

# Editorial

*The Opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect those of the staff of this production or the Student Union.*

Love it or hate it, the media is an amazing thing. In a world where everything from telecommunications to faxes makes widespread communication something taken for granted, the people who report on the world are now better equipped than ever to tell the world about itself. Therein lies a quirky paradox: Who in the world reports on the world, and who in the world can tell whether or not the reporters are right?

The power of the media to shape people's knowledge of and feelings for an issue is something both awesome and subtle, and a good example can be found within our own little world of Prince Edward Island regarding the recent alleged sexual assault at Marion Hall. Before the media began poking around, the bulk of the university community was blissfully ignorant of the matter apart from the odd rumour in the days following the incident. Everything changed on the Monday following the alleged assault as media coverage exploded out of the gate that evening, television and radio news jockeying for position as they broke the story to an unsuspecting public. People were stunned. Students wandered the halls in shock that evening and for days to come, trying to figure out what happened and why. They weren't alone. More than a few administration officials also got their first wakeup calls from the media as Monday morning brought the pitter-patter of reporters' feet to campus. The President was questioned even before he left town that day. The publicity department scrambled to figure out what was going on. The Student Council President found out about the incident from the evening news. In the space of twenty-four hours the entire university community was struggling to cope with the situation, a situation that had been brought to light by the media. Now that's power.

While the power of the press is formidable, it isn't always a positive thing. No one can deny the importance of the press in keeping the general public informed; in this case it is media attention that sparked student outrage and was largely responsible for forcing the administration to seek plans of action as soon as they did. It has gone further than that, though, in that the campus itself became news, not just the event. Reports and opinions on who did or didn't do this or that filter into the public and affect our judgement. The controversy in the news over who should have handled the police investigation and the subsequent entry of city police into the matter, has led many to believe that the university's security force was inadequate for the task; however, the

report recently released by the city police themselves praises the university security force for their excellent handling of the matter. It makes you wonder what you're supposed to believe, and that's something we should always be asking ourselves.

The media can only report what they know, and they don't know everything. We don't really know anything about the

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crime because we weren't there. We don't know anything about the investigation because it's ongoing and hence secret. We know only what we hear and as responsible citizens we should not be too quick to draw conclusions about it until we have items of unquestionable fact. We should always be intelligent enough to question what we hear. The media is invaluable tool for informing the public, but we should not blindly assume it to be the wellspring of all truth, especially when we are confronted by issues as serious as those now facing our community. While the media can be a priceless guide in forming our judgements, we must always remember to not let it make our judgements.

Sean McQuaid  
Editor

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