Queer Eye for the PR Guy in American Films 1937-2009

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The artistic representation of gays and lesbians has become mainstream news; scholars in various areas of American popular culture are now finding the public receptive to the serious analysis and evaluation of queer and non-heteronormative representations in the arts. Such was not the case even as recently as 1989, when the Corcoran Gallery cancelled an exhibit of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs amidst an uproar over its homoerotic content. In contrast, from late 2010 through early 2011, the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery presented a well-received exhibition of paintings titled "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," which, according to the *New York Times*, "celebrates gay and lesbian work, some created when it didn't dare expose itself."[1] This study hopes to contribute to the current conversation about queer art and queer theory.

Looking at the presentation of "queer indicators" in the representation of gay and lesbian public relations characters in movies during the Production Code era (1930 to 1967) and since, this study applies queer theory about the subversions and re-establishments of the heterosexual norm and about the performative nature of gender roles to mainstream cinema; it also applies current research on the image of the public relations practitioner to its sample of American films from 1937 to 2009. Comparing filmic depictions of public relations characters through the years reveals the extent to which film as a mass medium still presents plots and romances involving PR characters that cater to heterosexuality as the norm in order

to gain a broad audience. At the same time, the films play with the audience's often unconscious, non-heterosexual (i.e., queer) desires and imaginings. Films in the sample since the mid-1980s include openly lesbian and gay PR characters, with their depictions becoming less stereotypical over time. In the most recent movies with gay PR characters, gender and sexuality are less important themes than public relations ethics, professionalism, and personal fulfillment, whatever the character's sexual orientation.

To understand the changes in depictions of homosexuality in films, it is necessary to understand their historical context, including the changing climate of censorship. The Production Code of the Motion Picture Industry (1930-1967) was an effort at industry self-regulation. Enforcement was deemed "successful," especially in banning overt portraits of gay and lesbian sexuality. By December 1944, the Production Code's new "Forward" stated, "All the major producing and distributing companies in the United States, and ninety-nine per cent of the others, work with, and through, the Production Code Administration," though supposedly, "No one is compelled to produce motion pictures in accordance with the code regulations. No attempt is made to force producers to accept the service of the Production Code Administration."[2] The Code restricted — among numerous other things — nudity, semi-nudity, love triangles, "impure love," dances "which suggest or represent sexual actions," and making fun of ministers of religion. This stricture would have censored some of the great nineteenth century comic characters in Jane Austen and George Eliot's novels, not to mention characters in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, forbidding their depiction on the twentieth century screen.

The regulations most relevant to this study are: "Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden," and the Code's list of forbidden profane or vulgar expressions, which from

1934-1956 included "fairy," "nance," and pansy. In addition, from 1939 through the mid-1940s, the Code admonished that cissy and sissy are "invariably deleted by political censor boards" in England. The ban on depiction of sexual perversion was slightly loosened in October 1961 to read, "Restraint and care shall be exercised in presentations dealing with sex aberrations."[3]

In 1967, the Production Code was replaced by the current system of self-regulation by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), which designates a rating such as PG, PG-13, or R, based on the content of the film, the paradigm being that different ages and personalities are "mature enough" for different motion picture content. In the context of studies about the image of the PR practitioner in popular culture, this paper will show how films from the 1930s to the present that depict queer, gay, or lesbian public relations characters have negotiated both the minefields of "film-industry self-regulation" — known to most people as "censorship" — and the battlefields of public Puritanism and cultural uneasiness with non-heteronormative sexual content.

Literature Review

Image of the PR Practitioner in Film

The profession known as public relations, PR, or publicity includes a repertoire of many strategies, tactics, tools, and activities. Some of these, such as researching and writing informational stories, are akin to the activities of journalists, although PR practitioners do them for newsletters, websites, annual reports, and other kinds of in-house publications, rather than for the media publications and broadcasts where journalists work. Although today's PR practitioners are often educated in the same schools or colleges of mass communications or departments of journalism that educate journalists, public relations also

includes some activities that are far afield from traditional journalism. Public relations practitioners can work for corporations, government agencies (where they are called public information officers or press secretaries), non-profit organizations, or individuals. Public relations tools, strategies, and tactics can include media placement or press agentry; media relations including press conferences; promotion and cross-brand promotions; image consulting; event planning; crisis communications; customer and issue research; peer-to-peer marketing; and corporate social responsibility, including charitable giving and environmental initiatives.

In her definitive study of films and novels from 1930-1995, Karen S. Miller delineated categories of attitudes toward public relations work and PR practitioners that are still useful. Miller's categories were: Ditzy, Obsequious, Cynical, Manipulative, Money-minded, Isolated, Accomplished, and Unfulfilled.[4] This study works within her framework, as did Carol Ames in her recent study of films from 1996-2008.[5] Both of these studies noted that male practitioners outnumbered females in their sample, but neither specifically looked at the gender roles overtly depicted or indirectly implied.

Joe Saltzman has created a monumental database revolving around the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture (IJPC), specifying PR as a searchable category. Recently, he added the Gay Journalist in Movies and Television, 1929-2009 as well as a supplement on the Gay Public Relations Practitioner — pioneering groundwork that was essential to executing the current study. As Saltzman said in the introduction to the IJPC Database, in recent films, gay PR people are often "accepted as being gay and frequently their gayness figures in the plot."[6]

Ames found that films often present PR people — whether heterosexual, homosexual,

or unspecified — as having no interest in either sex and having no personal life beyond their PR functions. Ames placed those who sought something beyond their professional commitments and achievements into Miller's category of "Unfulfilled." In *Hancock* (2008), the most recent film studied by Ames, the PR practitioner, an image consultant, tried to integrate and balance his professional responsibilities with a satisfying personal life.

Queer Theory

Recent researchers differentiate queer theory from gay, lesbian, or feminist approaches to the criticism of art that, according to critics such as Norman Bryson, are often merely minoritarian in that they seek recognition and inclusion in the canon of their field, which has the limitation that "once the visual expressions of gay and lesbian desire can be as freely explored as their heterosexual equivalents — end of story."[7] Instead, according to Bryson, queer theory investigates "the ways in which structures of heteronormativity pervade the whole of the canon and its organization"[8] and therefore the queer approach questions the status quo, by looking at desire in its historical context. As applied to film, the aims of queer cinema "include developing an understanding of the visual field of heteronormative film, the discourses with which the compulsory heterosexuality of nearly all cinema is constantly secured and re-secured, and the central role that the stigmatization of gay and lesbian visuality plays in constructing the cinematic dominant,[9] i.e., heterosexuality.

According to Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, signs of queerness used in films during the pre-Production Code years of 1910-1930, "became even more nuanced in the wake of the Hollywood Production Code. Knowing that they would not find any overt or denotative representation of lesbians or gay men, queer spectators grew adept in discerning connotative homosexuality, or what might be referred to as queer 'subtexts.' An actor's flip

of the wrist. A woman's broad shoulders and aggressive body stance, or a lingering look between two members of the same sex: all might pass by straight audiences without a second thought, even as queer spectators zeroed in on such details."[10]

Vito Russo wrote, "A gay sensibility can be many things, it can be present even when there is no sign of homosexuality, open or covert, before or behind the camera. Gay sensibility is largely a product of oppression, of the necessity to hide so well for so long. It is a ghetto sensibility, born of the need to develop and use a second sight that will translate silently what the world sees and what the actuality may be."[11] Bryson refers to a passage from Marcel Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, a volume of *Remembrance of Things Past,* on the glance of homosexual recognition between two strangers where repression exists,[12] i.e., in most societies, most periods of history, and many forms of art.

The art of repression, this study avers, includes mainstream American films, especially those made during the strictures of the Production Code (1930-1967) and the repressive 1950s, but also more recent mainstream films, which still must presuppose a mass audience in order to secure a production order. In these, the glance of queer recognition may pass between the viewer and what is depicted on screen, which is the queer eye for the PR guy referred to in the title of this study.

Most of the films in this study present heterosexuality as the purported norm: boy meets girl; boy loses girl; boy gets girl; they kiss; fade out; the end. Simultaneously "something else" often seems to be occurring, something that promotes gender role-playing and questions traditional markers of "heterosexual" gender divisions. Chris Straayer identifies the "temporary transvestite film" as a genre with conventions that "negotiate contradictory desires in viewers, safely providing forbidden pleasures that are corroborated

by familiar visual configurations. The representations and containment of gender by clothing and other visual systems offer gender as a construction susceptible to manipulation by cross-dressing, drag, and masquerade. In films of this kind, both the text and the viewer contest gender fixity and unleash multiple identificatory processes that engage desires which, within the dominant order, might seem to be in mutual conflict."[13]

Because PR practitioners often do "image consulting," this study includes films that teach gender dressing and behavior in the category of gender-bending or temporary transvestite films. These include films in which someone in a PR role teaches someone else, usually a client, how to dress and act like a woman, or like a man, or like a star, whether the student is someone of the same sex or the opposite sex as the "taught" gender dress and behavior. These films are based on the prototype of Pygmalion (or Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady*) as an image consultant. The assumption is that nobody knows more than a man about how to act like a woman. To make these stories feel safe for heterosexual audiences, however, Straayer points out that the disguise or transformation is left "inadequate," so that when a kiss or other threatening aspect of sexuality occurs, the audience can knowingly see through the disguise, even if at the moment, the other characters cannot.[14] Image and behavioral makeovers are particularly effective in the film medium, because the audience can see and hear the before/after transformation.

In films with heterosexual storylines, when "something else" seems to be going on, often indicted by visual elements such as facial expressions, costumes, and gestures, one needs to watch film with one's "gaydar" turned up to super-sensitive, without necessarily going as far as Parker Tyler did in his early, ground-breaking work — published in his contemporary period of sexual liberation and license (the early 1970s, post-Production

Code). Tyler found over-determined sexual imagery in everything from the underground escape tunnels of 1963's *The Great Escape,* which he says represent anal intercourse between prison roommate buddies to 1970's *Myra Breckinridge* in which "Miss West's style as a woman fully qualifies her — as it always did — to be a Mother Superior of the Faggots."[15] As film critic Molly Haskell said, "American films, especially the action and thriller genres, flourish to an unusually large degree on the unconscious level. Most of the signals and symbols sent up from the region are sexual, a result both of the restrictions of a masculine genre and the repressions of a Puritan society. …Genre films operate on more levels than subjective cinema (though they are sometimes imperfectly resolved), and demand more rather than less exploration to uncover these meanings which relate directly to our collective unconscious."[16] This study looks at the unconscious meanings of selected mainstream American films that invite a queer reading in connection with a storyline and/or visual elements related to a character who does public relations work.

Methodology

This study provides a qualitative analysis of select films from 1937-2009 that present closeted or overtly gay public relations practitioners and themes. Because the Production Code banned depictions of, and even "inference to," any kind of "sex perversion,"[17] this analysis looks at films with "a queer eye for the PR guy/gal," as delineated above in the literature review. In this context, it also looks at depictions of the performative nature of gender roles, particularly in films in which a character is disguised, either as a member of the opposite sex or as a different "type" of the same sex. It also analyzes how the PR person or image consultant defines and teaches "appropriate" gender behavior.

Queer theory posits that gender expectations are related to their society and their era

and that gender expectations change over time. This study includes a chronological analysis of mainstream American films, from 1937 to 2009. Sources for the sample selection include Miller, Ames, and the IJPC Database, which is the only one of the three that specifies "gay" as a criterion. Additional films were identified to achieve samples across the years from 1937 to 2009, resulting in 11 films studied.

Each film in the sample was viewed multiple times to categorize and analyze the kinds of public relations activities presented, whether the activities were depicted positively or negatively, and in particular whether the PR activities were viewed by the characters or the filmmaker as ethical or unethical. Further categorization and analysis included the presentation of the practitioner's sexuality or possibly implied homosexuality, as well as presentations of disguise, temporary transvestitism, and "performative" gender roles in connection with the public relations strategy known as image consulting.

Research Questions:

Q1: How do the gay, queer, or non-heteronormative PR characters and their public relations work fit into the framework outlined by Miller and applied by Ames, especially Ames's finding that the depiction of public relations activities has become more nuanced and positive over time?

Q2: Do those professionals who are competent in their professions, but unfulfilled in their personal lives, actually have implied personal lives that would be unacceptable to Hollywood or the audience?

Q3: What are the visual and verbal indicators of non-heteronormative characters and plot lines, and how do they change over time?

Q4: What is the relationship of the profession of PR to themes of disguise and the

performative nature of gender roles, given that "image consultant" is one category of PR practitioner?

Q5: When PR practitioners in the film sample violate ethical norms of the profession, particularly the norms of truth and disclosure, do the consequences within the world of the film punish or reward deceptive practices?

The Sample: Queer PR Practitioners and Themes in Films 1937-2010

Shall We Dance (1937)

The PR practitioner, Arthur (played by Jerome Cowan), is at the center of confusion and flux in *Shall We Dance*. Miller put him in her negative category of "Manipulative": "Because clients are unintelligent or unable to understand PR, practitioners must manipulate and outwit them. In *Shall We Dance,* Arthur helps his client land a dance partner/husband by faking a photograph of them, leaking it to the press, then scolding her."[18] Having discovered her, recreated her as a Broadway musical star, and given her a fake name, Arthur is Pygmalion — the prototype of the PR practitioner as image consultant — to his client Linda's Galatea (Ginger Rogers).

Heterosexual marriage and fixed gender and social roles are meant to be the norms enforced by the still fairly new Production Code. Arthur, however, is first seen in evening clothes lounging on a curved satin-tufted settee. Fed up with her current dance partner, Linda asks Arthur, "Did you ever dance with a man you didn't care about who was in love with you?" He answers, "No," but with pursed and prissy stereotypical pansy intonation and expressions making it clear either that he has danced with such a man, or that he wishes he had.

Arthur has no heterosexual love interest within the plot or off stage. Instead, he is

shown leaning drunkenly closer and closer to Jeffrey, the dandy ballet company manager, as the champagne bottles pile up. The morning after, Arthur enters Jeffrey's stateroom, which is shared with his ballet star, Petrov/Peter, played by Fred Astaire. At another point, Arthur is shown entering his own stateroom with the male photographer who helped him fake the photos of Linda. From here on, the plot turns into a kind of unsexed (Code era) bedroom farce with lots of movement in and out of various bedrooms.

As a manipulative PR practitioner, Arthur not only tries to outwit his client, but in a clear violation of the professional ethic of truth telling, he also leaks fake rumors and faked photographs to the press about Linda and Petrov's supposed marriage and their purported impending baby. Linda and Petrov's actual Jersey marriage is presented as a sham to allow for a quick, public divorce, so Linda can marry her intended, Jim, a rich guy with a very weak (i.e., unmasculine) chin and a pansy demeanor.

As Arthur tries to stop Linda's marriage to Jim by promoting the rumor that she's already married to Petrov, he is told sarcastically, "It's so nice of you to think of Jim," and he answers, "I think of him constantly." So Arthur's quest to keep Linda from marrying Jim for money and leaving the theatre is doubly determined: As a PR person, Arthur needs her paycheck, and in the disguised homosexual romance, he "thinks" of Jim.

The movie ends with a big on-stage musical number. According to Benshoff and Griffin, "Although most musicals regularly enact boy-meets-girl narratives, their plots often revolve around mistaken identities, misunderstood conversations, and misplaced affections. Queer audiences could also rely on the musical to provide farcical destabilizations of gender and sexuality, whether via the presence of sissy sidekicks or in the genre's persistent use of cross-dressing."[19] *Shall We Dance* ends with a musical extravaganza promoting the

mutability of identity — with a more than a dozen chorus girls wearing Linda masks, and Petrov/Peter, who supposedly loves her, not able to identify her, throwing the boy/girl plotline into doubt.

Shall We Dance presents image makeovers, star-making, and Pygmalion-like activities as understandable and acceptable. Nevertheless, the film presents a negative portrait of a PR practitioner through Arthur, not because of his implied homosexuality, but because he manipulates his client to maintain his paycheck and because he lies to the press and fakes photographs — though these unethical actions are played for laughs.

I Wake Up Screaming (1941)

I Wake Up Screaming is a Production Code era film noir starring Victor Mature as Frankie Christopher, a boxing promoter (PR guy). Carole Landis is Vicki, the waitress whom three friends — Frankie and an effete columnist, along with a dandy of an aging actor who carries a phallic cane — decide to transform into a glamour girl, a la the Pygmalion or Svengali stories. They do it just for the fun or the challenge, but Vicki's transformation also helps their public images. Having her on their arms and having her apartment keys give them cover as heterosexuals.

In terms of Miller's categories for classifying PR characters, Frankie falls into the positive category of "Accomplished."[20] He appears to be a successful boxing promoter and his image counseling successfully brings Vicki to the verge of stardom. Like many successful and accomplished heterosexual practitioners in Ames's sample of later films from 1996-2008, however, Frankie needs "to get a life" beyond his PR function.[21] Betty Grable is Jill, the level-headed sister who falls for Frankie, seemingly on her sister's suggestion, though he queerly says, "Nothing like that has entered my head." Until Vicki throws her

sister at him, he is one of the many film PR characters — whether heterosexual, homosexual, or of unspecified gender preference — who seem to have no personal life at all.

As the Code era progressed, film references to queer relationships became even more oblique. The dark character in this film noir is played by Laird Cregar, who during the World War II era, "played overweight psychotic queers in films such as *I Wake Up Screaming*."[22] Cregar plays Inspector Ed Cornell, who first appears as a shadow in the interrogation room where several other male detectives grill Frankie for Vicki's murder. Frankie says, "Why don't you come out in the open, so I can see you?" Cornell lives in the shadows. First he unsuccessfully courts (stalks) Vicki. When she's found dead, Cornell turns his obsessive gaze onto Frankie. At a point in the film when he knows that someone else actually murdered Vicki, Cornell nevertheless accuses Frankie, saying that he "has never been wrong yet. That man's guilty." So what is Frankie guilty of?

In another odd scene, Frankie is startled awake to find Cornell lounging in his bedroom watching him sleep, like an insomniac lover. Elsewhere, when Cornell brags about sending people to the electric chair, he is told, "You're a gay dog, Cornell." According to Benshoff and Griffin, "Certain moments and characters and lines of dialogue seem to have slipped by the officials at the Production Code Administration. Often, because Code officials were lacking any understanding of the era's queer subcultures, they missed more subtle instances. For example, where Code administrators were ever watchful to censor the word *pansy* from proposed film scripts, the newer use of the word *gay* seems to have slipped through on occasion."[23] In the movie, Jill has the most direct of all the indirect statements about Cornell's sexuality, describing his presence outside Vicki's diner as "a queer thing that happened. …There was something strange about him." Confronted, Cornell attributes his

actions to the necessities of his profession: “That’s my job, Miss, to look at people. Alright, I’m a peeping Tom.” That job description would be news to most policemen and detectives, but not to those who understand Proust or Bryson’s glance of homosexual recognition.[24]

Frankie also attributes some of his seemingly queer behavior to the requirements of his PR activities as a promoter. He puts his clients ahead of his personal life to the extent that on his first “date” with Jill after her sister’s murder, he takes her to the fights, where he excitedly says, “I own a piece of the boy in the green pants. He’s a great little kid. I raised him from a pup.” There’s no actual scene with the fighter, but an interest in boxing and male bodybuilding was part of the queer subculture of Hollywood that developed into the 1945 publication of *Physique Pictorial*, which purported to be a catalog for artists looking for models. Even after an initial obscenity conviction, the publication lasted four decades: “The links between Hollywood culture and the physique industry were apparent from its inception. … The magazine regularly included beefcake photos of Hollywood stars such as Marlon Brando, Tony Curtis, and Robert Wagner, often obtained from studio publicists.”[25] Through his client — the boy he owns part of and promotes — Frankie is part of the physique subculture.

Frankie’s bedroom is luxurious and sensual with a satin bedspread; perfume and a fancy brush on the dresser; and a framed picture of Vicki, his now dead glamour creation, on the nightstand, to attest to his heterosexual normality — although he never showed a bit of sexual interest in his Gal(atea) when she was alive. Among other connotations that Frankie is a queer PR guy is Cornell confronting him about a cigarette butt found in Vicki’s closet: “Do you smoke in closets, Frankie?” Later, for no apparent reason, Frankie gives Cornell a phallic Tootsie Roll, and when Cornell tries to pass it on to his superior, the guy brushes it aside in

disgust. Mirroring Cornell's bedroom intrusion, Frankie confronts his columnist friend in the bedroom, and when the police question the aging dandy actor, Frankie lights a cigarette, tenderly hands it to him, and gives him a lingering shoulder squeeze.

Near the end, the film also comments on heterosexual marriage as the social norm: Frankie, whose escape is being abetted by Jill, whom he commits to marry, immediately thereafter seems to give her — and himself — an out by saying, "It isn't very much fun being married to a hunted man." Jill replies that *most* married men look hunted — not a strong endorsement of "happily ever after" heteronormativity.

The film attacks social norms and the Production Code through its theme that identity is mutable and can be created. All you need is an accomplished PR guy for overall image consulting know-how to coordinate the client's image and media relations; an actor to teach specifics of behavior; and the collusion of the media (columnist and paparazzi) to portray the "new person" to the public. Social and gender roles are changeable. With good image consulting, Vicki can be transformed from a poor waitress, to a glamour girl, to a celebrity, and then to an aspiring Hollywood star. No one in the film questions whether such image manipulation is ethical; the plot, however, punishes Vicki by killing her off.

A Star Is Born (1954)

The 1954 version of *A Star is Born*, features Judy Garland as Vicki/Esther, the star soon to be born; James Mason as Norman Maine, the drunken movie star who discovers her; and Jack Carson as Matt Libby, the head of studio publicity, the PR guy. Public relations activities depicted in the film include media relations and public events, but the overriding strategy is image consulting. Utilizing the hair, make-up, costuming, lighting and photographic resources of a major film studio, the head of publicity is able to transform an

ordinary person with a great voice — Esther — into a star. The film's overall view of image consulting and the fluidity of identity that goes with it is positive. Along the way, however, the film critiques the process of image consulting by showing that it can be done well — when overseen by the master PR guy — or badly, when the studio minions run amok and transform Esther into a grotesque blonde Marilyn Monroe caricature for what becomes a disastrous initial screen test. Creating a star out of a humble singer requires a master PR practitioner, an artist.

The process of image transformation, which is a central theme of many of Director George Cukor's films, is connected to Cukor's own public versus private personas, according to Benshoff and Griffin; Cukor "never denied being homosexual but lived a very discreet lifestyle. He was known in Hollywood for his all-male pool parties, but only a select few were invited, and they were expected to keep their mouths shut afterward."[26] Cukor plays it very straight in *A Star is Born*, compared to his 1935 *Sylvia Scarlett*, which starred Katharine Hepburn as a cross-dressing magnet for romance from both sexes. After that critical and public failure, and as the Production Code gained a tighter stranglehold on film content, Cukor avoided screenplays that dealt as directly with gender roles and cross-dressing disguises. However, "his best films all show the presence of a discreet queer performativity. Arguably, Cukor's double life in Hollywood attracted him to stories about performance, tales that hinged on conflicts between public personas and private selves, and many of his films deal with this topic through the prism of show business, such as *What Price Hollywood?* (1932), its musical remake *A Star is Born* (1954),"[27] and others, such as his 1964 Oscar-winning *My Fair Lady*, a Pygmalion makeover story, in which a man teaches a poor girl how to "be" or "act like" a society lady.

A Star Is Born has no overt homosexuality and no stereotypical pansies, which accords with Benshoff and Griffin's findings that, "Queer characters in postwar Hollywood films not only shifted from silly to villainous; they also increasingly moved away from the idea of homosexuality as gender inversion. … In fact, by the 1950s it was becoming increasingly difficult to tell the homosexuals from the heterosexuals, and the development would affect in its own way upon the cinematic representation of queers."[28] This did not, however, prevent the queer audience from using its queer eye on films. Cukor's *A Star Is Born* still retains an avid following of Garland devotees, many of them queer, who might at one time have used the code phrase, "Are you a friend of Dorothy?" referencing Garland's early hit, *The Wizard of Oz*, to ascertain someone's homosexual orientation.[29] In *A Star Is Born*, Garland as Esther is discovered by Norman when she does a benefit performance almost cross-dressed in a female version of top hat and tails to match her two male dancers.

If a star is born, who births her? The answer is Matt Libby (head of studio publicity) and Norman Maine (drunken, declining star), who in an uneasy alliance create the glamorous and successful film musical star named Vicki out of the small-time dance/band singer, Esther. In fact, PR guy Libby (he of the female surname) and the "normal man" star are much like a middle-aged couple, clearly fed up with each other and their frayed PR guy/client relationship. Libby is introduced pacing, fussing, and frustrated that Norman is late to the benefit performance and then shows up drunk. Libby's character has no overt pansy, homosexual, or other love interest. Instead, he is married to his work, and for better or worse, for the time being that means Norman. So Libby is a version of Miller's "Unfulfilled" practitioner,[30] but with covert homosexual implications in the PR guy/client relationship.

According to Miller, in her sample of films and novels, "The worst clients are those

who harm the practitioner's reputation or ability to work. In the 1937 version of *A Star Is Born,* Matt Libby resents Norman Maine's drunken escapades. 'I got my prestige to look out for,' he complains. 'I'm supposed to be the best publicity man in the racket, and they laugh themselves sick when I even try to get a decent mention of Maine.'"[31] In Cukor's 1954 version, when Libby's plans for a big publicity-heavy, Hollywood-style wedding for Vicki and Norman are foiled by their elopement, he rants, "I've spent 10 years covering up for him, killing bad stories, sucking up to the columnists to smooth his insults. Who do you think they'll blame? I'll look like a fool, double-crossed by a lousy actor." He vows to get even — whether for past misdeeds, or because Norman abandoned him for a woman, albeit one often in pants. Libby get his revenge when he "drives an actor back to drink by telling him, among other things, 'I got you out of your jams because it was my job, not because you were my friend,'" an example of Miller's "Money-minded" PR practitioner,[32] but also an example of the ambiguity of the role of PR practitioner as a paid nurturing helpmeet/friend/companion. The PR guy/client relationship is professional, not personal. Both practitioners and clients forget this truth to their own detriment and disappointment.

Sweet Smell of Success (1957)

In *Sweet Smell of Success,* nothing is as conventional morals would say it should be: a journalist blackmails a PR person; therefore a PR person has to plant a false story in the press; a supposedly loving brother interferes with his sister's romance; and cops beat up and arrest innocent people at the behest of someone who gives them free tickets to Broadway shows. Queer-eyed elements include the PR guy, Sidney Falco (Tony Curtis), being described as "so pretty"; Falco changing his pants in front of his dishy secretary, because he's clearly not sexually interested in her or any other woman; Falco blackmailing and

pimping a cigarette girl to a columnist to get an item placed; and the columnist J. J. Hunsecker asking, "Why do you keep coupling me with Falco?"

The public relations ethics of truth and transparency are violated flagrantly and repeatedly in PR/journalist and PR/client interactions in *Sweet Smell of Success*. For example, one of Falco's clients says, "You're a liar, Sidney. It's a publicity man's nature to be a liar. I wouldn't hire you if you wasn't a liar. I pay you a C and a half where you plant big lies about me and the club all over the map. … but also in the sense that you are a personal liar too, because you don't do the work I pay you for." In fact, *Sweet Smell of Success* is one of the most negative portraits of PR and a PR practitioner ever to grace the big screen. Falco falls into several of Miller's most negative categories: "Obsequious, Cynical, Manipulative, Money-minded, and Unfulfilled," i.e., skilled but unhappy.[33] In order to keep the powerful columnist, J. J. Hunsecker (Burt Lancaster), open to running publicity items about his clients, Falco submits to blackmail about a dark past deed, and he is forced into a subservient, even masochistic, queer relationship.

The relationship between J. J. and Falco is a perversion of the appropriate journalist/PR practitioner professional relationship. J. J. orders Falco to break up a relationship between his sister, Susan, and a jazz musician by planting a false accusation in a rival's column — a move that could be professional suicide for a PR person. J. J. orders Sidney to "match me" (light his cigarette or his fire — or something more sexual), and J. J. is often filmed towering over Falco, as Falco cringes or reclines. The powerful journalist bribes Falco with the possibility of being his substitute columnist, which for Falco would mean "the sweet smell of success," something that will always elude his grasp. The power of a journalist blackmailing a PR person is depicted as that of a master over a dog: Not knowing

that her brother J. J. holds a past dirty favor over Falco's head, Susan asks Falco, "Who could like a man who makes him jump through burning hoops like a trained poodle?" And Falco tells J. J., "It's one thing to wear your dog collar, but when it turns into a noose … ." Falco doesn't, however, find a way to escape that noose. As a "reward" for breaking up Susan's relationship, as requested, J. J. sets Falco up to be busted for marijuana and severely beaten by the police. In this distasteful world of moral corruption, the beating, which is both deserved and undeserved, is the emotional climax. The ending also satisfies the Production Code's dictate that moral turpitude — except for the journalist's — be punished.

Man's Favorite Sport (1964)

Abigail Page, played by Paula Prentiss, is a PR practitioner who is "Ditzy," "shallow but lovable … effervescent, jovial, lively, mild, chipper,"[34] according to Miller, who says, "Abigail Page describes herself as 'sort of director of public relations for the lodge' at a lake, but other than teaching another character to fish, she apparently does no work."[35] This is not, however, strictly the case. It's true that we see her doing none of the press agentry and media relations that are usually the main PR activities depicted in films. Instead, Abigail's goal is to generate publicity and entries for the lodge's fishing tournament by snagging a celebrity fishing author to participate — which she does. She convinces the boss of Roger, the celebrity fishing author who works in the sporting goods department of Abercrombie and Fitch, that Roger's participation would be great publicity for the store as well — a cross promotion with celebrity involvement that today seems very up to date. Her scheme works for the lodge; the contest draws crowds of participants. Even after Roger disqualifies himself as the trophy winner because of the odd and inept ways his fish get themselves caught, one of his customers rescues the PR situation for the store's side of the cross promotion by

reframing the story: the fact that Roger can't really fish actually means "that any darn fool can catch a record fish if he's using the right equipment" from Abercrombie and Fitch. The store rehires Roger. Thus the PR outcome for the store will be "a million dollars of free publicity." Abigail may present herself as a ditz, but her PR strategies are sophisticated, successful, and complex.

So are her sexual strategies and even her gender identity, which on the surface are simple and heteronormative, as in the previous films in the sample. According to Gerald Mast, "Both critics and the filmmaker agree that *Man's Favorite Sport?* lies at the bottom of his [Hawks'] comic barrel,"[36] perhaps because, according to Director Howard Hawks, "I didn't know that he [Rock Hudson] couldn't be funny."[37] The film bends genders right from the credit sequence, which is a photomontage of various beautiful women playing active sports of all kinds. The accompanying Johnny Mercer title song sings, however, of the sports that *men* are good at: "Some men are good at hunting quail. Some men are good at … But let a girl appear, he'll pursue her and run his fingers through her curls. And that's the way it's been since the world began. The favorite sport of men is girls." Since the person adept at sports in the film is Abigail, what is the favorite sport of her sort of woman and why is she the pursuer instead of the pursued?

Let's first define what kind of woman she is. She drives a zippy sports car and parks better than the man. She dresses in a masculine suit, complete with gloves and hat, and she meets up with "Easy," a blonde version of herself in almost identical attire, who is the daughter of the lodge owner, but also her roommate. Critic Molly Haskell described Abigail as "an aggressive, outdoorsy girl with a *soupcon* of butch,"[38] but from there Haskell concentrates only on the Rock Hudson character as an inept and virginal Adam to Abigail's

Eve. Abigail's mannish attire, aggressive stance toward men and life, and her low voice, however, make her a throwback to mannish women in earlier screwball comedies, including Hawks' own *Bringing up Baby*, which starred Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn, and which Andrew Sarris described as "undeniably the screwiest of the screwball comedies. Even Hawks has never equaled the rocketing pace of this demented farce."[39]

And what sort of a man is Roger? He is the kind of man who accidentally hands a cop a license identifying himself as Abigail! Known as the author of a fishing manual, he is nevertheless queasy about fish and fishing, which Haskell rightly points is a metaphor for sex in the film, with Roger the virgin and Abigail the expert.[40] Haskell says, "Fish are phallic symbols, of course, and there is even a scene in which a loose fish thrashes around inside Hudson's pants, causing him to jump and jerk uncontrollably."[41] What Haskell forgets, however, is that the throbbing fish is first in Abigail's pants and flops from inside her pants to inside Roger's pants.

The two of them inevitably end up in an embrace as her forest shelter is washed away by the storm to the center of the lake (the embodiment of danger for a man who cannot even swim). We have a heteronormative ending, a coupling of a celebrity and a PR practitioner that is also a queerly inverse coming together of an unmanly man and a mannish woman. In that sense, this film and many of the films of mistaken identity and sexual confusion hark back to Shakespearean comedies. In those comedies, a male actor played the female character, who might go in disguise as a man, only to have a man fall in love with her. Her "female" identity is revealed and the societal upheaval resolved by multiple heterosexual marriages (between characters played by two male actors) before the end of Act V. In *Man's Favorite Sport?*, Hawks gives us a masculine leading man (Rock Hudson), rumored from

early on in his career to be gay[42] and later dying of AIDS, playing a supposedly man's man and sportsman, who is really a professional phony and personally unmanly; he is being taught "to fish" like a man by a mannish woman. The two are united by a kiss that is twice intercut with film footage of a head-on crash, before their final kiss finds them floating away from civilization (with its war of the sexes and train crashes) into a primal lake, reentering the paradise-like womb before sexual differentiation and gender confusion.

The image of PR presented in the film is sophisticated. Although Abigail does hide her professional competence behind a ditzy façade, her PR activities are ethical, because she is open about who her client is — the lodge — and about what she is doing for her client: generating interest and participation in the lodge's fishing contest by securing celebrity participation.

Tribute (1980)

In 1968, the MPAA ratings replaced the Production Code. The end of the Code era meant that filmmakers could create different content, including sexual content that was "appropriate" for different kinds of audiences. Although independent filmmakers, such as Andy Warhol/Paul Morrissey (*Flesh*, 1968, and *Trash*, 1970) and John Waters (*Pink Flamingos,* 1972) now broached formerly forbidden areas and topics such as the sexual revolution and the multiplicity of sexual possibilities, mainstream filmmakers moved more slowly, especially in the area of creating overt depictions of gay sexuality. Mainstream movies in the 1980s still tended to be circumspect and indirect about non-heteronormative or queer characters.

Tribute is a 1980 film directed by Bob Clark, based on Bernard Slade's 1978 Broadway play, with Jack Lemmon reprising his Tony-nominated role as Scottie Templeton.

The playwright, who also wrote the screenplay, made one significant change: in the movie, although Scottie is a ham with a passion for creaky vaudeville repartee rather than honest emotion, the character has been changed from an actor to a Broadway press agent and failed fiction writer. His interactions nevertheless still have a high degree of performativity, and much of his repartee questions his gender role, implying that a queer reading that looks beneath the surface is necessary to find the truth. The film starts with Scottie telling a verbal lie, and ends with a visual lie that points to a queer reading of what seem, on the surface, to be hyper-heterosexual goings-on.

We first see Scottie telling a man at the window above him, like Juliet on her balcony, that he's going to Las Vegas, but telling the cab driver to take him to the hospital where he's having tests. For character exposition in the film's supposedly heteronormative world, Scottie impersonates a doctor to charm a young female patient, Sally. His female doctor helps deliver his death sentence — some kind of blood disorder eating him from inside, "after all the abuse," he later says. Scottie flees the treatment that will extend his life, and takes Sally to his apartment where he does NOT go to bed with her. If he's such a raging heterosexual, why not? It's the age difference, Scottie explains, as if that were the usual reason why a divorced, 53-year-old guy in the midst of a life crisis wouldn't bed a vibrant, beautiful, and very interested 20-something actress/model.

Though Scottie's behavior purports to be heterosexual, many of his self-depreciating comments, which are taken by his listener(s) as "charming," speak to deep gender confusion. Scottie tells his joyless son Jud, "I've got a late date. I've got to perfume my body and slip into something stunning," the exit line of an aging diva. When he's reminiscing with his ex-wife, Maggie, and starts to cry, Scottie says, "I have a torrent of water coming out of me.

You don't suppose I'm pregnant too?" And as he bawls, he asks, "You don't suppose I'm being a little too macho about the whole thing? … Is my mascara running?" It is Scottie as a bawling, possibly pregnant woman that Maggie kisses and then beds.

When Jud declares his father an amoral, selfish child "who doesn't care who he hurts as long as he gets his own way," Scottie responds: "I've always known what I am." It seems, however, that no one else knows, since Jud later refers to him as "the master of disguise." Lou, Scottie's boss/partner, who met him at age 12, says, "I think we started out as the Odd Couple and suddenly we're turning into the Sunshine Boys," referring to two movies from 1968 and 1975 respectively about mismatched pairs of men coupled together by the contingencies of life, if not overtly by sex. In fact, in Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*, Lemmon played the prissy, uptight roommate depicted on the movie poster wearing a frilly apron and wielding a feather duster — two throwback signals for the Code Era pansy.

Jud creates a tribute to the still-living Scottie, who uses the occasion to tell his son, "I wish for you passion." Then Scottie uses one of the charming seduction routines we've seen him use with women: He tells Jud, to give him a kiss on his check, and quickly turns to kiss Jud smack on the mouth. Everybody cheers this odd bit of queer seduction. As the young man and Scottie walk off the stage holding each other, Scottie drops his trousers. The visual lie is that this is all in good fun, a vaudeville routine pointing to the past, rather than a signal of a queer male-to-male relationship that follows a kiss on the mouth.

Tribute is not part of Miller's sample, but Scottie falls into the category of Unfulfilled.[43] He says he will be alright, because there will always be people who want their names in the papers — the typical work of a Broadway press agent. The only actual PR work we see Scottie do is an event campaign — a very successful retirement benefit tribute for a

prostitute with a heart of gold. To make the metaphoric connection to PR clear, Jud says, "My father has made a living from being a court jester and glorified pimp," an evaluation Jud seems to have picked up from his mother, who tells Scottie, "You didn't think you had talent. I did." For her, public relations as a profession is a huge step down from the high culture profession of fiction writer.

The other important metaphor in the movie is the grotesque chicken suit that Scottie wore to make Jud laugh as a child (documented by a cherished photograph). Scottie dons it again in an aggressive attack on Jud's morose and passionless view of life. The chicken is supposedly a disguise; Scottie has been a master of disguise in his professional life and in his love life. He has also been a chicken. *Tribute* presents a negative image of a PR practitioner, equating PR to being a pimp, a failed artist, and a coward in life and love, whose same-sex kiss on the lips has to be disguised as a joke.

Father of the Bride (1991)

The public relations activity depicted in *Father of the Bride* is event planning, specifically wedding planning, here the purview of stereotypical gays and women. According to Benshoff and Griffin, after the early devastation of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, "Gay and lesbian people continued to become more visible in America of the 1990s, a trend that led some pundits to dub the decade the 'Gay Nineties.'"[44] Mainstream films included some gay characters, mostly cartoonish stereotypes, and carefully protected audiences from the "sex" aspects of "homosexual."

The main plot of *Father of the Bride* is relentlessly heteronormative: George (Steve Martin) and Nina (Diane Keaton) are the happily-still-in-love and loving parents of Annie, who at 22 loves a good-looking, charming boyfriend, propelling them toward marriage.

Complications ensue, because, the two successful business people can't figure out how to produce the heterosexual rite of passage known as a big wedding. For instruction and guidance, they turn to a PR professional, a wedding planner, Franck, and his assistant.

From the moment the family walks into the wedding showroom, George is in alien territory. The assistant, played with contained swish by B. D. Wong, wears tight tailoring, complete with silk pocket square and later an ascot — classic filmic signals of the pansy. He also has his hair slicked back in a low ponytail reminiscent of a Chinaman's stereotypical pigtail, but for an extra kick of anti-stereotypical humor, his name is Howard Weinstein. As an assistant, his job seems to be to introduce and adulate his boss Franck, an even more exotic creature.

Played by Martin Short, Franck makes a sweeping, stagy entrance. His hair is in a high pompadour with a spit curl, and he wears a three-piece suit with a flashy vest that sets off his heart-shaped tiepin. He kisses the women's hands, like a lapdog eating treats. His most distinctive characteristic, however, is what marks him as most different from straight, plainspoken all-American George. With constant wrist gestures and facial grimaces, Franck enthuses in strongly accented and distorted gibberish. George Banks can't understand a word spoken by this creature from planet Queer, except when Franck says, "Welcome to the '90s, Mr. Banks."

To emphasize how different George (and every "normal" man in the audience) is from this exotic creature, we see George edging away in discomfort when Franck joins the family on his cozy love seat. George flinches when Franck pats his cheek. Unlike football and basketball games with their constant hetero/hetero full-body hugs, butt pats, and other buddy/affectionate body contact, this cheek pat is the closest the film comes to overt

male/male touch. When George cringes, the audience laughs, not just at Franck, but also at George's homophobia. Making the audience laugh at homophobia is a covert step toward making them repudiate it. Throughout the heterosexual drama and action of the film's wedding plot, however, there is a suggestion of an alternate queer reading: fey Howard Weinstein hovers in the background doting on his wonderful Franck.

Although the film was not part of Miller's sample, as a practitioner of a specialty within public relations, Franck would fit Miller's category of "Ditzy"[45] if he weren't so good at what he does. As he assures George, "I do this for a living. Trust me." And Franck is right. Despite an unprecedented Los Angeles snowstorm and an ultra-version of valet parking failure, the over-the-top event that Franck produces is the wedding of Annie's dreams. Therefore he should be considered "Accomplished."[46] He is successful in his work, he seems happy, and he has his doting Howard Weinstein hovering in the background; however, we have no way of knowing whether Franck is fulfilled or unfulfilled.

To help the audience defend against alternative queer interpretations, the film has a relentlessly heterosexual ending. After the wedding reception, framed by a rose-covered trellis, George and Nina dance together, alone as a couple and fulfilled as heterosexual parents. George's brush with the queerness of the accomplished gay PR person/wedding planner is safely in the past.

Primary Colors (1998)

Beyond such gay stereotypes as Franck and snippets of parodies of gays by Eddie Murphy in movies such as Paramount's Beverly *Hills Cop* franchise (1984, 1987, and 1994) and others, queer visibility in mainstream films with non-stereotypically queer public relations characters is led by overtly lesbian characters. In an interesting twist, not only are

lesbians visible and recognizable as people rather than parodies, but they also represent a moral or emotional compass for the other characters.

In *Primary Colors* (1998), a fictionalized story reminiscent of the first Clinton campaign, Kathy Bates plays Libby Holden, a campaign consultant/operative brought in to do opposition research. She is "someone we trust completely." Despite the fact that some years previously, she had "become incoherent during a press conference … she's stable now." Libby drives a pickup truck blaring country music, wears a cowboy hat and vest, and drinks from a pocket flask. To get a confession about a faked audio tape, Libby points a handgun at the perpetrator's crotch and shouts, "I'm a gay, lesbian woman. I do not mythologize the male sexual organ." She presents herself as a butch stereotype, but the film grants her human emotions and vulnerability. She immediately sets up housekeeping in a picture-book cottage with a cute, shorthaired campaign worker, whom we've just seen being sexually harassed by an aggressively macho campaign manager played by Billy Bob Thornton.

Libby describes herself as "the dust buster. I'm stronger than dirt." She believes in doing opposition research to find the dirt, but running a clean campaign herself. Libby has known the Governor (played by John Travolta) and his wife (played by Emma Thompson) since they were all young and idealistic. Libby knows that the Governor messes around, even if his wife doesn't.

The dirt she finds on his primary opponent, who was once her boss, involves cocaine use while in elected office and a drug dealer now clearly dying of AIDS, implying that there was a covert homosexual liaison that would damage him in the primary, should it become known. When Libby thinks that the governor and his wife (the sun to her moon, because she

lives in their reflected light) are going to do the wrong thing with the dirt she has dug up, she rides off into the sunset — committing suicide. (By the way, from 1938 until its end in 1968, the Production Code had discouraged "suicide as a solution of problems occurring in the development of screen drama … morally questionable and as bad theatre — unless absolutely necessary for the development of the plot."[47])

In this case, the lesbian PR guy is the moral compass, and her suicide redeems. Perhaps as a reaction to Libby's suicide, the Governor is able to get his opponent to make a dignified withdrawal from the primary. As Libby had said, "Our job is to make it clean, because if it's clean, we win, because our ideas are better." Her candidate eulogizes her for "her courage and her warmth and her madness," which is the madness of trying to run a clean campaign based on better ideas.

In Miller's terms, Libby is "Accomplished" but "Unfulfilled."[48] Though she seems comfortable with her sexuality and what we see of her personal life, it seems "the job did not have its reward."[49]

Amy's O[rgasm] (2001)

The schizophrenic title of *Amy's O[rgasm]* (2001) shows American squeamishness about overt references of any kind to female sexuality. The Amy of the title is a heterosexual self-help author looking for love, while writing about how unnecessary men are. It's therefore ironic that while this independent film was released as *Amy's Orgasm,* the title was truncated to *Amy's O* for home video/DVD distribution to avoid offending those who might see the film on the shelves of Blockbuster or Wal-Mart. Amy is an author whose "sexy" topic holds promise of becoming a bestseller. She is working with a PR practitioner, a book

publicist, who organizes her PR tour and decides where she will sign books and with whom she will do media interviews.

Janet Gaines, the publicist played by Caroline Aaron, is the one who actually finds men unnecessary, because she is a lesbian who is also looking for love. A nondescript middle-aged PR woman with a messy half-updo, Janet would blend into any business background in her standard-issue dark business suit with dark pants or a dark skirt and black tights. She is organized, tough, and foul mouthed when it suits her purposes. She is also efficient and articulate and prepares her client well for each publicity appearance, including one with a Howard Stern-style macho radio host, to whom Amy is attracted, despite the theme of her book. In Miller's terms, Janet is "Accomplished" but she is also "Unfulfilled."[50] When Amy begins to get close to the shock-jock, Janet tells her not to let a man "get in the way of what we've accomplished." At a point when Amy is waiting tensely off stage for an appearance, Janet massages her shoulders and makes a move with an aggressive kiss on the mouth. Amy rebuffs Janet and accuses her of doing it to be controlling, because it's clear, "I'm not gay!" Janet retorts, "Why not?" Janet is unfulfilled because she does not have a personal life and an outlet for expressing her sexuality.

The pass does not, however, damage the women's professional relationship. What does damage it is Amy answering an on-air question by using a colloquialism for oral sex. Janet reproves her for "trashing my reputation." This scene shows a more nuanced understanding of the public relations profession than most films with PR characters: As a PR professional, it's a mark against Janet if she hasn't trained her client on how to handle media questions. Janet resigns on principle. Once again as in *Primary Colors,* the lesbian PR professional is the professional compass.

Unlike that dramatic film, however, here the underlying structure of *Amy's Orgasm* is comedy or romantic comedy, a form that uses couples or marriage to reestablish the social order. By the time Amy realizes that she needs Janet professionally, Janet has a safely off-screen soul mate to whom she whispers, "I love you," into the phone. Her apparent fulfillment and her integration of a personal life with her life as a PR practitioner (even if via phone) leads the way for Amy's acceptance of her love for the radio host.

The happy heterosexual couple is shown in a romantic two-shot, but with Janet beaming proudly in the background. In other words, like Libby in *Primary Colors*, Janet is a role model and moral compass. But *Amy's Orgasm* represents a quantum leap forward for homosexual PR practitioners in film, because Janet does not commit suicide either for her ideals or for her sexuality. This "comedy" suggests that PR people, whatever their sexuality, have the possibility of finding personal happiness. Janet tells Amy there are no guarantees in love: "Take your best guess and go with it."

Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous (2005)

As Ames elucidated, *Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous* (2005) has two PR characters, both of whom are "Unfulfilled" according to Miller's criteria.[51] Both of the characters also subvert heteronormative gender roles throughout. The film plays with and twists the conventions of the temporary transvestite film, as defined by Straayer. Gender roles are taught and re-taught, twisted, and queered in multiple ways, and gender-typed clothing and disguises are put on and taken off. Gracie Hart (Sandra Bullock) is a heterosexual woman with an off-stage boyfriend and ex-partner from Part I, who breaks up with her via telephone at the beginning of Part 2. A butch FBI agent dressed in standard black men's suits and white shirts, Gracie is now famous for going undercover in a beauty

pageant (in Part I). She has become too easily recognized for further undercover work. Instead, she is assigned to become a spokesperson for the FBI, which is a PR function. Her superiors decide that Gracie must have a makeover, essentially ordering a butch woman to gender bend into a feminine woman, in the kind of undercover assignment that homosexual viewers might find familiar from decades of needing to pass.

Gracie's assigned guide to achieving a heterosexual femininity that is acceptable to the general public is Joel. Played by Diedrich Bader, Joel is a throwback to the Production Era closeted pansy in the kind of hyper-tailored men's suit with a silk pocket square that is still used to cue homosexuality. Joel has the pursed lips and exaggerated speech and gestures to match the long-standing stereotype. Seeing Gracie's puffy eyes, he says, "I also recently went through a breakup." So one storyline is about two PR practitioners who are looking for personal fulfillment beyond their jobs.

To the mix is added yet another butch female agent, Agent Sam Fuller, a petite, super-tough African American with anger management problems who is assigned first to demonstrate marshal arts moves (no longer suitable for the "feminine" Gracie), and then to be Gracie's bodyguard and keeper. All business, Fuller doesn't need anyone: not a partner, despite the Bureau's insistence that agents work in pairs; not a friend; and certainly not a man. At the end Fuller says, "Men, you can't live with them, you can't live — that's about it." Fuller's presence is an ongoing reminder either of Gracie's "real" self or of how far she has come in her transformation, under the tutelage and ongoing upkeep of Joel and his team of hair and makeup artists.

As a gay man in a repressed society, Joel understands how to "blend." He is the consummate professional image consultant, with creative ideas for performing roles that

allow "blending" into various milieus. He is a master of disguises for himself and his clients. When Gracie and Fuller need to go undercover in a nursing home, he transforms Gracie into a cranky old Jewish woman in a wheelchair, himself into a gay son looking to offload his bothersome mother, and Fuller into a docile caretaker in pastel scrubs. Fuller's anger breaks through, however, as does Gracie's physical strength. The same thing keeps happening in the film's long culminating sequence where Joel creates ways for them to "blend" as they try to question a Dolly Parton impersonator in a Las Vegas drag club. Gracie and Joel are transformed into "showgirls" in exaggerated glitzy yellow costumes with tall, pink head plumbs and boa tails, pushing the boundaries even further of Gracie's "feminine" impersonation, while revealing Joel's underlying female. Fuller is forced into a sequenced mini-dress and teased hair to compete against men in drag in the club's Tina Turner impersonation contest, during which it is Gracie who shows Fuller some female dance moves. They win this round of the contest. Here we have two butch women cross dressing to pass as men dressed in female drag, as well as a gay man in a drag show as a show girl. The scenes are a hilarious deconstruction of how our culture views masculine and feminine roles and behaviors, and highlight the performative nature of gender roles.

One of the hallmarks of performative gender in the temporary transvestite film is that "even though the disguise is supposed to be convincing within the narrative, it is generally not allowed to be convincing in the direct image presented to the film viewer. This would pose too great a threat to society's trust in sex-gender unity as a system to communicate and recognize sex."[52] In the film, at any moment, no matter how feminine or female Gracie's disguise, she may snort when she laughs or bend back Fuller's wrist to try to master her physically; and at any moment, Fuller may bust loose with a vicious stomp on the instep, or

refuse to loosen her grip on an opponent's throat, even if she herself suffocates trying. Underneath, they are what they are, as the film keeps reminding the audience.

The film has a series of endings that both queer gender roles and critique the profession of image consulting. With Gracie in showgirl garb having just saved her only friend, the beauty queen, and Fuller in Tina Turner drag having saved Gracie, they have a heart to heart as "girls" in which Gracie declares her friendship and Fuller clarifies, "It's not like I love you or anything. I'm just doing my job." They hug. Next we see them in a two-shot in their butch FBI (tomboy) garb as their boss assigns them to be partners, and Gracie chants, "You're my new partner, you have to like me and back me up." Visually they are bound together by the two-shot, first as "girls," then as tomboys. The viewer is free to interpret the coming together/reconciliation/partnership on multiple levels.

In the final scene, in the classroom of a young girl whom Gracie tried to teach to be more feminine, Gracie declares that what we all want is either world peace (as her beauty queen friend would say), or "The strength to hold fast to your beliefs while society is trying to hold you to some Barbie Doll image." In the end, Gracie repudiates "image consultation" that forces people into stereotypical gender roles. She also repudiates the PR role of spokesperson. She says, "No comment. Ever again."

The Joneses (2009)

The old suburban cliché of "keeping up with the Joneses" is updated in *The Joneses* (2009). These Joneses are not ordinary suburban neighbors, however, but a clandestine cell "family" of stealth marketers who are adept at peer-to-peer and word-of-mouth marketing. This kind of marketing/public relations typically uses on-line social network recommendations and influential blogs to push products, but it also encompasses product

seeding (free samples) by representatives such as the Red Bull girls who drive cute Mini-Coopers with giant Red Bull cans attached to the roof. The film's story goes right to the heart of the hot-button ethical issue affecting the industry today — the need for truth of origin and transparency in PR efforts involving street teams and peer-to-peer marketing. In order to maintain consumer trust, marketers need to identify themselves as company representatives, as the Red Bull girls do.

The Joneses also throws into question the heteronormativity of even the most ideal seeming family next door: These parents are not married, but rather new colleagues, with the Dad, Steve (played by David Duchovny), being the organization's latest recruit; the Mom, Kate (played by Demi Moore), being the most focused, ambitious, and unemotional; the nymphomaniac daughter interested in middle-aged men such as her "Dad" or one of the married neighbors; and the son, Mick (played by Ben Hollingsworth), being a likable, low-keyed, popular high school kid who has "never tried anything with" his female school friend. It's an understatement that, "We may not be a normal family, but we do have to operate as a team." According to their big boss, "You're here to sell an attitude, a lifestyle." By living an attractive lifestyle — one that's a product-sponsored lie — the Joneses sell their neighbors on the need to purchase the latest consumer goods.

As with temporary transvestite films, for all of them except Mom/Kate, playing the role of a family takes its toll, and the disguise sometimes slips just enough to remind the audience of the stakes. For Mick, this happens when he smokes dope ("You know why these people are in my house? So my 'so-called family' can show off their shit") or when he drinks. Then he lets one mask drop and tries to kiss his female friend's brother, who hits him and calls him a faggot. Mick then tells his family/colleagues, "I shouldn't have to hide this

any more. I'm gay." The brother punched him for making a pass, and his sister later hits Mick — apparently not for being gay, but for his lack of disclosure. Coming out to his colleagues/family, however, results in no immediate consequences. Sexual identity is not the central issue in this film, which also presents a stereotypical gay African-American hairdresser, Billy, as Mom/Kate's new best friend. Billy connects her to all the local trendsetting women. For word-of-mouth marketers, people who are connectors, trendsetters, and opinion makers are marketing gold. Their peer-to-peer endorsement sells — products, attitudes, lifestyles, which the film defines as dangerous lies.

Billy's homosexuality is accepted. It's not an issue, except as a topic of his banter with Kate about how attractive her "husband" is and how lucky she is, banter which floats the topic of possible same sex attraction under a supposedly heteronormative surface. Steve also floats the topic at their neighbor's cosmetics selling party: "I'm going to talk to Larry, tell him I'm gay." What he actually does is learn that Larry's efforts to keep up with the Steve Joneses of the world have led him to the verge of foreclosure. Rather than tell his wife the truth about their consumer-goods obsessed lifestyle, Larry commits suicide.

Larry's suicide, caused in large part by the Jones's clandestine marketing, is too much for Steve. He walks away from the job, while the others accept a reassignment to a new suburb with a new "Dad." Mick, who looks, acts, and dresses exactly the same, is now content because "I get to be a college student. And I'm out, which makes life a lot easier … I don't have to lie anymore." Unlike Steve, who has given up the life of an undercover marketer and now wants to take Kate with him, Mick doesn't see that he's still participating in the Big Lie. He tells Steve, "Thanks, Steve. It's been real." But nothing has been real, except that Mick has come out of the closet in an unreal and inauthentic situation.

The Joneses is about the performative nature of both social and gender roles in a consumer-oriented society. The film presents actors playing the roles of marketers playing the roles of family members. Each buys into the disguise and deception to a different extent, which is the extent to which each is fulfilled or "Unfulfilled"[53] by work as a PR practitioner and the extent to which they are able to integrate their personal lives, including their sexuality, with their work lives. Overall, however, the film criticizes the value of the public relations strategy of stealth marketing, because it is deceptive and inauthentic, i.e. unethical.

Results:

Q1: The Ames study concludes that recent filmic presentations of public relations show a more complex understanding of the range of PR activities than the ones in Miller's sample, and this study concurs, with the most complex being the most recent, those in *Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous* and *The Joneses.* Current results diverge from those of Ames's study, which looks at films through 2008, because of the negative presentation of clandestine, peer-to-peer marketing in 2009's *The Joneses.*

Q2: This study also concurs with Ames that PR people in recent films still have difficulty integrating personal fulfillment with their work lives as PR practitioners. What this study adds is an understanding of the way that personal fulfillment is intertwined with authentic expressions of sexuality and gender. To achieve authenticity, PR practitioners not included in the heterosexual norm come closer to fulfillment when they are out and open, not disguised or covert about their sexuality. No matter the practitioner's sexuality, however, according to recent American films, it is difficult to combine a successful PR career with personal fulfillment because of the professional demands on their time and energy.

Q3: The films created under the strictures of the Production Code (1930-1967) use visual and verbal double entendres to cue the viewer to non-heteronormative possibilities beyond the boy meets girl story of the main plot. After the Code era (1968-2009), the early films present stereotypical depictions of the formerly covert pansy of the Production Code years. More nuanced portrayals began with those of lesbian PR practitioners in the 1990s, and now sometimes extend to non-stereotypical portrayals of queers. Still covert, or missing entirely, are films that show heterosexual characters acknowledging interest in, attraction to, or overt sexual or romantic involvement with a queer PR practitioner.

Q4: On the theme of disguise and PR, one way to suggest alternative gender and gender coupling is the temporary transvestite genre, here expanded to include films in which someone in a PR role such as "image consultant" teaches someone else how to perform the role of a woman or a man or a star. As Joel tells Gracie, in *Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous*, "America wants a star. Dress like a star. Treat your friends like you're a star. Treat yourself like you're a star." He teaches her both star behavior and "girl" behavior, a demonstration of what queer theory would call the performative nature of gender roles. Because of American popular culture's fascination with the self-made man and self-improvement, dating at least as far back as the Horatio Alger stories and given strength by Oprah Winfrey's exhortation to "live your best life," the role of image consultant is in general treated positively.

Q5: Truth-telling, truth of origin, and transparency are important ethical standards for public relations work and for PR practitioners throughout the sample. In addition to violations of the norm of truthful speech, when the use of disguise or learned gender behavior crosses over into deliberate PR deception, there are negative consequences in the sample.

Peer-to-peer marketing presents ethical problems for a PR person, whether that person is queer or straight. The plot outcome of *The Joneses* (the neighbor's suicide) supports the need for strict enforcement of ethics in the burgeoning field of peer-to-peer marketing. Unless professional organizations enforce ethical standards, or the government effectively enforces the legal requirement for truth in this area of commercial speech, the image of the public relations profession will be damaged. This area of PR practice may again make the overall image of PR in popular culture as negative as that of the press agent in *Sweet Smell of Success*, who created fictional or deliberately deceptive "items" and planted them as "truth" in the news media (albeit because he was being blackmailed by a powerful journalist).

Discussion and Areas for Future Research

The film sample for this study showed changes over time. The nature of PR work depicted evolves to include the form of image consulting related to gender behavior or the performative nature of gender roles. When performance crosses over to deceptive marketing of either oneself or one's products, public relations develops a negative image. The presentation of the queer PR practitioner also changes over time, with acknowledgement of non-heteronormativity becoming more open.

Important research is yet to be done on the image of the gay PR person in other forms of popular culture. In theatre, for example, 2009 brought the Los Angeles production of *Matthew Modine Saves the Alpacas,*[54] which presents two celebrity publicists, one of them gay, who advocate the trendy process of doing good as a mode of celebrity career rehabilitation.

Television portrayals are also important, given the mass audience that the medium reaches. Recent research demonstrates, "At least in the case of same-sex marriage, television

viewing is associated with a progressive attitude."[55] Controversial topics such as AIDS (*An Early Frost*) and gender orientation (Ellen DeGeneres) have a long history of receiving early, nuanced treatment on TV. Public relations has been featured in a number of past network television series, such as *Spin City* (1996-2002). Recent reality cable reality shows that serve as a launching pad for instant "celebrities" and their outside projects often feature publicists, some of whom are lesbian and gay, as ongoing "characters." An example of the important role of PR plays in creating "reality stars" would be *The Spin Crowd,* the Fall 2010 E! Entertainment spinoff of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* and its previous spin off, *Kourtney and Khloe Take Miami*. Meanwhile, important research is yet to be published on the image of the gay PR person within the profession of PR itself to determine whether, how, and how much a practitioner's sex and gender orientation affect professional advancement and the image of public relations as a profession.

Endnotes

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[4] Karen S. Miller, "Public Relations in Film and Fiction: 1930 to 1995," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11:1 (1999): 3-28.

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[16] Molly Haskell, "*Man's Favorite Sport?* (Revisited)," in *Focus on Howard Hawks*, ed. Joseph McBride (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall: 1972), 135.

[17] "The Production Code."

[18] Miller, "Public Relations in Film," 19.

[19] Benshoff and Griffin, "Queer Images," 72.

[20] Miller, "Public Relations in Film," 10.

[21] Ames, "PR Goes to the Movies," 169.

[22] Benshoff and Griffin, "Queer Images," 35.

[23] Ibid., 30.

[24] Bryson. "Todd Haynes's *Poison*."

[25] Benshoff and Griffin, "Queer Images," 115.

[26] Ibid., 52.

[27] Ibid., 55.

[28] Ibid., 37.

[29] Ibid., 101.

[30] Miller, "Public Relations in Film," 10.

[31] Ibid., 19.

[32] Ibid., 9.

[33] Ibid., 8-11.

[34] Ibid., 8.

[35] Ibid., 13.

[36] Gerald Mast, *Howard Hawks, Storyteller* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 133. See also Andrew Sarris, *Confessions of a Cultist: On the Cinema, 1955-1969* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 128-129.

[37] Mast, *Howard Hawks,* 347. Mast attributes this Hawks quotation to Winston S. Sharples, Jr. Unpublished interview (July 27, 1977), Part II, p. 24 in the papers of Howard Winchester Hawks, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Box 1, Folder 13.

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[39] Andrew Sarris, "The World of Howard Hawks," in *Focus on Howard Hawks*, ed. Joseph McBride (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall: 1972), 47.

[40] Haskell, *Man's Favorite Sport?* (Revisited)," 136.

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[42] Benshoff and Griffin, "Queer Images," 98.

[43] Miller, "Public Relations in Film," 10.

[44] Benshoff and Griffin, "Queer Images," 248.

[45] Miller, "Public Relations in Film," 8.

[46] Ibid., 10.

[47] "The Production Code."

[48] Miller, "Public Relations in Film," 10.

[49] Ibid., 11.

[50] Ibid., 10-11.

[51] Ames, "PR Goes to the Movies," 167; and Miller, "Public Relations in Film," 10-11.

[52] Straayer, *Deviant Eyes,* 57.

[53] Miller, "Public Relations in Film," 10.

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