

Public Relations in Film and Fiction: 1930 to 1995

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Poor Dave Randall. "He had ended up in what he privately considered a dump heap—public relations. Basically, Randall did not believe in public relations, although he tried hard to do so. There really was no need for it . . ." Such is the life of an information manager for a fictitious company portrayed in *The Empire* (p. 19), written in 1956. In a novel written 35 years later, former reporter Joe Winder also discovers what it is like to work in public relations (PR). Winder's job at a Florida amusement park could not match his old career in significance or purpose; rather, it "took absolutely nothing out of him, except his pride" (p. 28). Even the woman who spends steamy summer afternoons in a Robbie the Raccoon suit recognizes Joe's sorry situation. "My job's crummy," she tells him, "but you know what? I think your job is worse" (*Native Tongue*, p. 30).

In this article, I examine depictions of PR and its practitioners in film and fiction appearing in the United States from 1930 to 1995. The analysis indicates that representations of PR are woefully inadequate in terms of explaining who practitioners are and what they do, and it shows that writers dislike primarily PR's apparent effectiveness. Perhaps most significant is the extent to which the portrayals have remained the same over many decades. This study reveals misconceptions about and stereotypes of PR that are relayed to the public through the media, setting the stage for scholarship on what members of the general public think, for the enduring quality of representations suggests that the media may well have cultivated negative attitudes toward PR and its practitioners.

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Public relations (PR) scholars and practitioners have long indicated concern about the ways that people, especially journalists, perceive practitioners and PR. Although journalists like and respect many of the practitioners with whom they regularly work (Brody, 1984; Jeffers, 1977), they believe practitioners as a group lack credibility (Aronoff, 1975) and in fact often expect them to mislead reporters or to withhold information (Ryan & Martinson, 1994). Kopenhaver (1985) found that one group of editors ranked PR practitioners' status higher only than politicians in a field of 16 choices. Practitioners have sought remedies to the reputation problem—even considering dropping “public relations” altogether because so many people no longer use the title (Brody, 1992; Pritchitt, 1992; Sparks, 1993).

The next step in this research stream was analysis of news media content to determine exactly how this antagonism has affected media content. Bishop (1988) examined three newspapers and found that, in a sample of 16,000 stories, not one mentioned PR, but the term *spokesperson* was used so many times that it had to be discarded. Reporters, thus, relegated the role of the PR practitioner to a single facet. Spicer (1993) concluded that the contentious relationship has frequently led to pejorative use of the term *public relations* in print on those occasions when it does appear. After thematic analysis of ways that reporters and their sources used the term *public relations* in 84 newspaper and magazine articles, cartoons, and editorials, Spicer found that only 17% of the codeable mentions used it to refer to a practitioner who “is not trying to distract, deflect, or avoid an issue or event but is honestly attempting to deal with” the problem at hand (p. 55). A census of network television news coverage of PR (Keenan, 1996) found that most of the 79 news stories about PR were neutral in tone, reporting on PR as an accepted part of business and politics, but it was most often associated with foreign governments and domestic politicians rather than reflecting the broad range of uses that actually occur.

The negative or misleading media representations found by Bishop (1988), Spicer (1993), and Keenan (1996) may affect others' views of PR. Spicer did not suggest that the images of PR in the press are necessarily those that are accepted by the audience. However, mass media images are often influential, particularly in the absence of other sources of information such as personal experience; some studies have shown that entertainment media images can affect perceptions of certain professions. Pfau, Mullen, Deidrich, and Garrow (1995), for example, found that “television depictions of attorneys consistently were suggestive of public perceptions” of lawyers (p. 325), especially in terms of characteristics such as composure, physical attractiveness, and presence. As Keenan pointed out, analysis of depictions of PR in the media is the first step toward a full investigation of public perceptions of the profession.

This study was inspired by an undergraduate class discussion of Spicer's (1993) research on images of PR in the print news media. In the course of the discussion, it occurred to me that the entertainment media might also contain references to PR.

When I mentioned this idea, half a dozen hands went up, and the students began to tell me about movies they had seen with inadequate, even embarrassing, images of PR. I decided to undertake a study of these representations using the example provided by Spicer, who conducted qualitative research on a convenience sample.

METHOD

The first step was to locate examples of characters who are PR practitioners in film and fiction. Except in relatively rare instances when the practitioner is a major character or PR is the primary topic of the novel or movie, such reference sources as *Halliwel's Film Guide* (Halliwell, 1996) or library catalogs are of little assistance in locating practitioner characters. Therefore, most of the sources came to my attention through personal contact with colleagues and students, Internet discussion groups, and television listings; only eight recommended sources could not be obtained for review.

In no way could this sample be considered representative of all images of PR practitioners in film and fiction. A drawback to the convenience sample is that, although numbers are provided for comparison purposes throughout the article, the reader should bear in mind that interpretations based on the sample may not be generalizable to all such characters. Still, the repetition and continuity of the stereotypes discussed next are certainly suggestive of major trends.

Review of over 200 novels and films yielded 118 containing at least one PR character. A character was identified as a practitioner if (a) the character identified him- or herself as a press agent, publicist, counselor, or something similar; (b) other characters identified the character as such; or (c) the duties of their jobs entailed publicity, political campaigning, public opinion polling, and other tasks related to the practice of PR. A breakdown by decade appears in Table 1, and a

TABLE 1
Film and Fiction Sources by Decade

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Number of Books</i>	<i>Number of Movies</i>	<i>Total</i>
1930s	2	5	7
1940s	2	8	10
1950s	12	8	20
1960s	9	9	18
1970s	2	9	11
1980s	3	11	14
1990s	21	17	38
Total	51	67	118

complete source list is appended (see Appendixes A and B). The texts included comedy and drama, mystery, science fiction, musicals, and even a horror movie.

Analysis netted 202 different PR practitioner characters. "Different" means distinctly different people, with different names, appearances, and so on; the same character portrayed at significantly different times, in the case of sequels; a character from a book who is significantly changed in the movie version; or a film remake with different actors portraying the same character. The intent was to capture a wide range of PR characters as portrayed by the writers and directors.

Analysis of the practitioners in the books and movies followed. Because the sample is haphazard, no attempt at formal content analysis was made. Instead, the following items were noted about each source: publication information, name of the character, sex, title, age, physical characteristics, clothing and style, background information, area of PR practice, relationship to management, relationship to news media, truth-telling, effectiveness, and words or phrases used in the text to describe the character. These items were included because I suspected that they would be interesting, but not all of the categories provided useful insights about the characters.

The analysis included one major departure from Spicer's (1993) exemplar. Spicer categorized news stories based on how they used the term *public relations*—something I also intended to do. However, such categorization was not workable. Some sources never actually used the term, for example; others had a PR practitioner, but so little of the practitioner's work was shown that it was not possible to fit it into a category. Therefore, I chose to develop categories of archetypal characteristics instead. Based on Spicer (1993), the method involved was inductive analysis, with archetypes emerging from the research—specifically, the descriptive words and phrases used within the texts—as opposed to fitting characters into predetermined categories. Many of the practitioner roles were too small to allow categorization. For example, in the 1976 version of *A Star Is Born*, Gary Danziger introduces himself as a "PR man," but his part is so minor and so few personality traits are presented in the story or mentioned by other characters that he could not be assigned any archetypal characteristics. For this reason, each practitioner was not assigned to a specific archetype, and the categories are not exclusive (some characters exhibited more than one of the traits). Instead, I simply looked for traits repeated throughout the sources to identify characteristics that are frequently associated with practitioners.

Finally, extensive notes were taken on the plot lines, characterizations, and dialogue, which provided insight into PR definitions, responsibilities, and strategies and tactics employed. During the analysis of these notes, I recognized that relationships with three key groups—clients, the public, and journalists—recurred in many of the sources. "Disdain" best describes the feeling of the practitioner in all of these relationships, although in each case a few practitioners developed more complex relationships with their counterparts. Other themes that emerged repeat-

edly related to morality, practitioner effectiveness, and repudiation and redemption. As with the archetypal characteristics, these topics were not selected prior to examination of sources but were identified during the analysis as subjects frequently confronted within the texts. Other interesting themes were noted, such as the conflict between personal beliefs and client interests in *A Really Sincere Guy*, but because they appeared infrequently, they are not examined here.

In the remainder of this article, I summarize the findings of the analysis of the texts, using examples to illustrate each point. It should be noted that, in every case, many other examples could have been included, but in the interest of parsimony, the number was limited. In selecting examples, I attempted to include a mixture of books and movies from different time periods to demonstrate the constancy of the images.

RESULTS

The Practitioner Characters

Demographics of PR Characters

Three quarters (152) of the practitioners were men. As a percentage of the sources located, the number of women is perhaps unexpectedly high. In the 1930s and 1940s, for instance, over 25% of the sources contained a female practitioner, and in the 1990s, more than 50% did. A closer examination of the female practitioners indicates that women were often included because they made convenient love interests. Women were thus portrayed as young, single, and desirable compared to male practitioners, who had a broader range in age and appearance and who did not usually need to be attractive—or unmarried—to advance the plot. The case of Barbara Tompkins, in *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*, is instructive. After numerous plastic surgeries, “it seemed impossible that less than two years ago she had been stuck in a drudge P.R. job in Albany, assigned to getting mentions in magazines for small cosmetics clients” (p. 150). “Now Barbara was working in Manhattan at a large prestigious P.R. firm. She always had brains, but combining those brains with that special kind of beauty had truly changed her life” (p. 25). PR women go only as far as their looks will take them.

Aside from the inclusion of women, PR is not portrayed as a diverse field. No African American or Hispanic American practitioners were included, although the race of many of the characters in books was not mentioned. Two Asian Americans, two Filipina, and one Native American woman represented the only non-White characters. Six characters were identified as Jewish.

Practitioners worked under almost every title and in a variety of organizations. Many practitioners, especially those in movies, were never referred to by title but

simply called a "publicist," "PR man," or "press agent"; sometimes, no occupational reference was made. The most common titles were "Head of," "Manager of," or "Director of" Public Relations or Publicity (19 times), "Partner" (7), "Spokesman, -woman, or -person" (6), and "Press Secretary" or "Press Officer" (8). Thus, on occasions when titles were provided, most were ambiguous or referred to publicity or the media. Over 40 of the characters worked in business and industry, and 25 more worked in agencies; many practitioners worked in entertainment and for the government, with only 1 at a nonprofit. The more glamorous jobs in PR were vastly overrepresented.

*Archetypal Characteristics: Recurring Traits
of Film and Fiction Practitioners*

Ditzy. Ditz characters were shallow but lovable—their jobs in no way intellectually stimulating. Ditz people, according to the texts, were effervescent, jovial, lively, mild, and chipper. Jenny Nelson in *The Glass Bottom Boat* guides tours at a space research facility. When she is finally asked to write a story about a new gravity machine, she bubbles with enthusiasm; whether she is capable of doing a good job is a moot point because through a series of misunderstandings she is accused of being a Soviet spy and must help catch the real spy at a cocktail party. Randi James in *Dead Heat* is introduced as being "in charge of public relations" of Dante Pharmaceuticals, but she says "I don't know a damn thing. I play tour guide and I write press releases." (James might be excused for her attitude, however; it is later revealed that she is a zombie.) There were a few male ditzes, such as Ted Pierce in *Woman in Red*, who is in charge of a San Francisco cable car campaign but who spends his time mooning over an attractive model, and Wayne Hereford, a military photographer who is often heard saying, "I think the idea sparkles!" (*Don't Go Near the Water*).

Obsequious. Obsequious characters do anything necessary to please their bosses; they have no principles but are guided by whatever they think will satisfy their employers. In *Let's Make Love*, Kaufman's overindulgence leads him to confess to his boss, "Who's going to tell you the truth when he's sober?" In *The President's Child*, a PR character has a conversation with a presidential candidate in which the speechwriter's half of the dialogue consists of, "Okay All right You got it." More bluntly, Andy Fowler in *The Birthday Boy* "didn't sleep with the boss though he came as close as he could" (p. 315). These characters are not popular; other characters referred to obsequious practitioners in such unflattering terms as buffoon, dick lick, and prat boy.

Cynical. The “cynical PR man” was especially common in 1950s novels by and about PR practitioners, but it is an enduring stereotype. According to the texts, the cynic is sarcastic, edgy, angry, contemptuous, and driven. In *The Man Who Had Power Over Women*, Alfred Felix tells one of his subordinates, “I’m not happy. I can’t think of anybody who *is* happy. Only fools are happy. I’m well off, but I’m not happy” (p. 311). According to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Tom Rath, “It was fashionable that summer to be cynical about one’s employers, and the promotion men were the most cynical of all”; an advertising copywriter comments, “I wouldn’t want to get into a rat race like that” (p. 6). Dorie Walker in *Miracle on 34th Street* is so cynical that she teaches her young daughter that there is no Santa Claus.

Manipulative. The manipulative practitioner is a wheeler-dealer with a supple conscience—a shark or a snake who is ruthless, deceptive, and predatory. These practitioners lie and cheat both for personal career advancement and on behalf of their clients. Tubby in *The Wall-to-Wall Trap* spreads a rumor about his colleague Ted because Ted’s job would be the next logical step in his own career; Andy Fowler in *A Really Sincere Guy* likewise maneuvers behind the scenes to get his supervisor fired, although “there was no personal malice or grievance involved . . .” (p. 210). In *Gordy*, a children’s movie, Gilbert Sipes tells his boss “the PR department has planned a nationwide campaign around Jessica,” the boss’s daughter, whom Sipes is dating. When the boss opts to run a campaign around Gordy the pig instead, Sipes orders it kidnapped. Clint Lorimer in *The Build-Up Boys* attempts to convince the head of the ad agency where he works to offer *Fame* magazine “a big advertising campaign, anything,” so that its editors would not run an unflattering story about his PR tactics (p. 187).

Money-minded. Money-minded practitioners think about their jobs from only a financial standpoint; they are shrewd, cheap, and have commercial minds. Many times, the money-minded practitioner provides comic relief. In *Headhunt* John Gentle listens quietly when he learns that one of his agency’s top clients has died. “Then he asked his key question: ‘Any danger we’re going to lose the account?’” (p. 35). A more sinister version of the money-minded practitioner is the hired gun, who takes a job without any thought about the worthiness of the cause or the consequences of a campaign. Matt Libby in *A Star Is Born* (1954) 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.” In *The Candidate*, Marvin Lucas goes to great lengths to convince Bill McKay to run for the Senate, telling him that there is no way he can win, that he can use the campaign as a platform for his views. However, McKay does win and is left asking “What do we do now?”

while Lucas goes off to the victory celebration—his work is done. Taken to its extreme, this stereotype equates PR and prostitution. In *A Really Sincere Guy*, when Bill McCrary finds himself “caught in a direct and fundamental conflict between his personal convictions and his job” (p. 108), an associate tells him it is like losing his virginity: He has to do it to get rich in PR. In *For Immediate Release*, Morris Sommers gibes a madam, “After all, Molly, we’re in the same business, aren’t we?” (p. 94).

Isolated. The isolated practitioner is unable to fit in with coworkers. These practitioners are described as ill at ease, naive, pathetic, a nun in a whorehouse, a lamb among wolves, a eunuch in a harem, and an outsider. Bruce Daninger, a World War II military PR man in *Memphis Belle*, tries to lead the crowd in three cheers before an airplane crew’s last mission, not realizing that it is considered bad luck; he is left standing alone and ridiculous as no one joins his salute. Captain Flume in *Catch-22* lives in the woods because he believes another man in his squadron will cut his throat while he is sleeping. “The next time any of the boys ask about me,” he says, “why, just tell them I’ll be back grinding out those old publicity releases again” (p. 286). Perhaps the ultimate isolated practitioner is Rich Woodall, who is identified by a psychiatrist as an “inadequate personality”: “They’re people without much inside; no interior sense of self. They don’t do well in relationships because they aren’t really capable of caring about another person beyond what that person can do for them” (*Double*, p. 124).

Accomplished. Confident, poised, capable, responsible, bright, reliable, efficient, imaginative, well-read, personable, and trusted—accomplished practitioners are good at their jobs and love what they do. Sam Toi in *The Palermo Connection* runs an election campaign when the candidate goes to Italy for his honeymoon, and he makes it known when he disagrees with the candidate’s ideas. Joe Tumulty maintains a good relationship with both the President and the press in *Wilson*, and Liz Wareham in *Headhunt* and *Full Commission* manages to solve mysteries while serving as executive vice president of a Manhattan agency. She urges a client to clean up the building he owned or “you are throwing out the money you’re paying us. Public relations won’t help you a bit” (p. 193). The accomplished practitioner is knowledgeable and respected.

Unfulfilled. Unfulfilled practitioners are skilled at what they do but unhappy with their jobs; they are gloomy, hacks, mopes, tired, and discontented. Martin Brill has a “nagging feeling” that “there must be something better I should be doing, there must be something more significant” (*The Empire*, p. 231). In *Drop-Out*

Mother, Nora Cromwell's clients include a rock star and Airtech International, but she quits her job, saying that her work had been "meaningless. Next time I want the work I do to count for something." "... I pictured myself all dressed up in a terrific suit shouting terribly penetrating questions at a White House press conference," explains the unfulfilled Marcy Cheung. "So I end up in jeans on the floor of my crummy office" (*Where Echoes Live*, p. 132). The job did not have its reward for these characters.

The Practice of Public Relations

Definitions

In *A Really Sincere Guy*, a friend asks Bill McCary about the difference between advertising and PR. "It's a pretty big difference," Bill answers. "I guess it would take a while to explain it" (p. 16). The problem of defining PR is, of course, not limited to fiction. Harlow's (1977) study analyzed 472 definitions of PR in an effort to construct one that would be acceptable to everyone, but no definition prevails. Faced with such difficulty, most novels and movies provided no definition. "Are you still in advertising?" a character asks Adam Keelby. "Public relations," he responds. "Same thing essentially." He calls PR "the easiest way of living without working that was ever invented" (*The Crying Game*, pp. 16, 209). When a friend of movie character Tommy Rath, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, tells him about a job at his company, Rath says, "I don't know anything about public relations." "Who does?" the friend responds. "You got a clean shirt, you bathe everyday, that's all there is to it."

A few sources go to great lengths to explain PR in what might be considered textbook definitions. Bill McCary eventually defines *publicity* as "the art of conveying a message to the public by finding ways to make it newsworthy or entertaining enough for the communication media to carry it as part of their editorial content" and *public relations* as "the art of adjusting ... relationships so they're satisfactory both to the company and the publics concerned" (*A Really Sincere Guy*, p. 27). Joe Clay, in *Days of Wine and Roses*, similarly explains, "My job is supposed to be to advise people how to relate to the public, you know, how to make the good that my client does known and how to help him find ways to do the good and benefit others as well as himself." On rare occasions, PR is portrayed as two-way. Hunt Stevenson, the "employee liaison" in *Gung Ho*, mediates conflicts between American autoworkers and their new Japanese managers. He leads the Americans in Japanese exercises before work and invites the managers to play baseball with the workers, eventually resolving their conflicts by helping them get to know one another. In *Full Commission*, Liz Wareham negotiates an amicable settlement between a building owner and his unhappy tenants.

A few early novels mention sociology, psychology, and Edward Bernays, elevating PR to a strategic level, but these references are usually made in a mocking manner. Bill McCrary discovers that Bernie Malcolm, a character based on Bernays, "regarded himself as primarily a psychologist to the mass mind—a concept with which Bill had to go along during office hours, but which privately he debunked" (*A Really Sincere Guy*, p. 38). In *Nobody's Fool*, Jeff Clarke makes no pretense of behaving like his competitors, "nice, clever operators who go about telling their prospective clients about mass psychological impulses, the dynamism of symbols, the R factor in mass motivation, and all that crap" (p. 153). Morris Sommers wonders, "What has Bernays got that I haven't got? A smoother patter, psychological aura, better contacts. . . . But there's no reason why I can't make the grade!" He plans to write a book so that he, too, will be taken seriously (*For Immediate Release.*; p. 82).

Like Sommers, many practitioner characters see counseling or policymaking as simply the ticket to money and prestige. Sommers decides that his agency needs "less emphasis on clips, more on advice" to approach the level of Bernays or Ivy Lee (*For Immediate Release.*; pp. 82–83). Counseling is also a source of personal power. "I am the press secretary, I make the policy decisions," Mike Kratz reprimands a subordinate in *Speechless*. One character, Jerry McMann, declines a South American dictator as a client because he refuses to accept the agency's advice (*The Birthday Boy*, p. 336), but for the most part, counseling is conducted for personal advancement rather than social benefit or professionalism. "But that was the trouble with a career in public relations," thinks *Jurassic Park's* Ed Regis, "nobody saw you as a professional" (p. 98). In fact, professionalization is frowned on in the sources, even by practitioners. "In recent years public-relations groups have sought tentatively to do something about elevating the trend to the status of a profession," the narrator of *Life in the Crystal Palace* explains, but that is only "intellectual social climbing" (p. 215).

Strategies and Tactics Employed by Practitioners

Because most sources do not provide explicit definitions of PR, audience members might deduce its meaning by watching what its practitioners do. The characters have an incredibly wide range of duties. They organize open houses, guide tours, and handle corporate contributions to political campaigns; plan parades, movie premieres, and beauty competitions; and conduct research and refer to opinion polls and market surveys. They prepare clients and employers for interviews, debates, and Congressional testimony; plan national speaking tours; form clubs; make awards; plan parties; write purpose statements and newsletter articles; sign autographs for their famous clients; work in graphics and production; and attend meetings.

However, the details of work are regularly omitted: Many practitioners are never seen doing any work. Frankie Stone explains, "I promote people—politicians, businessmen, the occasional rock star," but she never tells how (*Making Mr. Right*). Meaningful strategy sessions are virtually nonexistent, but clichés abound. In *The Candidate*, Howard explains, "We'll label him Mr. Geritol and you'll do the 'I'm my own man' bit." Eustace Dinwiddy's plan is even simpler: "I shall have a slogan," he says. "I shall compose an announcement" (*Stand Up and Cheer*). In *Holiday Inn*, Danny Reed says, "I'll get all the newspaper boys from New York," and then the newspaper notices are shown, suggesting that all he has to do to get a front-page banner headline is ask. 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 (*Man's Favorite Sport?*). Anne in *Heart and Souls* is able to close a botanical garden so that she can have a romantic lunch there because "I did their fundraiser last year," but no other reference to her work is made.

When work is shown, activities most commonly involve the media. Practitioners write press releases, brochures, speeches, infomercials, and trade journal articles. They work with the news media by planning and speaking at press conferences, taking pictures or creating photo opportunities, serving as spokespersons, delivering handouts, bribing reporters, and drinking with journalists. They book clients on *The Tonight Show*, *Today*, and the cover of *Time*. About two thirds of the practitioners work or are implied to have worked with the media in some capacity. Given that some are never shown working and that others are shown in purely managerial capacities, publicity and press agency clearly dominate.

A lack of information on the groundwork of public relations leads to two misconceptions. The first is an assumption that, with enough money, anyone can use PR to achieve fame and fortune. As a character in *The Big Hype* explains, "I pay my publicists a lot of money to get coverage" (p. 139). In sources like *It Should Happen to You*, that line of thinking is true: Gladys Glover realizes her dream of becoming famous when she comes into a little money and splashes her name all over the billboards in Manhattan. PR is, in short, easy. On the other hand, there is also an element of magic to PR. "Shows you what a little PR can do, huh?" says the villain in *Gordy*. "A plain little pig, and—boom! Instant celebrity." A character in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* declares, "I'll make public opinion You leave public opinion to me." In these sources, public relations is almost supernatural.

Major Themes About PR Practitioners in Film and Fiction

The Moral Life of the Practitioner

The morality of the PR practitioner characters was often questioned, first and foremost relating to lying. Only 24 practitioners could be considered honest and

open when confronted with a decision about whether to tell the truth. One example is Stephen Early, Franklin Roosevelt's press secretary in *Murder in the Blue Room*. When Russian government officials make a secret visit to the White House, Early tells the press about it and explains that, for national defense purposes, the visit cannot be reported. "They're keeping it mum," Early says (p. 38), his honesty having been rewarded.

By contrast, in *Sweet Smell of Success*, Sidney Falco's employer tells him, "It's a publicity man's nature to be a liar. I wouldn't hire you if you wasn't a liar." Many sources reflected this view, with 58 of the practitioners lying at least once, whether on the job or in their personal lives. Another 14 practitioners engaged in cover-ups. In addition, if hype is included, then 103 of the 202 characters lied at some point in the texts.

Hype, which Spicer (1993) defined as the creation of "artificial excitement" (p. 55), is incessant among PR characters, especially in the entertainment industry. The 48 who engaged in hype are perhaps best exemplified by *Mighty Joe Young's* Max O'Hara, who is described as "restrained, artistic, the shy type—ha!" In *The Big Hype*, Mel Steiner promotes "America's Balladeer of the Middle Class" by buying a standing ovation at Radio City Music Hall for \$950, saying, "Granted, it's a little Barnum. But nobody is hurt by it. And this *is* show business" (p. 71). Dan Armstrong, in *Thunder in the City*, creates a vast publicity campaign to raise enough capital to mine magnelite, a newly discovered Rhodesian mineral. One of his more memorable tactics was a theme song for the sales staff called "Magnelite, We Need You," sung to the accompaniment of a brass band. Hype could also be used for sinister purposes. In *Meet John Doe*, Ann Mitchell creates a stunt for her newspaper that almost leads to the election of manipulative party boss D. B. Norton. Norton's plans for the country go against everything valued by "John Doe," the character she created based on her father's diary, but her desire for money made what seemed like harmless hype a danger to the nation.

Another form of lying is the cover-up, which was most often associated with military PR in books and movies written after the Vietnam War. Col. Jeff Cooper and diplomat Susan Clifford lie during a news conference about an attack on an American Marine base in Israel in *Cover Up*, and Lt. Col. Dan Lerner helps hide the arrival of aliens to Earth in *Official Denial*. "No one lies," Lerner explains. "We deny." Cover-ups were not unique to the military though; perhaps the best known movie cover-up is when Bill Gibson in *The China Syndrome* pressures reporters not to do a story about a nuclear power plant accident.

Lying sometimes related to another moral issue—sex. At least 11 of the male practitioners had affairs outside of their committed relationships, often with women they met at work. For some characters, hiring prostitutes is part of the job. Joe Clay's client in *Days of Wine and Roses* thanks him for organizing a party and finding the "dates," and Larry in *The Wall-to-Wall Trap* charges the "highest class whores in the city" to his client's tab for a press party (p. 224). One character in

The Crying Game notes that an agency "has a reputation for providing company for clients." "Don't they all," responds another (p. 184). Two other practitioners have sex with reporters in attempts to influence news coverage.

Sex is also related to the careers of many of the women characters. Diana Forbes, in *Nobody's Fool*, is "well-off, secure, and luxury loving ... she was a fancier of the underdog; and if the underdog was an attractive guy who might make good in the hay, so much the better" (p. 234). A colleague of Ann Farris, in *Tom Clancy's Op-Center*, wonders if their boss "realized that all he had to do was crook his finger at his sexy Press Officer, and she'd do more to him than shower him with epithets" (p. 70). Undoubtedly, the strangest liaison occurred between Frankie Stone and the android she has been hired to socialize and promote in *Making Mr. Right*. Women sleep with their clients or bosses on eight separate occasions; in other words, 16% of the female practitioners sleep with their employers. Sometimes they are sympathetically portrayed, but it is often implied that the women use sex to advance their careers, exemplified by Flannery (*Major League II*), who dumps her client/lover when his pitching career goes sour and tries to get him back when it improves.

Like sex, alcohol use in film and fiction is an indication of the immorality of many practitioners, symbolizing a dissolute lifestyle. Several 1950s characters—Joe Clay in *Days of Wine and Roses*, Peter Reaney in *The Man Who Had Power Over Women*, Roger MacLain in *Nobody's Fool*, and Jim Somers in *The Empire*—are alcoholics whose careers are jeopardized by their drinking, yet alcohol use is portrayed as inherent in the career choice. It is often associated with journalists, as when Sidney Falco in *Sweet Smell of Success* meets with reporters and columnists in bars to plant his stories. In *The Harder They Fall*, Eddie Lewis sits in his hotel room "sipping a rye highball and bending over a hot typewriter whipping up some porridge about this fight's being for the Latin Heavyweight Championship of the World" (p. 232), and Morris Sommers in *For Immediate Release*: has a scotch-and-soda in one hand, keeping the other "free for gestures and hand-shaking" (p. 64). Not drinking was so unusual in some sources as to be notable. When Sue Marriner says that she does not drink, another of *The P.R. Girls* wonders, "How did you get into the public relations field?" (p. 62).

Effectiveness

Although practitioners are presented as despicable in many ways, they are at least good at their jobs. In many cases, practitioners' effectiveness could not be judged because the text did not discuss the results, the practitioner had no apparent goals, or the story ended before the campaign did. However, only rarely were they ineffective. Tom Rath, in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit II*, has worked for Ralph Hopkins for years, promoting a mental health campaign for the head of

United Broadcasting. Yet, he notes, Hopkins's service as chairman of the National Federation for Mental Health "had failed to shine up his public image" (p. 136). Whether the campaign had benefited the mentally ill is never considered. In *The Stand*, Bill Starkey, who will use any measure to hide the Army's involvement in a plague spreading across the United States, cannot stop determined journalists from covering the story (although it matters little because most of the world population dies). In *This is Spinal Tap*, Arnie Fufkin sets up an autographing session for the band he represents, but no fans appear. He blames himself, telling the band members they should "kick [his] ass."

Of the practitioners whose effectiveness could be determined, the vast majority successfully achieved their goals for their clients and employers. Chet MacGregor and Clark Anderson promote folk-singing candidate Bob Roberts in the movie of the same name to a seat in the Senate, and Bobby Blair and Steve Rothman coach the narrator of *The Big Hype* who says, "I had gone through this kind of interview so often that I was poised and focused" (p. 156). He handles the media with aplomb, and his book becomes a national bestseller.

However, effectiveness should not be considered a sign of respect. Quite often, the least ethical practitioners are the most effective at their jobs. For instance George Carson's *Big Smear*, though morally reprehensible, works: A senatorial candidate wins the election, despite having been the object of a PR smear campaign, but not by a large enough majority to make him a viable presidential candidate, which is all that Carson's oil client had asked. Their effectiveness is really just another reason to dislike practitioners, and it may in fact be the root of writers' dislike for the field.

Practitioner Repudiated, Practitioner Redeemed

Another theme is that characters must deal with the consequences of the professional choices that they have made. This took two forms: repudiation by others or redemption by some act of the practitioners themselves. About 15% of the practitioners were denounced or punished for their behavior, with the suggestion that the characters deserved to be repudiated because of their personalities or private ambitions and their actions as practitioners. Another 5% avoided repudiation by redeeming themselves.

Some repudiated characters were privately reprimanded or publicly humiliated. In *It Should Happen To You*, Ross is put into place by his client, the lightweight "nobody" Gladys Glover, who with his help has become known mostly for being known. "You're not real," she tells him, unimpressed by his threat to resign. Philip Harwood, who has spent his time fawning over *The Empire's* finance vice president, is repudiated when the man realizes Harwood's personnel record is too perfect to be true. He adds a note to his file: "Not suitable material." The words are

"little enough to end a career" (p. 220), and Harwood ends up a bitter man with a "smooth, controlled, satanic face" (p. 292). Bill Gibson in *The China Syndrome* insists to reporters that "the public was never in any danger at any time," a blatant lie about an incident at a nuclear power plant, and he tries to stop another man from discussing the crisis. "Mr. Gibson," a reporter says while the television cameras roll, "if there's nothing to hide, let him speak." Gibson tries to minimize the impact of those words, but no one believes him.

Other practitioners lose their jobs, are physically attacked, or are jailed. In *Dark Forces*, Doc Wheelan loses his hold over a politician when a supernatural faith healer convinces the senator that Doc is an evil man. Tom Kay in *Roger and Me* insists that General Motors head Roger Smith is a "warm man" with a social conscience although he planned 30,000 layoffs in one town. Kay argues that a corporation does not owe its employees lifetime job security, and then he gets laid off. Gilbert Sipes, the pignapper in *Gordy*, is attacked by the father of the young girl who first befriended the pig. In a case of poetic justice, tobacco spokesman Nick Naylor is attacked by antismoking advocates who cover him in nicotine patches, almost killing him, in *Thank You for Smoking*, and Naylor's friend Bobby Joe Bliss, spokesman for a gun owners association, is arrested for carrying an illegal weapon. Sidney Falco in *Sweet Smell of Success* plants evidence on another man and then tips off the police, but his plan backfires, and he himself is arrested.

The ultimate repudiation—death—came to 10 practitioners. Bill Starkey of *The Stand* and Jeff Carlyle of *The Empire* commit suicide. Zombie PR woman Randi James disintegrates like the other characters in *Dead Heat*. More sensationally, the PR practitioner in the book *Jurassic Park* is killed by a baby tyrannosaurus rex. Other practitioners are murdered. Former madam Suzanne Dominico is killed when she tries to sell a recording of a private client meeting in *Perry Mason*. Austin Tucker in *The Parallax View* refuses to help a reporter investigate his employer's assassination because he fears for his own life, and rightly so: Both he and the reporter, who heroically pursues the story without Tucker's assistance, are killed by the conspirators.

Some practitioners avoid repudiation by redeeming themselves for their past mistakes. Joe Winder in *Native Tongue* gets fired for investigating a murder that took place at the amusement park, but he continues the investigation on his own, seeking redemption for allowing himself to "get used to this goddamn zombie job" (p. 33). In *The Leopard Man*, Jerry hypes his client, a nightclub performer, by having her make a grand entrance with a leopard, but the animal escapes and kills a child. Jerry gives all of his cash to the family, but then another person dies, and he suspects that the leopard has provided a cover for a murderer. Jerry and his client remain in the town until they identify the serial killer.

In some cases, redemption required getting out of PR altogether. (Not all of the 12 practitioners who quit their jobs did so for redemptive purposes: Bill McCrary, for instance, quits his job but steals some of the agency's clients away in *A Really*

Sincere Guy.) Only when confronted by certain death can Bob Jones leave PR and therefore become a whole, fulfilled person. One of his colleagues believes Jones was "a product of his own PR," and Bob begins to understand that no one really knows him, not his employees or his family, not even himself. As the head of his own agency, making \$250,000 a year, he had "20 rings all going at the same time," and his brother says "I felt like a client" when he had dinner with Bob. When Bob quits his job, he is able to resolve his feelings about his ethnic heritage and his working-class family: Only terminal cancer saves him from the shallow, unexamined life he led as "one of the great men in public relations" (*My Life*).

In other instances, practitioners redeemed themselves by using their PR abilities or position for the public good. The best example is Bill Dunnigan in *The Miracle of the Bells*. This character leaves Hollywood to go to Coaltown, the hometown of an actress, Olga, whom he loved but who died before her only picture could be released. His goal is to stir up enough interest in the movie that the studio will be forced to release the film. He pays all three churches in town to ring their bells continuously for 3 days and nights. When local reporters ask what he is doing, he explains, and they agree to help. A miracle in the town and Olga's portrayal of Joan of Arc restore the hope of the people.

Relationships With Key Groups

The public. The portrayal of the relationship between practitioners and the public is one of the few areas that indicates change, and improvement, over time. In early sources, the public is mass, and, unfortunately, it is ignorant, gullible, and backward. One PR man refers to the audience as "blank-eyed, slack-mouthed, grinning, staring, a bottomless receptacle into which you could pour anything" (p. 67) with "an eagerness on the part of millions to be intellectually raped" (*Nobody's Fool*, p. 207). In *The Empire*, Philip Harwood recalls his early career in industrial relations, in which plant workers were "childishly easy to understand and manipulate" (p. 179).

At times, characters in these early sources defend the public. Alan in *Nobody's Fool* suggests that PR does not serve the public interest: "How can people find out who's tellin' the truth when it all depends on who's got the smartest public relations man ... ? Seems to me the truth can get hollered down pretty fast." However, he also insists, "you think of them as stooges. ... But you're wrong. The people of the country are smarter and bigger than you think" (pp. 286-287). Even boxing press agent Eddie Lewis, who claims great influence over the public because of their "credulity," recognizes also that "they were a little punchy too. They had taken an awful pasting from all sides: Radio, the press, billboards, throwaways, even airplanes left white streamers in the sky telling them what to buy and what to need. They could really absorb punishment" (*The Harder They Fall*, p. 137).

These practitioners suggest that, if the public is foolish or misled, PR is partly to blame.

In more recent sources, the public is not usually denigrated, and PR characters are discredited when they underestimate the public. In *Running Mates*, for example, Mel, the campaign manager for a presidential candidate, insists that people "want to look good, they want to feel good, they want to be back on top," and recommends that the staff should "test our man in the most non-controversial way possible until we know what's going on out there." He stands by when other staff members pay off a blackmailer to cover up information about the candidate's fiancée. However, on his own, the candidate tells the public the truth. "There goes the Inaugural Ball," Mel mutters, but the crowd begins to applaud, grateful that the candidate was honest.

Clients and employers. Practitioner characters save most of their disdain for their clients and employers, who are apparently brainless and essentially interchangeable. In *Nobody's Fool*, Jeff Clarke claims, "it might be proper to call me a kindergarten teacher for politically and socially backward industrialists" because "from the public relations point of view most of them are morons" (p. 38). Nora Cromwell's aircraft manufacturing clients are nothing, in her opinion, but "criminal adolescents" (*Drop-Out Mother*). Mordecai Schiff sees all clients as equally meaningless. "In the last analysis," he says, "they're all out for the same thing" (*Nobody's Fool*, p. 210). Morris Sommers, in *For Immediate Release*, makes this explicit when he removes from his office a photograph of one client who did not renew his contract, replacing it with the picture of a new client.

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, "How can you look yourself in the face? Here I emphatically deny your marriage to the boys [in the press] and they flash these pictures on me. Oh, the humiliation of it!" Liz Wareham uses reverse psychology, telling a client she was correct in her assessment of a brochure. It was too "young" and "zippy" for a bank; the client then accepts the brochure in its original form (*Full Commission*, pp. 197-198, 239).

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." "It's one thing to wear a dog collar," Sidney Falco explains. "When it becomes a noose, I want my freedom" (*Sweet Smell of Success*).

Yet, both clients and practitioners know who foots the bills. Although only eight of the practitioners were fired, the power to fire makes many of them leery

even of clients and employers they dislike, creating an army of PR “yes men.” Tom Rath tells his wife that it is standard operating procedure for employees at his television network to tell their boss what he wants to hear. “I think it’s a little sickening,” she says (*The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, p. 205). “In corporate public relations,” one veteran knows, “you begin by pleasing higher authority, and worry about the public later” (*Life in the Crystal Palace*, p. 221). Clients are given the “star treatment”—as Corbett in *Ladykillers* explains, “you know how Morgana is”—for an unhappy client is intolerable. An agency vice president speaks of “a cardinal rule: Thou shalt not be snotty to clients—ever” (*Full Commission*, p. 96). The problem with the star treatment is that clients come to believe their own PR, apparently a common phenomenon. Helen Baskin’s client explains, “I could no longer tell where I ended and my press release began” (*The Big Hype*, p. 149). Lloyd McRuman was “so impressed by the public personality Logan had developed for him that in every possible way he attempted to live up to it.” The PR program elevated “him to a state of conscious dignity” that his own friends could not recognize (*PAX*, p. 33).

A handful of practitioners respect their clients and employers, and they are respected in turn. Charlie Hand, in *Beau James*, stands out among practitioner characters because he refuses the “yes man” role, admitting that he did not vote for the mayor he now represents. “I need a resident dissident,” the mayor explains. Pierre Salinger, in *The Missiles of October*, does not argue when John F. Kennedy keeps him in the dark about the Cuban missile crisis. However, later, when Salinger insists that Kennedy had an obligation to respond to the charge that the United States was provoking the crisis, the President heeds his advice. In *The Birthday Boy*, David Smackenthal has a reputation for “telling off the most impressive of clients when they dared to differ with his recommendations” (p. 73). These relationships are exceptions to the rule.

Journalists. When Dan Armstrong exclaims, “We love the press!” (*Thunder in the City*), he is not speaking for the majority of practitioners—and their dislike is reciprocated. The ambiguity resulting from the symbiotic antagonism that characterizes the relationship between practitioners and journalists in real life is apparent in fiction as well. “We ladies and gentlemen of the press sort of sneer at it, we think public relations just means grabbing free publicity,” one reporter says (*The Build-Up Boys*, p. 197). In *The Cat Who Went Into the Closet*, reporters “as a matter of newsroom honor” deplored promotion director Hixie Rice’s “commercial taint” (p. 18), and in another book by the same author, a journalist declines a luncheon invitation because “if I ate their free lunch ... they’d expect all kinds of puffery in my column” (*The Cat Who Came to Breakfast*, p. 4).

The journalist characters’ negative attitudes stem from this fact: Practitioners will do anything to get reporters to cover their stories. Sidney Falco attempts to

blackmail one reporter and finds a "date" for another (*Sweet Smell of Success*). Adrian Crow doles out leaks and exclusives (*Tom Clancy's Op-Center*), and Clint Lorimer tells reporters he hopes "he could work back up to being a newspaperman himself someday It made [them] feel pleasantly superior" (*The Build-Up Boys*, p. 28). Liquor is an especially popular inducement. "The cocktail party is America's favorite form of seduction, arranged by press agents, full of gin and bourbon, paying off in news space," Eddie Lewis learns (*The Harder They Fall*). In a jam, the practitioner could pull "a crying act," in which he "throws himself on his contact's mercy—begs, pleads, implores, claims he'll be fired if he doesn't produce, cites a sick wife, a child in need of an operation, even weeps literally if necessary." Adds Teddy, "Usually, it works" (*The Wall-to-Wall Trap*, p. 147).

Although they are well aware of what reporters think about PR, practitioner characters and their employers recognize that they need the press. In *Return to Peyton Place*, Louis Jackman displays his understanding of the two-step flow, telling his young author, "celebrities are created by the gods of publicity through newspapers, radio, and television," and he promises to "create an image for the press so that they can pass the image along to the public so that they'll want to buy your book." Frankie Stone promises her client that Congress will want to fund the android it has produced as soon as she promotes it with "full media saturation" in *Making Mr. Right*. The media are necessary because so many of the characters are simply press agents.

Nonetheless, practitioner characters often aggravate reporters by standing between them and their sources or stories, most commonly through distraction. When a celebrity endorser begins to argue with a reporter at a press conference in *The Electric Horseman*, the PR director jumps to the microphone, says "Listen, we've got a time problem here," and invites the reporters to a reception, spoiling their chance for a good quote. In *Full Metal Jacket*, *Stars and Stripes* reporters are given a new vocabulary: "search and destroy" becomes "sweep and clear," for example. However, some practitioners move beyond distraction to withholding information or access to sources. A political PR man refuses to give a press pass to a journalist from a small independent paper, *Troubled Times*, in *Bob Roberts*. Mrs. McGee in *Roger and Me* tells Michael Moore, "It's a very private, personal time," forcing him to move back to the sidewalk under the watchful eye of plant security, when he tries to interview the employees of an auto plant that is being closed. The cover-up, discussed earlier, is also utilized.

Practitioners are aware that the source-reporter relationship works two ways, even if journalists seem to forget it. When a columnist is angry with the luxury hotel that employs Sue Marriner, the PR woman tells her employer, "in the long run she needs us more than we need her" (*The P.R. Girls*, p. 95). In *The Wall-to-Wall Trap*, Teddy describes the practitioner-reporter relationship as "honor among thieves": The press agent wants to steal space, and the reporter must fill it through the information from the press agent or through "his own exertion" (p. 147). "A

press agent eats a columnist's dirt and is expected to call it manna," Sidney Falco remarks. "But don't you *help* columnists by furnishing them with items?" someone asks. "Sure, a columnist can't do without us, except our good and great friend J. J. forgets to mention that," he complains (*Sweet Smell of Success*). In addition, like practitioners, some journalists go to extraordinary lengths to get their stories, as one reporter who sleeps with Gary Danziger, the PR man in the 1976 version of *A Star Is Born*, to get an interview with his celebrity employer.

In a few instances, journalists and practitioners cooperate for the public good. Dwight Somers asks a reporter friend to screen a video for him. "Run it and see if you think we could sell copies to benefit the college," he says, seeking input from a columnist (*The Cat Who Blew the Whistle*, p. 157). Beth Kelly helps a journalist get information on her boss after she learns that the man is plotting to take over several foreign countries (*The Newspaper Game*). Malcolm Sturt of *Nobody's Fool* suggests that the best way to manage press relations is to "always answer the inevitable embarrassing question promptly and honestly and never off the record" (p. 212).

DISCUSSION

If film and fiction representations of PR reflect or generate public perceptions in any way, the reputation and understanding of the field are in even worse standing than Spicer (1993), Keenan (1996), and other studies of the news media have suggested. Positive characterizations of practitioners are rare. Negative characterizations, embellished with the zeal of poetic license, are disheartening at best and malicious at worst.

Several moderating factors should be considered. First, not all readers or viewers connect negative portrayals of certain characters with PR specifically. Often, the practitioner is one of a group of people engaged in a particular activity, such as running an election campaign or selling a product, and it would be paranoid to assume that PR practitioners are singled out by the audience for special scrutiny. Second, PR is certainly not the only occupation or profession to be vilified in entertainment media. Watts (1982) identified a trend of depictions of businessmen in literature as "greedy, unethical, and immoral (or amoral)" and "childish or irresponsible" (p. 150), and Ghiglione's (1990) analysis of fiction found that "however heroic people may judge Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of Watergate fame . . . People love to hate the journalist" (p. 445). Many film and fiction representations of occupations and professions are negative, simply because conflicts and tension make the most interesting storylines. Finally, McTague's (1979) analysis of businessmen in literature makes an important point: Fiction is symbolic. In Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scriviner*, for example, Wall Street is false, cold, and isolated. However, business in the story is "a metaphor for farther-reaching

human problems" (pp. 63–64), and the traits of any character portrayed in film and fiction are part of the greater human experience, certainly not attributable solely to the character's career choice.

Still, these representations should not be ignored or taken lightly. Positive portrayals of accomplished practitioners—professionals—are available, but they are far from prevalent. Antisocial characteristics such as alcohol abuse, promiscuity, and especially lying are connected with the practice of PR so regularly as to seem normal. Practitioners are usually depicted as skilled in the sense that they are effective, but they are also often cynical, greedy, isolated, unfulfilled, obsequious, manipulative, or intellectual lightweights. That people with such characteristics are good at what they do is hardly complimentary.

Fictitious characters also display very little understanding of PR or what practitioners do. Definitions of PR are only occasionally included, and few of those bear any resemblance to those offered in textbooks. Because it is inadequately defined, PR is usually explained by showing or implying practitioners' duties. It is seen as conducting a variety of activities, most commonly involving the news media, but the strategies and tactics of the practice are virtually never made clear. It is safe to say that a reader or viewer could learn very little about the actual practice of PR from film and fiction.

The problem with an inadequate discussion of the work of PR is not that film and fiction serve as poor training tools but that the audience is left with two opposing and equally deficient views. Sometimes, PR is magic, which only a magician with secret knowledge can perform while audience members wonder how they have been tricked. In other sources, it is almost embarrassingly easy—a phone call or a cocktail with a reporter is all it takes. Neither view explains the PR process, and because strategies and tactics are unexplored, practitioners' effectiveness seems ominous.

If film and fiction do reflect public attitudes toward PR or practitioners, then there is no point in dropping the use of the term *public relations*, as Brody (1992) and others suggested. This analysis indicates that it is not the term that people despise or fear, because many of the practitioners included in the study were not specifically called "public relations practitioners" or "counselors"—often they were given no title at all. Rather, what troubles observers is the effectiveness with which practitioners wield the tools of opinion management. People who so frequently invite repudiation or require redemption are unlikely to be liberated from a poor reputation by a mere name change. In fact, this kind of obfuscation would only add to the "smoke and mirrors" depiction of practitioners that apparently appeals to many novelists and screenwriters. The implication of this research is that the best way to redeem the image of PR would be to emphasize its limitations—an option most practitioners would surely dislike—rather than to change its name. A reporter in *A Really Sincere Guy* makes this point best. "No matter how honorable your methods may be," Myra says, "the fact is you're tinkering with men's minds, trying to shape

their opinions, and they just naturally tend to resent it." Propaganda, she says, "makes people suspicious of you" (pp. 266–267). As long as persuasion is part of the practice, and as long as the tools of PR are not understood, PR by any other name will frequently be viewed with skepticism and scorn in film and fiction.

In addition to a better understanding of the stereotypes that must be countered if PR is to gain public respect, PR scholars can find an agenda for further research in the representations of film and fiction relationships between practitioners and key groups. First, how do practitioners think and talk about the public? Although countless scholars analyze the relative ease or difficulty of changing public opinion, attitudes, or behavior or describe the best ways to effect such changes, no one has asked practitioners about or observed their behaviors to develop an understanding of how they conceive of their audiences, much less attempted to figure out how conceptions of the public have changed over time. Second, many fictional practitioners have dysfunctional relationships with their clients and employers, but less is known about these relationships in real life. "Despite the centrality of the public relations firm–client relationship ... researchers have devoted little attention to investigating the causes or nature of conflict between practitioners and clients," according to Bourland (1993, pp. 385–386). A third research area is the dual power of source and media. Literature on the source–reporter relationship includes only a handful of analyses of power dynamics in source–reporter relations (Cameron, Sallot, & Curtin, 1997), most of which present the press as adversary, the source as victim (e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Newsom, 1983). The gatekeeping function of PR is also worthy of examination.

Finally, the time for an examination of public attitudes toward PR has now come. Scholarship has shown that newspaper, television news, and film and fiction representations of PR are not very positive. Keenan (1996) noted that, after analysis of media content, the second prong of cultivation analysis is survey research that measures the level of media exposure and audience perceptions of the profession to determine if repeated exposure to media messages has cultivated certain attitudes or beliefs in viewers. Based on network television news coverage, he recommended "measures of how public relations is perceived in terms of who uses it, its purposes, how it is practiced, and its social and economic contributions" (p. 229). In addition to the factors discussed in Spicer (1993) and Keenan (1996), this study adds several other dimensions for continued research because, although movies and novels are certainly not mirrors of reality, they do offer a view of PR to people who have had no personal experience with its practitioners. Readers and viewers of these stories are offered a picture of a somewhat mysterious occupation populated by unscrupulous practitioners with superiority complexes whose main goals appear to be getting their clients mentioned in the news media, duping the public and their clients, and gaining power. The continuity of these images over the 65 years under study suggests that rather than dismissing the stereotypes as foolish or uninformed, however, scholars would do well to try to understand if and

in what ways these representations have influenced public knowledge and attitudes about PR.

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APPENDIX A Novels Consulted

- Airport* (Arthur Hailey, 1968, Doubleday)
Americanization of Emily, The (William Bradford Huie, 1959, Signet)

Big Hype, The (Avery Corman, 1992, Simon & Schuster)
Big Smear, The (William Reardon, 1960, Crown)
Birthday Boy, The (Al Hine, 1959, Scribner's)
Build-Up Boys, The (Jeremy Kirk, 1951, Scribner's)
Cat Who Blew the Whistle, The (Lilian Jackson Braun, 1995, Putnam)
Cat Who Came to Breakfast, The (Lilian Jackson Braun, 1994, Jove)
Cat Who Knew a Cardinal, The (Lilian Jackson Braun, 1991, Putnam)
Cat Who Wasn't There, The (Lilian Jackson Braun, 1992, Putnam)
Cat Who Went Into the Closet, The (Lilian Jackson Braun, 1993, Putnam)
Catch-22 (Joseph Heller, 1955, Dell)
Certain Evil, A (David Kraslow & Robert S. Boyd, 1965, Little, Brown)
Crying Game, The (John Braine, 1968, Eyre & Spottiswoode)
Don't Go Near the Water (William Brinkley, 1956, Random House)**
Don't Stop the Carnival (Herman Wouk, 1965, Doubleday)
Double (Bill Pronzini and Marcia Muller, 1984, St. Martin's Press)
Empire, The (George de Mare, 1957, Putnam)
Executive Suite (Cameron Hawley, 1952, Houghton Mifflin)
Fly on the Wall, The (Tony Hillerman, 1971, Harper)
For Immediate Release: (Rion Bercovici, 1937, Sheridan House)**
Full Commission (Carol Brennan, 1993, Carroll & Graf)
Getting Straight (Ken Kolb, 1967, Chilton)
Goodnight, Irene (Jan Burke, 1993, Simon & Schuster)
Harder They Fall, The (Bud Schulberg, 1947, Random House)
Headhunt (Carol Brennan, 1991, Carroll & Graf)**
Jurassic Park (Michael Crichton, 1990, Alfred & Knopf)
Let Me Call You Sweetheart (Mary Higgins Clark, 1995, Simon & Schuster)
Life in the Crystal Palace (Alan Harrington, 1959, Knopf)
Little Class on Murder, A (Carolyn G. Hart, 1989, Doubleday)
Long Gainer, The (William Manchester, 1961, Little, Brown)
Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, The (Sloan Wilson, 1955, Simon & Schuster)
Man in the Gray Flannel Suit II, The (Sloan Wilson, 1984, Arbor House)
Man Who Had Power Over Women, The (Gordon M. Williams, 1967, Stein & Day)
Murder at the National Cathedral (Margaret Truman, 1990, Random House)
Murder at the Pentagon (Margaret Truman, 1992, Random House)
Murder in the Blue Room (Elliot Roosevelt, 1990, St. Martin's Press)
Native Tongue (Carl Hiaasen, 1991, Fawcett Crest)**
Nobody's Fool (Charles Harrison, 1948, Holt)**
Original Sin (P.D. James, 1995, Knopf)
PAX (Middleton Kiefer, 1958, Random House)
P.R. Girls, The (Bernard Glemser, 1972, Bantam)
Really Sincere Guy, A (Robert Van Riper, 1959, McKay)**
Rising Sun (Michael Crichton, 1992, Knopf)

Seven Minutes, The (Irving Wallace, 1969, Simon & Schuster)
Stand, The (Steven King, 1990, Doubleday)
Thank You for Smoking (Christopher Buckley, 1994, Random House)**
Tom Clancy's Op-Center (Tom Clancy & Steve Pieczenik, 1995, Berkley)
Wall-to-Wall Trap (Morton Freegood, 1957, Simon & Schuster)
Where Echos Live (Marcia Muller, 1991, Mysterious Press)
42nd Parallel, The (John Dos Passos, 1930, Harper & Brothers)
 **Highly recommended sources; especially useful for undergraduate teaching.

APPENDIX B
 Movies Consulted

Barbarians at the Gate (1992)
Beau James (1957)
Bob Roberts (1992)
Bye, Bye, Birdie (1963)
Candidate, The (1972)**
China Syndrome, The (1979)**
Cover Up (1991)
Dark Forces (1980)
Dave (1993)
Days of Wine and Roses (1962)
Dead Heat (1988)
Dream of Passion (1978)
Drop-Out Mother (1987)
Electric Horseman, The (1979)
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**Highly recommended sources; especially useful for undergraduate teaching.