**LANDMARK STUDY ON THE IMAGE OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER IN MOVIES AND TELEVISION**

**USC ANNENBERG PROFESSOR’S ANALYSIS OFFERS NEW INSIGHTS INTO**

**THE IMAG OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER IN POPULAR CULTURE**

A landmark study of the public relations practitioner in film and television from 1901 to 2011, the largest study of its kind ever attempted, reveals seven images offering a range of positive and negative descriptions of the professional and the field.

Joe Saltzman, Professor of Journalism at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and director of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture (IJPC), a project of the Norman Lear Center, presented the study’s findings at the International History of Public Relations Conference at Bournemouth University in Great Britain last July. The entire study and its appendix listing the PR men and women in more than 327 English-speaking films and television programs was published in a special edition of *The IJPC Journal,* *Volume 3, Fall 2011-Spring 2012.*

The final study included 222 movies and 105 television series and movies-made-for television.

The seven principal images of the public relations practitioner over the last 100 years included:

* **(1) The early press agents whose stock in trade was ballyhoo and outrageous publicity stunts is one of the oldest and most enduring images.** In the movies, their hair-brained schemes always resulted in big headlines and pictures splashed all over the nation’s newspapers
* **(2) Publicity men and women who would do anything to get their clients publicity and to protect their clients in crisis situations**. The only thing that matters to these publicists is what is good for the client.
* **(3) The public relations professional as hero is one who rebels against unethical practices and will quit his or his job before doing something immoral.** These professional public relations men and women often are portrayed as conflicted, anguished people who try to elevate what they do into a profession with high standards. More often than not, they fail, but they are heroes in that they try to do the right thing.This image is more prevalent than one might think because the negative images are so strong and powerful that they often are more memorable than the positive images.
* **(4) Press secretaries, political aides and military and police information officers are among the most diversified public relations professionals in the movies and television.** They range from vile people doing terrible things to some of the most appealing and professional public relations professionals depicted.
* **(5) The public relations professional as a true villain who will step on anyone, do anything, lie, cheat or steal to protect a client’s image.** These PR men and women will stop at nothing, even murder, to get what they want.
* **(6) The female public relations practitioner who uses her sex appeal to win clients and get promotions.**

**(7)The alcoholic public relations man is a staple throughout the history of movies and television.** These PR practitioners drink for a variety of reasons – to keep their clients happy, to escape the pressures of their job, to forget the horrendous things they often have to do to keep an account. Many films featuring public relations men and women have scenes of serious social drinking, but few seem to consider alcoholism a problem

In addition, Saltzman said, “the analysis revealed that the images of the public relations practitioner are far more varied and more positive than previously thought. When they are good, they are very, very good, and when they are bad, they are horrid.”

The study also concluded that males overwhelmingly dominated the image of the PR practitioner in the movies, but by the 21st century, women are represented in almost equal fashion, especially on television. “We also discovered that there are far more negative images in film than on television. TV series may have more impact on the public because of the frequency and necessity to have likable people as leading characters, resulting in more positive than negative images of the PR man and woman,” Saltzman wrote.

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