeps out there. He's a minor, is this legal?" Her anger is a believable reaction to the news that one's privacy has been thrown out the window. She has probably read tabloids before, but she's shocked that this has happened to her.

Bo Laramie, on the other hand, seemingly absorbs 40 years' worth of anger at intrusive media and lashes out violently. His reaction comprises disbelief, rage and revenge. *Paparazzi* reinforces and hones every negative connotation the paparazzi have ever merited and then some, and in turn it stuffs every celebrity's revenge fantasy into Laramie. At most times, however, the paparazzi are so awful in this film, you can't blame Laramie for turning homicidal. Their vile image is reflected in Laramie's transition from protective dad to scheming killer. As they grow more audacious, he loses another marble.

Laramie first loses his temper with Rex Harper at his son's soccer game, when Harper refuses to stop taking pictures. When Harper taunts him with intimate details about his wife and son, Laramie punches him and then has to attend anger management counseling when Harper sues *him*. He tries to stifle his outrage but he is disconcerted that he's supposed to learn to accept the paparazzi's behavior:

Kelley: You're carrying belief systems from a previous life that don't fit in with your new reality. Some of your old values may not be valuable anymore. Not here, not now.

Laramie: I disagree. You don't mess with a man's family. And I'm not going to change who I am to suit my environment or your expectations. I got to where I am by doing things my own way.

Kelley: Your time here will give you the tools to better deal with situations like last Saturday's. And I'm considerably cheaper than Mr. Harper.

The general acceptance that obnoxious paparazzi are part of celebrity life does not sit well with Laramie. When Harper and fellow paparazzi – Leonard Cohen, Wendell Stokes and Kevin Rossen – cause a car accident that seriously injures Abby and Zach, Laramie goes on the offensive. Whenever Laramie lashes out, however, the paparazzo victim has just done something immoral or said something hateful. This film wants the viewers to feel as little sorry for the photographers as possible. Meanwhile Laramie is the poor family man who feels helpless. “Cheated, angry, lost – all at the same time,” he tells Dr. Kelley.

First, Laramie tries to help photographer Rossen when his motorcycle skids on a canyon road and he's hanging off the edge of a cliff. Rossen had run into Laramie's sport utility vehicle while in pursuit of the actor. Blaming Laramie for the accident, Rossen mutters under his breath

about “owning his ass.” Envisioning the images of his injured wife and son, Laramie purposely lets go of the paparazzo’s hand.

For his next attack he embraces the main characteristic of his adversaries and becomes a calculated stalker. Laramie plants a gun in Cohen’s car, follows him and calls the police, saying a man is waving his gun on a busy street. When the police pull Cohen over, he confusedly pulls the gun out of his coat when he reaches for his wallet, and several officers shoot him dead.

Laramie’s final act is to beat Stokes to death with a baseball bat and frame Harper for the crime, leaving bloody handprints and the murder weapon at Harper’s residence. Laramie succeeds, and is able to relax around the usual red carpet phalanx after that.

Paparazzi’s mission is to make the photographers the clear-cut bad guys. While *Paparazzi* exploits real-life events (e.g. the Princess Diana-style paparazzi car chase and crash; punching the photographer when he tries to take a picture of a child¹²), however, it does not debate the right-to-privacy issues that surface when celebrities complain of exploitation. Paparazzi maintain that they have First Amendment rights to gather news and are serving society’s right to know about public figures. Laramie’s response is a fantastical revenge fantasy, cooked up by Hollywood in light of celebrities’ complaints and the masses’ preconceived idea that paparazzi are stalkers.

Celebrities in *La Dolce Vita* swat at the paparazzi like flies, if they try to shoo them away at all. They literally either wave them away, like Marcello and Maddalena do to Paparazzo, or they half-heartedly try to stop them from getting away after taking their pictures. Paparazzo takes a picture of a couple in a nightclub – the lady is apparently having an affair. The gentleman tries to get the manager to take away his film, but he hides it and claims the camera is empty. “Everyone has a right to their own image,” Paparazzo says as the manager escorts him out. If the

famous want to live decadently, he will be sure to let everyone have a taste. A real-life paparazzo, Alan Zanger, once said, “We don’t provoke their affairs. We photograph it.”¹³

The most serious verbal opposition to the paparazzi comes from Marcello’s fiancée Emma, at the site where the children claimed to see the Madonna. Paparazzo and others take numerous pictures of people who have either been trampled by the crowd or are lying on the ground praying zealously. “How can you be this way?” she screams accusingly. “It’s not possible to be like you! Hyenas! You’re worse than hyenas! You don’t respect anyone! You make me sick! Cowards!” Emma labels the photographers as animals, vocalizing the imagery Fellini has so far presented.

While the photographers are ruthless, the famous Italians and Americans living the sweet life play to the paparazzi when it suits their needs. When Sylvia comes to Rome and the paparazzi rush her airplane, she happily poses for them. She appears to enjoy it, laughingly taking off her sunglasses when they request and obediently going back onto the plane so she can make a grander exit for the cameras. Similarly at the press conference in her hotel room, Sylvia gives tabloid-worthy answers to their questions. They ask if she sleeps in a nightgown or lingerie. “Neither,” she responds. “I sleep only in two drops of French perfume.” When asked what she likes most, she says she likes lots of things, but the things she likes most are “love, love and love.”

Sylvia’s press conference is like a party, with her and her publicity agents entertaining the reporters and photographers. Afterward she has them follow her around as she tours the city, stopping to climb the steps of a cathedral. Sylvia darts up the stairs, full of energy. “She’s an elevator, that one,” says a photographer as he stops to rest. She plays right into their hands, and they play right into hers. The press will crow about her in their publications; pictures will portray

her as energetic, lovely and interested in Italian culture; and she will be an even bigger star. Regardless of what she does, the paparazzi and entertainment press will draw readers and make money. They are happy to film her dressed in conservative church-going clothes or dripping-wet after standing in the Trevi Fountain.

When Truth Be Not Told

“Laramie Underwent Penile Enhancement” (Magazine headline, *Paparazzi*, 2004)

Fellini’s paparazzi are obsessed with images – the most glamorous, most telling and most scandalous pictures possible. They don’t particularly care what they’re reporting; instead they’re devoted to the next big thing and they’ll cross most lines to get the pictures. The few remaining uncrossed lines are obliterated by *Paparazzi* in 2004. Stemming from *La Dolce Vita*’s portrayal of paparazzi directing their candid shots as if they were staging a play, the contemporary photographers will create scandals out of thin air and blatantly lie. This willingness to manipulate the truth is a constant factor in the image of paparazzi in these films.

Paparazzi in *La Dolce Vita* try to enhance reality, turning a fist fight or a religious scandal into a photo opportunity. When Paparazzo and his colleagues visit the family of the children who supposedly saw the Madonna, they arrange their subjects to make them look even more pious, worried and stunned than they are. They pose the grandmother on the rooftop, looking pained and pointing to the heavens. “Now over here, like this,” they say as they arrange her. “Good, yes! Cry!” The grandfather gets enthusiastic about the photo shoot. “Do I look good like this?” he asks, strumming his guitar. “You’re perfect!” the paparazzi reply before running out of the house onto the next subject, leaving the family posed like dummies.

The paparazzi are also playing production roles when they move a drunken Robert around in his car as they photograph him, and then encourage him to attack first Sylvia, and then

Marcello. While they all may have fought anyway, the press wants to make sure they milk the situation for all it's worth.

La Dolce Vita showed a hint of how entertainment photographers' minds supposedly worked in that era. *Paparazzi* in 2004 threw the notion of nosey photographers out the window and turned them into boldfaced liars who concoct entire scenarios. Rex Harper and his colleagues use the photographs they capture to suit their business – sex, scandal, and payback to the stars that spurn them. They doctor images and write headlines completely devoid of truth. “Laramie Underwent Penile Enhancement” means to just embarrass him. “Laramie’s Wife on Drugs; Star Too Busy to Notice” and “Laramie’s at Fault” (featuring a picture of their smashed car) aim to ruin his career.

They increasingly cover “news” that *they* cause. Harper and his buddies also set up scenes that they believe would make great photographs. Harper provokes Laramie at Zach’s soccer game while secretly filming, and when Laramie hits him, the van door behind him opens and Cohen, Stokes and Rossen start photographing away. This set-up echoes an alleged real-life scenario, in which a paparazzo apparently approached actor George Clooney and started verbally abusing his assistant. When Clooney went after the guy, another showed up and took his picture.¹⁴

Paparazzi also inject themselves into the scenario in order to stir up controversy. Cohen runs up to Laramie and his wife and strikes up a conversation: “Hey Bo, remember me? London press junkie. You were sitting next to me at the park when there was that beautiful bird on your lap... oh, sorry man... is that your wife?” This is a lie, of course, but Cohen is merely trying to start a photographable fight between the two.

The detective investigating the Laramies' car accident and the paparazzi deaths says it outright, as he acknowledges the tabloid cover featuring the crash site: "Complete and utter distortion of the truth."

Dishonorable Mention

"I can't say I hate the paparazzi, but I don't like them. They're destroying our reputation." (Elfie Naddel, freelance photographer¹⁵)

Whatever their behavior, the photographers in *La Dolce Vita* and *Paparazzi* cite their roles as photojournalists to justify themselves. When Marcello's father visits and meets Paparazzo, he asks if he's a photographer. "I'm a photo reporter," Paparazzo replies. Marcello further explains their choice of nightclub-as-workplace with this explanation: "You know, important people come here, they make news, we take pictures." Rex Harper also defends his profession when two girls in a bar make fun of him for getting punched on the news. "Look, I'm a photojournalist," he says. "I was doing my job. I was assaulted." One woman replies, "But your pictures hurt people." His response:

"Do they? The irony, Marcie, is that everyone wants to have steak, but nobody wants to date the butcher. My job is to provide a window of reality for society. It's up to them whether they want to look through it or not. Come on, haven't you ever bought a tabloid... Don't feel guilty. Guilty's bad. Everyone wants to have a little peek."

He qualifies his work as journalism, and he touches upon the fact that as much as people complain about paparazzi or fault their methods, they keep reading and looking at the cameras' output. This scene provides an alternative argument – paparazzi gather news and if the news isn't flattering to the celebrities, that's their fault. But Harper's previous actions turn his speech into lip service – he is already such a loathsome character, his rationale is unbelievable.

In a prior scene, Harper, Kevin Rossen and Wendell Stokes sit discussing their profession:

Harper: Celebrities getting approval of paparazzi's photos. That's bullshit. The public wants raw and real. And that's what we give them. Let me tell you something, my friends. We're the last of the real hunters.

Stokes: I'll drink to that. Like those shots you got of Lopez, now they ain't worth a shit, and you are a dog.

Harper: I made bank on them, too. I spent three nights hiding in that tree. Ants crawling all over my ass. I picked her off with a thousand mil[limeter lens] from 120 yards. It was beautiful.

Rossen: Yeah, too bad it wasn't really Lopez.

Stokes: Nobody knows that. Let me tell you something, Kevin. Don't start sweatin' the small stuff, okay, or you'll get soft like the rest of those pussies working at the agencies.

Rossen: Hey, I'm here, ain't I? Hanging with you and Rex, who is, by the way, still the king. \$105,000 for that shot of Clooney in the woods.

Harper: Yeah, Clooney's been a real gold mine.

This exchange paints a particularly unflattering portrait. These freelance photographers apparently don't even care if the pictures are *of* celebrities – look-alikes will do if they can make money. They could also qualify as hateful characters *before* they mouth off about their business. Harper has been arrested for attempted rape and has a history of provoking celebrities until they lash out, so he can sue them for large sums. Leonard Cohen is a drug-dealing former attorney who once sued the police department for an illegal search when they found drugs on him. "We're dealing with real scumbags here," the detective tells Bo Laramie.

The image in *Paparazzi* has angered legitimate photographers in the agency and freelance businesses. While the real-life counterparts have been known to pester kids, sift through garbage and plant video cameras, they have become more restrained in recent years. Their audience is now more interested in pictures of stars doing everyday stuff, like pumping gas and grocery shopping, rather than engaging in scandalous behavior, according to Mireya Navarro in her article “Shooting Back at the Paparazzi.”¹⁶ Scandal is valued less than “relationships, fashion, funny situations and pure color,” said Brittain Stone, photography director at *Us Weekly*, a magazine that prominently features candid and glamorous pictures of celebrities. Glossy star-filled magazines like *Us*, *People* and *In Touch* try to distance themselves from the reported nastiness.

Real photographers were disconcerted that *Paparazzi* and other movies that feature them do not try to distinguish between the stalker types and those who attend events and stand in line. ““We go to events we’re invited to. We’re not hanging out in the bushes,” said Scott Downey, owner of Celebrity Photo Agency.¹⁷ *Paparazzi*’s egregious behavior in the movies thoroughly distinguishes them from the positive image on film of scrappy or heroic photojournalists, as mentioned in Joe Saltzman’s *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*.¹⁸ Those who photograph war, poverty and internationally important news would never doctor their photos or misrepresent the scene.

From Behind the Scenes to Creating the Scene

In *La Dolce Vita*, paparazzi act as atmospheric accents for the movie, which spotlights the hedonistic, decadent lifestyle of the rich and famous. They follow characters around and clamor for access. They quietly flock around celebrities, the flashbulbs becoming as expected in

the film as the Italian language. In one scene, the press follows Sylvia as she drives to her hotel. The character Paparazzo is in the car with gossip columnist Marcello, his friend and sometime-colleague. “Come on, pass him,” he tells Marcello as they get stuck behind a photographer on a motorcycle. “Run him over!”

Paparazzo does not create a mortal threat to his subjects in *La Dolce Vita*, but his comment represents the urgency with which he and his fellow newshounds approach their work. The need to get exclusive pictures trumps all other actions and speech.

Preying on celebrities certainly overshadows any other rational thought in *Paparazzi*, where photographers are the central antagonists. The animal mentality created in *La Dolce Vita* grows fiercer and more parasitic. When Harper, Cohen, Stokes and Rossen cause the Laramie family’s car crash, they approach the wreckage cautiously, and 30 seconds later run back to their cars – not to speed away, but to grab their cameras. They proceed to swarm the car like ants, and one tries to expose Abby’s breast as she lies unconscious.

Rex Harper is a vindictive and merciless character. After Bo Laramie badmouths him on television, he makes this declaration to himself: “Laramie, I am going to destroy your life and eat your soul. And I can’t wait to do it.” After he figures out Laramie’s revenge scheme, he actually goes to his house to murder him, firing several gunshots into what turns out to be an empty bed.

Although this image of paparazzi is debatable, society accepts it practically unblinkingly. Incidents with celebrities like Alec Baldwin, Tony Danza, George Clooney, and Johnny Depp punching or running after photographers helped build a general picture in people’s minds over the years about paparazzi being annoying, intrusive and audacious.¹⁹ In 1997, however, the court of public opinion judged that they might be killers, as well. When Diana, Princess of Wales, died in a car crash, the paparazzi who chased her car were the first ones questioned by police and then

tried and convicted by the media. Diana's death greatly increased disgust and anger directed toward the paparazzi. Since then, after evidence surfaced that Diana and Dodi Fayed's driver was drunk, the consensus has mellowed to, they "went too far trying to take the picture."²⁰

La Dolce Vita in 1960 showcased an alluring, although somewhat degenerate, society that lent itself to media attention. *Paparazzi* in 2004 assembled the most seemly representations imaginable and created possibly the four most contemptible, one-dimensional photographers on film. The similarities between the paparazzi's behavior in the two films lend themselves to a more far-reaching interpretation, however. Ultimately, the paparazzi's role in both *La Dolce Vita* and *Paparazzi* shows how photographers are increasing the monetary and social value of images. In contemporary culture, public figures are able to carefully construct their images. They want to be taken at their word without further exploration into their lifestyle or sensibilities. The press can prove to be both a useful tool to convey their messages, and a liability when they delve too far beneath the surface. When celebrities are caught being unglamorous, acting immorally, or breaking the law, inquiring minds want to know and see. An interest in sensationalism and the unknown provides a bottomless market for the photographic products the public loves to loathe but gobbles up nonetheless.

This reversion to using images to explain the human experience is a risky venture, as pictorial representations are easily manipulated and taken out of context. Despite an overwhelming public aversion to the concept of paparazzi and what they stand for – invasion of privacy, dishonesty, ruthlessness – many people still want those easily digestible images of lives they normally would have no access to. They figure, how can pictures lie?

Easily, if those shooting the film do not care what they capture or how they capture it, so long as it sells.

Filmography

La Dolce Vita, 1960 (running time 167 minutes), black and white, International Media Films.
Directed by Federico Fellini. Written by Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano and Tullio Pinelli.

Paparazzi, 2004 (running time 80 minutes), color, 20th Century Fox, Directed by Paul Abascal,
Written by Forrest Smith

¹ Federico Fellini quoted in Janice J. Johnson, *Paparazzi Mania*, Spring 1999, (4 November 2004).
<<http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Spring99/Johnson/page1.htm>>.

² Mark Bowden, "When the Front Page Meets the Big Screen," *The Atlantic*, March 2004, 146.

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⁴ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Los Angeles: Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture, Norman Lear Center, 2002), 184, 187.

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⁷ Johnson 1999.

⁸ Alan Zanger sued Alec Baldwin in 1996, alleging the movie star gave him a black eye when he took pictures of Baldwin and then-wife Kim Basinger arriving at their home with their new-born daughter. Johnson, 1999.

⁹ Richard Schickel, *La Dolce Vita Audio Commentary*, Produced by Susan Ricketts, (Koch Vision, DVD, 2004).

¹⁰ John Parris Springer, "Fellini's Roman Circus," *UCO Passport to Italy*, 2004.
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¹² Johnson 1999.

¹³ Johnson 1999.

¹⁴ Johnson 1999.

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¹⁷ Navarro 2004.

¹⁸ Saltzman, p. 185

¹⁹ Johnson 1999.

²⁰ Johnson 1999.