

Connie Chung

The CBS News veteran talks about sensationalism on TV news, the flap over Gingrich's mom and whether or not she plans to be on the air in 20 years.—By Sigrid Bathen

Connie Chung, co-anchor of the "CBS Evening News" and anchor of "Eye to Eye with Connie Chung," came to town in April to anchor the evening news from the state Capitol and to moderate KOVR and SACRAMENTO magazine's Women's Safety and Security Forum.

Do you think the increasing violence reported on TV news encourages violence in society?

I think we are simply covering and reflecting what exists in reality. I don't think we're focusing more attention on violence just for the sake of it. I think it very simply exists.

Does the news have to be sensational to sell?

I think a good story is appealing enough to a viewer and will engage the viewer. But [some] viewers have short attention spans, and the remote control has become a prevalent phenomenon in our lives.

Do you think you have to become more sensationalist to compete with so-called tabloid TV and talk shows?

I think we are actually [more] in competition with entertainment programming, and that is difficult. "Eye to Eye" has been up against "Seinfeld" and "Frasier."

You've been criticized for going after certain interviews—Tonya Harding, Faye Resnick—

and accused of duping Newt Gingrich's mother into making intemperate comments about the First Lady.

Anyone who focuses attention on [my interviews with] a Faye Resnick or a Tonya Harding is being, I think, unfair. If you look around, Ted Koppel on "Nightline" has done the O. J. Simpson story night after night after night. Do we hear anything that suggests that Ted Koppel has gone tabloid? No.

What about the Gingrich episode?

I really think that, fortunately, everyone is past it. CBS News carried a special, and we had the Democratic re-

sponse, and then I did a live interview with him. It was completely focused on the issues and the 100 days, so I think we've crossed over the bridge together and are both on the other side of the river.

Do you regret it?

You mean anything that I did?

Yes.

No. I didn't. I don't. There was no question in my mind that his mother was fully aware of what she was saying, and

I think anyone who saw the entire interview is quite clear on that.

Your decision in 1990 to try to have a child was trumpeted around the country by various media. How do you feel about that? If I'm getting too personal, just tell me to go to hell.

That particular thing was so misinterpreted. I was being very honest with my staff. I was basically canceling a program that I was doing, that was scheduled in a very coveted time period, and I had an obligation to some 60 people on the staff to tell them the truth. Actually, I never intended to pour out my innermost thoughts regarding having a family. I simply put out a statement describing in honest terms the reason I was canceling the pro-

gram. It was a simple statement, and I ended up on the cover of *People*. I think a lot of people had the impression that I did do an interview with *People* magazine, which I did not, and that I was pouring out all my personal thoughts, but in fact I wasn't. I begged them not to do a story.

It is now a reality that a 48-year-old woman can anchor the evening news. What about when she's 68?

The first generation of women [newscasters] was eventually no longer on the air, except Barbara Walters. The second generation—those of us in our late 40s and 50s—I think will last. I think we will be on for a long time. ☐



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