

2012 IJPC Special Edition: Public Relations

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the third edition of *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Journal*. In this special issue, we further our mission of broadening the study of journalism's popular image by focusing exclusively on public relations professionals.

We begin with Joe Saltzman's research report "The Image of the Public Relations Practitioner in Movies and Television 1901-2011." As the report's introduction notes, it is the most ambitious study of its kind, analyzing the depiction of the PR practitioner in more than 300 movies and television programs over the past century. The report and its appendix find that popular culture's portrayal of public relations professionals has been similar to that of news journalists in that it has varied widely over the years and has not always been so negative as some real-life professionals fear.

After that, in our features section, we offer scholarship originally presented at a workshop at the 2011 conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). "The Image of the Public Relations Practitioner in Popular Culture" examined the PR practitioner in movies, television, fiction, and other media. The goal was to understand how and why the public feels as it does about the PR profession and what that means to practitioners and the news media.

The program included presentations from four public relations professors. Two of the panelists, Karen Miller Russell (Georgia) and Carol Ames (California State-Fullerton), considered the role of the PR practitioner from textual analysis and agenda-setting viewpoints. Emily Kinsky (West Texas A&M) and Margot Opdycke Lamme (Alabama) examined how the

portrayal of PR practitioners affected students' choice of occupation and their perceptions of the field they wanted to enter while also offering suggestions for "teachable moments."

The panelists' presentation papers are featured here. Russell (in what she described as a work in progress) provides readers with a look at her study of 89 mystery novels in which the PR person is a lead character. Ames follows up on her 2010 *IJPC Journal* article "Queer Eye for the PR Guy in American Films 1937-2009" by using agenda-setting theory to look at the testy relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists in the context of PR image consultants' typical ways of handling celebrity crises and makeovers. She writes that although the image of the image consultant has been generally improved in recent years, the PR profession's image and status is now threatened by lack of transparency, instant transmission of information, and stealth marketing options connected with new uses of digital and social media.

As for the other two papers, Kinsky looks at television portrayals of PR practitioners by summarizing studies about *The West Wing*, *The Apprentice*, and other prime-time shows as well as studies involving the use of PR terms on network news. Finally, Lamme takes us into the classroom where students are engaged in critically examining PR practices and insights. She argues that popular culture television shows such as *The West Wing* and *Absolutely Fabulous* can spark discussion about the portrayal of political press secretaries and practitioners who own their own firms.

We hope that you enjoy this special edition of *The IJPC Journal* and that it will spark additional work in this important research area. As always, we invite your feedback and submissions.

*Matthew C. Ehrlich
Sammye Johnson
Joe Saltzman*