THE LIFEBLOOD OF HOLLYWOOD:
MOTION PICTURE PUBLICITY DEPARTMENTS
PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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THE LIFEBOLOOD OF HOLLYWOOD:
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PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

Motion pictures have played a major role in shaping America's culture and lifestyles during the twentieth century. Movies have been used as an entertainment medium, catalyst for social reform and leaders in fashion and lifestyle trends. Each generation has had its own film stars, such as Douglas Fairbanks, Joan Crawford, Elizabeth Taylor and John Travolta, who have served as heartthrobs, role models and examples of persons who have achieved the goals that the movie-goers wish to achieve.

Film stars did not become larger than life images and role models on talent alone, although talent is important in movie stardom. Stars need fans and admirers who will buy tickets and keep these stars employed. Publicity brings screen personalities to the people and enables these people to identify with and learn more about these personalities. For this task of bringing the stars to the people, motion picture departments and occasionally stars themselves hired publicity agents or formed publicity departments to sell their players to the public.

These publicity departments and agents created the star system which we have today. They took common public relations practices, including media releases, arranging interviews and press conferences, and creating favorable public images, and added extra creative touches
to form the public's idea of Hollywood and its employees. These departments would give stars new names, background histories, build-ups in magazines and newspapers, and molded them into the screen character they were to symbolize. These agents and departments would often go one step further. Under the direction and order of their studio bosses, publicity people would develop or make up romances among their contract players, planned weddings and fought elopements, covered up scandals and controlled many stars' personal lives.

The general term "Publicity" refers to free promotion given to a person, event or subject. Activities, including ground-breaking ceremonies, media conferences and coverage of a topic, fall into this definition. Work done by publicity departments, except for advertising and making coming attraction films, would also fall under this definition. The history and contributions of Hollywood publicity departments, along with their techniques and ability to sell stars, will be examined in this paper.

When the motion picture was beginning, around the turn of the century, publicity played no part in the new industry. In fact, publicity was avoided as much as possible. People who appeared in films were given no billing or identification, because producers felt that name acknowledgement would lead to public recognition. This recognition would enable performers to demand higher salaries. During this period, certain actors became popular without billing. Studios received fan mail addressed to "Broncho Billy", "Little Mary", or "The Man With the Sad Eyes". This recognition partially progressed due to D. W. Griffith's experimentation with the close-up, a film technique which studio bosses disliked at first. Because it was unique and fresh, the motion picture industry was
in a position to produce a new form of hero in American society with its actors. Most stage stars, except for Sarah Bernhardt whose film debut was a spectacular box office success, failed on the screen because of a lack of screen personality. Young, neophyte actors were more adaptable to the new medium than stylized stage actors. These young film actors were the first ones with the potential of having screen personalities created for them. The first attempt of consciously creating a star occurred in 1910 with actress Florence Lawrence. Carl Laemmle, head of Independent Motion Picture Company (IMP), the leading independent studio of the time, used his journalism instinct for human interest and advertising inventiveness for a new sales gimmick in promoting Lawrence to the public. Lawrence, also known as the "Biograph Girl", was the first actor to be mentioned in a newspaper. This coverage was the report of her death on a hazily described street in New York on March 10, 1910. The report's author is believed to have been Laemmle. Premature death publicity surrounded this girl who had just signed with Laemmle's company. The death was soon found to be a lie, but Lawrence's popularity grew from this notice. Two weeks following her "death", a St. Louis Post-Dispatch magazine devoted its entire front cover and part of an inside page to the Biograph Girl, who also gave an interview and posed for pictures for the magazines. A week after this magazine coverage, Lawrence appeared before a large crowd in St. Louis, a first for movie stars and fans. This event also was the first case of exploitation of a film personality. Her popularity grew so rapidly that the crowds which greeted her were larger than those which met the President the week before.

Soon other independents realized the tremendous value of free
publicity which could be obtained from a news-hungry press. They began
to turn their own performers into public figures. Companies which fought
this trend lost their performers to the attraction of fame and fortune.
The trend toward star system being an essential ingredient in movie
marketing had begun.6

With the foundation set for motion picture publicity, studios
started to hire people to handle these duties. Christopher Finch and
Linda Rosenkrantz, in their book Gone Hollywood, described the roles
of these newly formed publicity departments as such:

Publicity was the lifeblood of Hollywood, and its top operators
were men, although unknown to the general public, wielded
considerable power. Close to the executives who made the
key decisions, they were the guardians of the industry's
secrets, and they effectively controlled the channels of
communication between the stars and their fans.7

These publicity practitioners worked under the philosophy that
almost any news was good news. They believed that keeping a name before
the public was their major goal. The context which the name appeared
was a secondary consideration. This strategy worked for short term
goals, but many people in the long run had problems believing Hollywood
was a group of normal people making a normal living. When a star's
publicity became too unbelievable, their popularity died and ended their
career.8

Publicity departments and practices went into operation during the
1910s. Many top performers of the day, including Douglas Fairbanks,
Charles Chaplin and Tom Mix, owe part of their success to publicity.
America's biggest star of this period, Mary Pickford, also benefited
from publicity and having a star image. Audiences originally knew
her as the "Girl With the Curl". Although this youthful image would
haunt her in later years when she wanted to play older, more mature
roles, Pickford gained fame with her curls and her sweetness. Studio publicity departments cashed in on the "Girl With the Curl" tag, and promoted Pickford this way. To everyone's amazement, this billing was box office magic for the studios. In 1914, Pickford picked up another title which would be used often and exploited by her publicity people. This tag originally appeared on the marque of David Graumann's San Francisco Theatre and read:

TESS OF THE STORM COUNTRY
MARY PICKFORD
AMERICA'S SWEETHEART

This title brought Pickford much more name recognition and became such a popular term, that in later years "America's Sweetheart" would become synonymous with Mary Pickford.

At the same time as Pickford and other stars' careers were quickly building up steam due to their publicity, Fox Studios took the publicity process one step further. They molded a starlet into the first prefabricated personality, created by a publicity department and a studio. Fox Studios decided to cast an unknown actress with no previous notice on the screen for the part of the seductress in the film A Fool There Was. Theodosia Goodman, a Cincinnati native whose father was a tailor, was selected for the role of the exotic seductress. In order to prepare the public for this unknown in this role, Fox's publicity department remodeled every part of Goodman to fit the image of a sex siren, beginning with her name. "Theda Bara" became her screen name, and was said to have been an anagram formed from the words Arab and death. Stories stating this were circulated, but the name most likely came from a contraction of Theodosia and the name Barangers on her mother's side. Fox's publicity department felt the
anagram story suggested the exotic personality of their creation, so they built their unbelievable publicity campaign around the anagram idea. 11

Theda's mystique, the publicity people said, resulted from Theda's birth in the shadow of the Sphinx in the Sahara Desert. Her mother deserted the family and became a well-known European stage actress, while Theda was brought up by her multi-talented father who sent her to Europe to be trained for the stage. The public at the time took the fantastic stories as gospel, motivating the press agents to write new, wilder copy for their "Serpent of the Nile." 12 Another story had Bara born in Egypt, child of a shiek and a princess, who was weaned on serpent's blood, given in mystic marriage to the Sphinx, and was fought over by nomadic tribesmen. Bara was clairvoyant and lustful, with an emphasis placed on her supernatural powers since Fox put her in a role which consisted of her mesmerising and ruining a succession of besotted lovers, without any reason given in the film. 13

Following this publicity campaign, Bara went on tour in 1914, prior to the release of A Fool There Was. She brought along a set of props designed for a femme fatale and gave her press conferences in hotel rooms filled with incense, to add atmosphere to her character. This tour proved two things. First, film stars could be made without necessarily being in any films. Bara was the forerunner of a line of newsworthy women, among them pin-ups, models, premiere starlets and celebrities known for being known, who flourished by using the attributes of stardom as a substitute for it. Bara's prepublicity, along with the public's curiosity about a woman who was filled with sinful love and sex appeal, instantly confirmed her and the film's success. Bara also
proved that the public could not be fooled for long. Her "vamp" (from Vampire) personality became a laughing stock after a few years, while the image stuck with her when she attempted to play non-vamp parts.\textsuperscript{13} William Fox and his publicity men Johnny Goldfang and Al Selig accomplished their mission, building a star who was able to make 39 successful films before the public tired of her. Fox wanted her to be successful, after all, she was being paid $150 a week.\textsuperscript{14} Fox and Bara left a mark on publicity and the film industry. They demonstrated the prefabricated personality could succeed and gave a thrust to the cynicism that took an early hold on the industry, which to some appeared to be a sin capital and totally unbelievable.\textsuperscript{15}

Bara's success motivated other studios of the day to launch stars with fantastic and contrived publicity. Promotional tours emerged as common practice in studio procedures. Publicity "tricks", similar to Theda Bara's, were used to launch the careers of such stars as Marion Davies, Rudolph Valentino, Kim Novak, and Marilyn Monroe. Theda Bara may no longer be remembered for her acting, but she found a place in cinema history for having inaugurated the synthetic star.\textsuperscript{16}

The years following the Bara campaign saw Hollywood and its stars gain more prestige and money. Publicity departments also grew more important. They were involved in all phases of motion pictures, from fashioning coming attraction releases, writing ad lines and press books, to coordinating entire pictorial layouts.\textsuperscript{17} Studios relied heavily upon their publicity personnel. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) had a policy where persons not employed by the studio were not allowed anywhere on the lot without a publicity man or woman. A visitor's every move was guarded and reported to studio heads.\textsuperscript{18} MGM's publicity
department included unit publicists, planters and agents who handled some of the main stars. All MGM publicity staff members had two major functions. They gathered information on the sets, wrote copy for distribution, and channeled information to gossip columns and magazines. Each also took responsibility for at least two of the contract players. The publicist had the duty of watching over his/her charges, including writing stories for them, accompanying them to interviews and keeping away unwanted attention.19

In the early years of cinema, publicity consisted of these above-mentioned responsibilities and staging stunts, which attracted a lot of media attention. A famous press agent of this period, Harry Reinchenbach, displayed a keen sense for the newsworthy and outrageous. Although based in New York, he is considered a major influence on early Hollywood publicity. His famous stunts included smuggling a lion into a Times Square hotel, and registering it as a man pseudonamed T. R. Zann, just as a jungle picture was about to be released. He also caused Francis X. Bushman to be followed by a mob by simply devising holes in Bushman's coat pockets, which were full of nickels. The crowd followed to trinkling of nickels on the sidewalk. Reinchenbach also gathered eight macho-type men to Manhattan, registered them as Turks at the Hotel Majestic, and spread the word that they were searching for a missing virgin. Much was written in the newspapers about these men, to the dismay of their editors who soon noticed advertisements in their publications which featured these men. The advertisements concerned a new Priscilla Dean picture, The Virgin of Stamboul.20

Stunts took up a great deal of a publicist's time, but they also had other duties. One was outlining the star's build-up campaign.
The studios learned to package their product, the stars, by creating personalities and selecting stories which further enhanced their image. After this was completed, high-power publicity was used to sell their product to the public. Done properly, publicity departments could persuade the public that almost anyone was a star. This belief caused some fine actors and actresses to be looked over for more salable and favorable stars. This work also evolved personality cults around such names as Greta Garbo and Rudolph Valentino, which added to their popularity and box office success.21

Build-ups required much work by publicity departments. The first thing studios did after signing a new contract player was to form their campaign. Often, this was done slowly, in order to avoid saturation of the star in the public's eye. Names often were the first things changed to fit the image of the performer. Male stars were given names which sounded more masculine, patriotic, Christian and Anglo-Saxon. Marion Michael Morrison sounded too effeminate, so the performer was dubbed John Wayne. Julius Garfinkle became John Garfield. Paul Muni was formerly Muni Weisenfreund. William Franklin Beedle was billed as William Holden. Male stars had other personal data altered by publicity department personnel in order to fit their screen images. Tom Mix, a cowboy star who hailed from the east, changed his state of origin to a western state to conform to the idea of masculinity and myths of conquering the western frontier. Humphrey Bogart, born December 25, 1899, had his birthdate changed for publicity releases to Christmas Day, 1900, to epitomize the energy of the new century.22

Stars had their names changed to fit many reasons. Carole Lombard was christened Jean Peters. Fox changed her name to Carol after she
signed with the studio. The publicity people felt it lacked glamour and another contract player, House Peters, was often the butt of many local jokes. Believing that two syllable names were more effective for female stars, Carol took the name of close family friends, the Lombards. The e on her first name came by accident in a film's billing. Arlington Baugh was given the name Ramsey Taylor after signing with MGM, but studio head Louis B. Mayer did not want to risk this title and gave him the name of two of his more popular players, Robert Young and Robert Taylor. Frank Cooper took his new name, Gary, from his agent who was born in Gary, Indiana, and because a friend said the city sounded romantic.23

The classic example of finding a name to fit a personality is the story of Joan Crawford. Discovered by a MGM agent in New York while on a chorus line in the middle 1920s, Crawford was brought to Hollywood. She was then known as Lucille Le Seuer. Publicity men rushed her around to photograph her shapely figure in bathing suits, low-cut dresses and other outfits which exposed as much flesh as possible. Lucille was given many well-publicized dates with playboys and actors, and was reported engaged many times. She was well-known before she appeared before a camera. However, Le Seuer was not on the screen until a new name was given to her. MGM considered her name too French and difficult for most Americans to pronounce. With the same reasoning that Garbo sounded like garbage, studio personnel thought Le Seuer sounded like sewer. The studio felt this name would ruin her. A national magazine contest followed, with a bed-ridden woman from Albany, New York winning $500 for suggesting Joan Crawford. The publicity department involved the fans in creating the Crawford image, one which would stay popular for many decades.24
Once a name was decided, stars were carefully groomed before their images were built. Under Harold Strickling, publicity head for MGM, a new performer filled out an elaborate form containing biographical data. Basic information, such as name, real name if different, date of birth and education were on this form. Also included were tidbits of information which could be of particular use to a publicist. Contract players were asked to name personal favorites on a variety of topics, other ambitions, favorite roles, relatives in the theatre or in films, business activities, hobbies and pets. The MGM principle concerning publicity was that a person was to be a star for a long time, so the image conveyed should resemble the one they live and can feel comfortable with. On occasion, the star would become comfortable with the image and lifestyle which the publicist dreamt up for him. Clark Gable was to be presented as a typical, all-American outdoorsman in his build-up. Gable had little experience with outdoors life but he thought it was one which could appeal to him. Soon he became an avid outdoorsman. Strickling's department also had to brief child stars of all-American answers to questions reporters may ask concerning world topics. Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney and Lana Turner were often given answers parents would like to hear children answer, since many parents modeled their own children after these young stars.25

Child stars also had personal data altered to fit their screen image. Shirley Temple's mother agreed to the shaving of one year of Shirley's age so she could meet the Fox policy of keeping her younger longer. At Shirley's twelfth birthday party, she and the public found out that she was actually thirteen.26
A typical publicity build-up can be shown in the case of Irene Bentley, a Fox starlet who never gained fame or fortune. She was billed "The Girl Fox Believes In." Items from Fox's press kit claimed that Bentley was in The Daughters of the American Revolution, a direct descendant of a rebel army corporal, and a promising member of New York's social circle before she decided upon a career. Bentley could not be found later in any Daughters of the American Revolution membership files. This type of proper background manufactured by publicity departments for every new starlet was once acknowledged by Louella Parson in a column where she publicly thanked a studio for signing a young actress without identifying her as a socialite.27

Humans were not alone in being built up in studio publicity campaigns. Warner Brothers signed a dog and his manager in the 1920s and made the animal a major star by using tactics human stars used. Rin Tin Tin, named after a good luck charm placed in World War I plane cockpits, had his publicity done by Hal Wallis, who later became a major producer. The interest in the dog was so strong that the releases were blindly accepted by the press in the 1920s. After the premiere of his first movie, When the North Begins, Rin Tin Tin achieved popularity by going on stage at the Lowes' State Theatre in Los Angeles and doing his favorite tricks, to thunderous applause. Following this event, he and his trainer, Lee Duncan, went on a four month promotional tour where the dog visited countless hospitals and sanitariums, plus appearing at many successive openings. Rin Tin Tin received 12,000 fan letters weekly, more than most human stars of the day. Boys pinned Rin Tin Tin badges to their lapels. People fed their dogs Ken-L Ration dog biscuits.
with "Rinny's" face on the box. Rin Tin Tin also barked on the radio for his fans and rumors appeared which said he was the embodiment of God. The canine star was so popular that after flying into Roosevelt Field in New York, he needed a police escort. Rin Tin Tin proved that anyone, including animals, could be made a star with Hollywood publicity skills.

When dealing with human clients, publicity practitioners would keep their ears open for any opportunity which could draw publicity mileage for the star. Greta Garbo was being given the usual publicity build-up when she acquired agent Harry Eddington to be in charge of her publicity. Garbo was tired of posing for photos in track suits, tennis shorts and swimsuits like other starlets. After posing for pictures with the MGM lion and in other cheesecake positions, Garbo complained that she should not have to do this. She reasoned that Lillian Gish did not pose and she was a star. Eddington suggested that Garbo make herself hard to find until she was actually making a movie. She granted no interviews and stopped posing for pictures. This counter move had the desired effects. Garbo's reclusiveness developed and became natural for her screen identity. MGM used this image and personality trait when they advertised her first sound movie, Anna Christie, with only two words—"Garbo Talks." Good publicity people kept their eyes and ears open to find small, rather insignificant tidbits and blowing them up for the star's advantage. Myrna Loy's publicity people let the world know that gangster John Dillinger considered her his favorite actress, and that Dillinger was killed after seeing one of her crime films, Manhattan Melodrama. In 1937, Janet Gaynor joined other stars in visiting the White House to help launch the March of Dimes campaign
with President Roosevelt. David Selznick's publicity director, Russell Birdwell, attended this event and was able to elicit a comment from Roosevelt concerning Gaynor. The President said she was as cute as a button. Birdwell made sure that the press everywhere reported on the status of this remark. Birdwell also overheard Carole Lombard complaining about a foreign director who was upset about paying high taxes. Lombard, who was one of the highest paid Americans at the time, stated that she did not mind paying part of her salary to taxes because she felt lucky to earn it. Birdwell passed this statement on to the Internal Revenue Service, who along with many politicians, nationally praised her for her patriotism.

Publicity departments also spent great amounts of time and energy making their contract players look and act like royalty. Gloria Swanson served as the chief representative of this illusion during the 1920s. Her name brought the feeling of elegance and extravagance, which fans enjoyed seeing and hearing about. Money, stardom and publicity enabled Swanson to live up to this fiction of beautiful living. In one interview, Swanson described her lifestyle this way:

In those days, the public wanted us to live like kings and queens. So we did- and why not? We were making more money than we ever dreamed existed and there was no reason to believe that it would ever stop......The public didn't want the truth and I shouldn't have bothered giving it to them.

Stardom, especially in the 1920s, involved creating illusions for fans about movie idols, in order to make these stars interesting and the types of persons a movie-goer could daydream about.

Stars may have had beautiful lifestyles designed by studios and publicity departments, but they also had to live under the rule of the studio and publicity department. Joan Crawford, for example, had her
lifestyle taught to her by her studio. She knew she needed to be popular and sell tickets in order to stay employed. Crawford was lectured to avoid scandal because she was considered extraordinary by ordinary people, and possible scandals could ruin her career. The studio guided her, protected her in various situations and she always obeyed her studio. 33

The area which publicity departments most often showed their control over stars is the area of romantic life. Happy marriages and normal lives in Hollywood, as elsewhere, do not get much publicity. A good number of Hollywood's amorous activities were deliberately engineered by publicity officers. Romantic hoopla was unequaled as a method of building up personalitites quickly. Infatuations of fledging actors and actresses were often plotted with as much care as their personal appearances and tours. But this coverage had to be done correctly. Life Magazine once stated that Victor Mature discovered he was photographed best when snapped with small, blonde girls. Mature appeared with 80 different small blondes in one year. Leading men in need of ballyhoo were ordered to escort movie queens to night clubs, while promising young actresses were maneuvered into the limelight with matinee idols. Reporters and photographers were tipped off on where and what was happening. The studios paid the food and entertainment bills in these operations. 34

The press often realized these romances were phony but that did not make them any less newsworthy. An actress' outing with a promising player may be as cold as a business luncheon for a 4-H group but her fame demanded news space regardless of her motivation. One actress, Judith Barrett, protested to her studio about the number of men the
press agents had matched her up with and refused to be an accessory to further romantic publicity tie-ups. Barrett argued that loving three men in four months bordered on promiscuity and made her look silly in the eyes of the public. 35

Unmarried actors were often drafted by their publicity departments for the cause of conspicuous romance. David Niven, until he enlisted in World War II, was a favorite party-goer and was alleged to be enchanted with at least three women a month. James Stewart was rumored to have dated 263 glamour girls. No unmarried female star of any stature could go a month without being reported pursued by at least one male of appropriate fame or promise. A method, as well as a madness of the Hollywood romantic publicity whirlwind, was studio round-robin dating. A good example of this dating is the record Tyrone Power had between September 1937 to September 1938. During this period, movie columns and fan magazines reported he was enamored of Loretta Young, Sonja Henie, Janet Gaynor, Simone Simon and Arlene Whalen. The press was filled with copy of Powers and one or another of these actresses, who also reported to be jealous of at least two of the other girlfriends. The coincidence of this romance group is that all were employed by 20th Century-Fox at the time. At the same time, the actresses were reported to be credited with the following:

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<thead>
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<th>LORETTA YOUNG</th>
<th>SONJA HENIE</th>
<th>JANET GAYNOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tyrone Power</td>
<td>Tyrone Power</td>
<td>Tyrone Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cesar Romero</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Greene</td>
<td>Richard Greene</td>
<td>Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.</td>
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<td>George Brent</td>
<td>Michael Brooke</td>
<td>Adrian</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARLENE WHALEN</td>
<td>SIMONE SIMON</td>
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<td>Tyrone Power</td>
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<td>Cesar Romero</td>
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<td>Richard Greene</td>
<td>Richard Greene</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Brooke</td>
<td>Gene Mackey</td>
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Power and the rest of 20th Century-Fox group were not the only ones involved in round-robin romances. Other studio publicity departments at the time also used romance as bait for the media. George Brent, at the time he was linked to Loretta Young, was attached to Olivia de Havilland, Bette Davis and Ann Sheridan, while all were Warner Brothers stars. Some romances in Hollywood were real during this period, but publicity departments jumped ahead of computer dating services by bringing employees together to obtain press coverage.

Weddings were also popular and handled by publicity departments. More often, they were avoided or hidden by these staffs. Joan Crawford and Franchot Tone had publicity personnel help in obtaining their marriage licences quietly and having a simple ceremony. Gable and Lombard's wedding was a high-level, high priority secret of the publicity department. Otto Winkler, Gable's personal publicity man, found an out-of-the-way place for the ceremony and a honeymoon route the press could not follow, in order to make the honeymoon as nice as possible for his client and his bride. Elopements were often charged with a lot of strong publicity potential, since they were surprise and dramatic events. Publicity people did not appreciate contract players going over their heads and eloping, even when a couple wanted a quiet ceremony. The mentioned cases were more the exception than the rule. Publicists liked having photographers, parades and collective hysteria. One pair of actors eloped to Santa Barbara, to the surprise of their studios, and were ordered back home for pictures for fan magazines. They posed for pictures half of the night and then left on a secluded honeymoon.

In addition to handling weddings, some publicity departments also worked with other aspects of their players' married lives. One
publicity department hosted a press conference on the set where Lew Ayres was filming, followed by a press reception at the Ambassador Hotel, in order to announce Ayres' engagement to Ginger Rogers. RKO Studios kept track of the marriage happenings, and in 1936 the studio issued a statement on behalf of the Ayres announcing their amicable separation. 38

Night life activities fell under the realm of publicity departments also. Actors with 5 a.m. studio calls could not sustain the night life they were believed to have had. An eager publicity person would happily cooperate with the media to maintain the Hollywood cafe society image. For the press' benefit, stars like George Brent and Loretta Young would be picked up in a limousine and taken to Trocadero long enough to have a few pictures snapped. The stars would then return to the lot for a few more scenes and then go home to bed. 39

Scandals were likewise handled by publicity departments. Following the suicide of Jean Harlow's husband, Paul Bern, in the early 1930s, MGM's staff kept the media away from Harlow and Clark Gable, her costar at the time, to avoid any words linking the two together with the suicide. The publicity people also kept Bern's funeral quiet and dignified. Until this day, no one is sure of all the details and questions surrounding the suicide, due to the studio's cover-up. 40

Although publicity departments were responsible for covering up scandals, one studio agent later admitted to making up law suits and court cases, all which the studio could win, in order to keep the studio's name in the limelight. Southern California citizens were ready to cover up scandals, at a price. In events of drunken brawls, publicity people would be sent over with money to square the barman
and make sure the police were not called in. If a contract player, director or other studio representative were involved in a scandal, big money would also be involved. Publicity people covered up affairs, homosexual discoveries and drunken driving charges for their clients. They often spent entire days and pockets full of money bailing out stars. Publicity people did not want to lose box office appeal and the images they built around the stars because of one incident. The movie industry, due to its importance to the area and profits from films, ended up paying through the nose for publicity cover-up protection.41

Publicity people were also in charge of keeping promotional material available. Staff members often circulated pictures of stars resting between takes of films or stars busy answering their fan mail. Press junkets were formed by departments for the cause of promoting films. The 42th Street Train, promoting the film of the same title, carried Warner Brothers stars across the country for fans to obtain a glimpse of them. These junkets often invited the media on board at stops, and gave them refreshments, access to the stars and opportunities to enjoy the train's lounge facilities. Publicity people also played active roles in parades, which were given much coverage. Warner Brothers and MGM were among those who entered floats in Franklin Roosevelt's first inauguration parade.42

Bad publicity, scandalous material excluded, was dealt by publicity staff members also. When Ann Sheridan was voted the actress least likely to succeed by Harvard students, the attack was countered with pictures of Sheridan posed next to a mule, which were sent to thousands of newspapers. A caption was included which commented on the salaries of
Hollywood actresses compared to Harvard graduates. Robert Taylor was once accused of being unmanly when a journalist said he turned her on less than her own husband did and that Taylor probably had no hair on his chest. Publicity people aided Taylor, by planning a media conference, for the purpose of Taylor regaining his manhood and avoiding wild fans waiting to tear his shirt off.43

Publicity departments in the 1920s and 1930s showed a level of creativity equal to their forefathers in the cinema's early years. Stunts were still great ways to attract news coverage. MGM arranged to fly Leo the Lion, their mascot, from California to New York in the 1920s. Flying was considered newsworthy by itself in this era, which made the story with the lion draw more press attraction. A plane was designed to hold the lion and a famous aviator. The flight attracted more attention than intended when the plane was forced to crash-land in a remote Arizona canyon and could not be found for several days.44

Russell Birdwell devised a variety of unusual stunts in this era. For one film he was promoting, So Ends the Night, Birdwell set up a press conference for a bit player named Gerta Rozen. Rozen announced that she would stand in front of the United Artists studio and remove an article of clothing a day until United Artists gave her better roles. The studio did this before lingerie showed, but the event attracted attention and was billed as the world's slowest striptease. Birdwell would also get his actress clientele together and announce that some fraternity awarded them Miss this or that. For example, Birdwell spread the word that Martha Scott was voted Miss Carefree Legs by one group. Other stars would be given titles by their publicity people in order to build a sexy image. Clara "It Girl" Bow and Ann "Oomph Girl"
Sheridan are examples of titles given to promote an image. Political recognition also had little to do with acting or film skills, yet brought a great deal of attention to a star. Birdwell often arranged for stars, who were beginning to lose popularity, to have invitations to political dinners. These invitations revived the public's interest in the star, plus allowed the political world an opportunity to okay and approve the star.45

Publicity releases of the 1920s and 1930s contained a potpourri of topics. In one grotesque report, actor Pat O'Brien was forced to remove a tattoo from his chest for screen appearance reasons. O'Brien was supposedly so attached to the tattoo that he had all of his skin peeled off and made into a lampshade.46 Phobias were the content of one 20th Century-Fox release, which revealed a variety of fears for almost every star at the studio. The release sounded like everyone signed with 20th Century-Fox was paranoid about something.47

One of the most talked about and successful releases of the pre-World War II era came from publicist Pete Smith. Smith wanted to make Sam Goldwyn, a famed producer of the day, the talk of the town. He asked Goldwyn to name the thirteen real actors in Hollywood, but to leave one name out in order to avoid making enemies. Goldwyn announced twelve names and left the remaining one anonymous. Stars and newspapers talked about it and tried to decide who the other actor could be.48

This publicity work paid off for the stars and their studios. Gary Cooper became so popular, that when one of his films, Northwest Mounted Police, was screened in Chicago, the Loop saw two days of frenzied activities by fans who wanted to attend a showing. 12,000 women entered a contest to have the privilege of sitting next to Cooper at one screening.49
Cordell Hull's reciprocal trade agreement with Brazil competed with headlines about Robert Taylor giving a tennis court to Barbara Stanwyck for her birthday. Hollywood's publicity and ability to build stars has also been attributed to the mob of frenzied fans who swarmed New York's Pennsylvania Station, waiting for Edward G. Robinson, while overlooking another passenger, Herbert Hoover.\textsuperscript{50}

During this period, the media, especially the print media, became tools and assistants to publicity departments. Radio shows and personal appearances were important, but in the print media lied most of the publicity person's power and comradeship.

Fan magazines played a major role in bringing stars to the public and creating interest in these personalities. Cinema information originally was carried in publications like \textit{Scientific American} and \textit{Popular Mechanic}, which dealt with the technical aspects of film. Separate publications developed when censorship efforts brought more interest to the content of films. \textit{Literary Guild} and other reviews began to summarize film activity. Popular pieces of the day, including \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, \textit{Harper's} and \textit{Atlantic}, featured occasional copy on the "motion picture craze." Trade publications were also being initiated at this time. Soon larger newspapers began to devote space to films, which started to advertise in these papers about the same time. Small papers started to carry syndicated matter dealing with films. With the discovery of Florence Lawrence and the star image in 1910, film players and their films quickly became major interests of the American public. Film stars were money makers (Charles Chaplin earned $15,000 a week in 1915) and people were taking a more voyeuristic look at their lives. Eventually, an entire
form of subliterature was created about movie stars to cater to the growing demand of their fans. In 1911, the first fan magazine, *Motion Picture Story* was established and became an instant success. By 1914, it had a circulation of 270,000 which quickly spawned other publications like *Photoplay* in 1912 and *Motion Picture Story* in 1913. These issues contained plot summaries at first. Eventually tales about the stars' lifestyles and their biographies took over the editorial space. Newspapers followed this trend, and beginning in 1914, the *New York Herald* began a series of full-page, illustrated articles on the movie industry in its Sunday magazine section.51

Fan magazine popularity grew, along with the publicity department's involvement in their editorial context. Information from studios about Marion Davies' white and green mansion or James Dunn's brand new Stinson Reliant airplane became enjoyable reading for people during the depression years and publicity departments took full advantage of this fact. People liked this material because these stars proved there was still hope to gain fame, fortune and the luxuries of life. These celebrities were a part of an instant mythology of Hollywood, which inspired admiration and aspiration instead of envy. A star's popularity also was aided by having millions of Americans getting more involved with them on a pseudo-personal basis. Hollywood style and character was created by the fan literature, especially during the 1930s. Screen personalities were shown in these magazines as real people, and parts of their private traits could be revealed and later added to the screen character they symbolized. People learned that William Powell was a recluse who shunned publicity by reading lavishly illustrated articles in four magazines during the same month. These same readers learned that Lana Turner was discovered
eating a sundae at Schwab's Drug Store and soon became a star. The
success of the fan magazine was a cooperative effort of the myth-makers,
or publicity people and writers, and the army of readers willing to be
mythified.52

Fan magazines also contributed to the publicity departments' efforts
to personalized stars for their fans. Stars often revealed their
pasttimes in fan magazines, with the sources of these revelations being
publicity releases. The goal of these stories was to make the star
share characteristics and interest with fans, who would show more
interest in the star. Topics written about included Robert Montgomery
announcing he read philosophy, psychology, sociology and political
matter. Montgomery admitted that he could hold his own against
scientists, engineers, medical men and learned professors. Deanna
Durbin told readers that she read over thirty books annually, while
Barbara Stanwyck revealed that she enjoyed serious things, like a lake
by Carat or a book by Thackeray. Ray Milland stated in one publication
that "I like astronomy, love to ponder on the composition and possibilities
of planets....Right now I'm wading through 24 volumes of the Encyclopedia
Britanica."53 Stars went to fan magazines for advice, allowing readers
an opportunity to play a more active role in the film making process.
Joan Crawford received her name through a fan magazine contest. Mary
Pickford, through Photoplay, asked her fans what types of roles they wanted
her to play. Pickford did not heed their advice for long, and soon
gave up the "America's Sweetheart" stereotype to become a flapper-type
at the age of 33. Her career went downhill following this change.54

Many articles were also written to strengthen the positive image
of Hollywood, by showing that stars may have fame and fortune, but they
still had hearts and were human. Constance Bennett admitted to supporting four needy families. Clara Bow and Joan Blondell outlined their approaches to motherhood. Publicity departments also submitted personality profiles and pseudo-controversial features about their players to build public interest or just to keep their names in the limelight. Typical titles and headlines for these articles include:

"I'm No Gigolo!" Says George Raft"
"How the Stars Spend Their Fortunes"
"The Inside Story of Joan's Divorce"
"What's the Matter With Lombard"
"Clara Bow—What I Will Tell My Baby"
"The Most Revealing Interview Janet Gaynor Ever Gave"
"Can Hollywood Hold Errol Flynn"
"The Truth About the Mysterious Miss Loy"55

These publications had predominately female readership. Fan magazines served as inspirations for midwest girls who dreamt of California vacations in the arms of handsome movie stars. These publications played up to the romantic interests of these readers, by placing staple columns, such as Miss Lonelyhearts, with advice for the lovelorn nominally given by a star like Bette Davis. Ghost writers and publicity departments usually penned features that appeared under a star's by-line. Magazine photo sessions at the Vendome or Brown Derby also were organized by publicity departments. Publicists were the unseen third parties at interview sessions and outings who guided the conversation from possible problems. Except for brief periods when the magazines took digs at studios or covered risky and controversial material, such as an article on "Hollywood's Unmarried Husbands and Wives", which prompted many couples to become legally married in order to avoid scandal, fan magazines generally served as extended arms of the studio publicity departments. Reporters for these publications for the most part were free-lance writers or newspaper people who moonlighted or wanted a different career. Their
questions usually were turned in prior to interviews for studio approval, and press agents sat in on interviews. The story's text needed the publicity department's okay before it was published. Censorship by the studios was prevalent. For example, one interview revealed that Virginia Bruce liked to dance until the wee hours of morning. The studio rephrased this statement to say that Bruce liked to get all of her dancing done by midnight. Flatness of style and content showed in these articles, since studios okayed material and story angles came from publicists who offered the same story to many reporters at the same time. But, despite their quality and inaccuracy in many features, fan magazines prove to be excellent examples of the interest people had in Hollywood and the type of material and control offered by studio publicists of the day. 56

Motion picture publicity departments additionally relied on newspapers, which were the largest and most widely circulated media form of the time period, for assistance and coverage. Newspapers, as well as magazines, had great interest in movies because readers enjoyed them and their advertising became important sources of revenue. Studios took every advantage of obtaining newspaper space. When MGM signed Marion Davies in the 1920s, William Randolph Hearst, Davies' lover and owner of the Hearst newspaper chain, moved his film company to MGM. This action cut down on competition and gave MGM more advertising and editorial space in the Hearst papers. 57

The public could not get enough of Hollywood. Their interest can be shown in the number of press corps representatives in Hollywood, which in its heyday, was the third largest in the country, following New York and Washington. There were 395 accredited permanent Hollywood correspondents
in 1940, which included 89 newspapermen, 77 U.S. magazine reporters and 63 foreign press representatives, including one from the Vatican. In short, there were three to four journalists per star of any consequence, including singing cowboys and has-beens. Studio publicity departments kept the copy flowing to these reporters, as shown in 1939 when 15,709 media releases were submitted to the Advertising Advisory Council and 109,083 movie stills were distributed to the media. Wholly factual information in these releases may be hard to find, because license with the truth was taken so freely that anything originating from a publicity department, including most newspaper and magazine stories, could automatically receive some doubt.58

Out of the world of newspapers developed an integral member of the publicity process, the columnist. Read daily by millions of Americans, this press group could spread news faster and more effectively than any other source available. Columnists were experts in exploiting the contrived romances of Hollywood and were able to keep news hot for weeks. Of course, they had help from shrewd publicity minds employed to spread alarms of impending marriages, stormy separations, reconciliations and generally impassioned affairs.59 In the columns' peak period, Louella Parsons of the Hearst papers and Hedda Hopper reigned as queens of the gossip columns. Their combined readership was estimated at about 75 million daily. They either liked or disliked stars, and their columns treated them accordingly. Stars pampered the columnists in hopes of receiving favorable notices. Carole Lombard paid regular visits to both Parsons and Hopper, occasionally with gifts for the ladies.60

Gossip columnists enjoyed the gifts and being pampered, which studios often gladly did to secure good relations with them. Hopper had
a fondness for wild hats. She often received boxes with hats from publicity departments, along with information on stars or movies which were opening. This information often received column space. Parsons would make trips to studios whenever a holiday or birthday came up. Her secretary alerted publicity departments and publicity-minded producers that she would like presents ready while on these round-robin trips.61 These presents and pampering antics did do the studios some good, considering the high news level readers placed on the columns. On the day Mussolini invaded and began his attack on Albania, Parsons told her readers that the dullness of the past week was lifted when Daryl Zanuck admitted he had bought all right to The Bluebird for Shirley Temple. Parsons' column received more interest than the Mussolini story.62

Publicity departments and newspapers should equally share the blame in spreading exaggerated truths in columns. Hollywood's publicity policy and output to the media almost compelled news editors to print publicity information since the public enjoyed and expected it. Newspapers needed to keep their readership up, especially in the days when newspaper competition was heavy. One wildly absurd and well published story from a Paramount publicity man showed that people would print almost anything. The Paramount representative connected almost everyone involved with their film, I Want a Divorce, to be involved in at least one divorce. The publicity story leaked out to a United Press Hollywood correspondent who gave the story national space in his column. Joan Blondell, Dick Powell and everyone else connected with the film, except for a six year old, were listed to have been involved with divorce. The idea boomeranged when civic and religious groups threatened
the film's boycott and got upset with the columnist for printing such material.63

Perhaps the epitome of Hollywood publicity work can be singled out to one picture, which is often considered the pinnacle of pre World War II films. Gone With The Wind opened in Atlanta in late 1939, with more anticipation and fan involvement than any other film, because of its massive and highly successful publicity campaign and build-up.

Producer David O. Selznick bought the rights to Margaret Mitchell's ante-bellum novel while only the galley proofs were available. The public was carried away with its characters, especially its heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, and the sweeping story of the south. Selznick's publicity department, under Russell Birdwell, a former Hearst reporter, played cat and mouse with the public for years, creating a great interest in the film's casting. Arguments, newspaper columns and editorials, radio commentators and celebrities discussed and debated the casting topic.64

The week he closed the deal with the "Gone With The Wind" film rights, Selznick had Birdwell plant a rumor that Clark Gable was to play Rhett Butler, the male lead. Selznick instinctively picked Gable as his first choice. As the book's audience grew, so did the Gable/Butler demand until Gable finally signed to play the part. With this and similar moves by Birdwell, the public got to play the role of producer, assuming responsibility of the film's creation. Their opinions were searched for. The greatest amount of publicity and public stir resulted from the search for Scarlett O'Hara, a project which cost the studio $92,000. Many actresses, including Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer, Katherine Hepburn, Paulette Goddard, Margaret Sullavan,
Carole Lombard and even Lucille Ball, were leaked out to the press as being the frontrunner or possible choice for Scarlett. Newspapers took polls on who should play Scarlett. Clubs had violent arguments on the subject. The New York Times even wrote an unfavorable editorial to Norma Shearer when she declared her non-candidacy for the role.65

After the public broke into groups cheering for their personal favorite to play the part, Selznick decided to have a national talent search for the "unknown Scarlett" One report cited this search was so big that even P.T. Barnum would have been envious.66 Birdwell sent agents all over the country to find Scarlett. Whenever a candidate showed potential, interviews, occasional screen tests and news stories, both local and national, would follow. Scarlett was not found during this search, but a few hopefuls used the publicity and screen test to get their foot in the door in Hollywood. One candidate who received much publicity, a hat model from New York named Edythe Marriner, stayed in California following her test and became Oscar-winning actress Susan Hayward.67 The most publicized and silly story of the Scarlett campaign occurred on Christmas Day, 1937. A package arrived at Selznick's door, which contained a giant replica of the novel in its dust cover wrapped in ribbons and tapers. A young girl dressed in crinlines stepped out of the book and wished Selznick Merry Christmas and exclaimed that she was his Scarlett O'Hara. When giving this story to the press, Birdwell was accused of staging the event.68 The cast had been picked, except for Scarlett, when filming began in early 1939. Two years, 1400 interviews, 400 readings and 60 screen tests brought no results. When Vivien Leigh was finally found and signed for the role, Selznick and Birdwell designed a campaign to exploit their finding of an unknown Scarlett to the fullest,
while retaining an element of mystery. Her name was trumpeted all over the world, while photos were deliberately held back. Finally, one important editor, through special arrangement, was allowed to pirate the first prints of the new star. Soon these pictures were given a wide circulation and fans received their long-anticipated first look at Scarlett O'Hara.69

Birdwell's success with the Gone With the Wind publicity campaign was attributed to his knowledge of the newspaper world and his shrewd understanding of its editorial instinct. When Selznick told him the burning of Atlanta scene was to be filmed at night, which marked the beginning of the film's production, Birdwell did not send out media releases or other information pertaining to the event. Instead, he let the flames serve as a magnet for Southern California newsmen who would be attracted and drawn to the unknown fire, thus creating an element of surprise and draw more attention to the filming.70

Birdwell and the MGM publicity department also took charge of the movie premiere. Sneak previews and premières were studio rites in the 1930s, the equivalent of Broadway "taking a show to New Haven." During the day of a preview or premiere, publicity personnel notified by phone the executives and invited guests to assemble at a chartered trolley, which would escort them to the showing. The Gone With The Wind opening had extra frills, thanks to the publicity departments. Usherettes dressed in Civil War period costumes, reception halls were decorated in anti-bellum styles, and the theatre was draped in confederate flags. Stars were flown in, parties were thrown and fans and the media showed up to add the finishing touches to Selznick and Birdwell's hoopla publicity campaign.71
The motion picture industry grew incredibly between the time that Florence Lawrence was reported dead to the search for Scarlett O'Hara. Movies became a major entertainment medium and place to escape for Americans, especially during the depression years. Stars also developed to sell movies to the public. They also set trends in fashion and acted as role models for people across the country.

The publicity departments played an instrumental role in the advancement of the cinema and the growth of the star system, along with the fans' interests in these screen personalities. The publicity departments discovered techniques which could sell a person to the public and guarantee box office success and popularity for the star. Florence Lawrence and Theda Bara gave studios and publicity practitioners the initiative and ideas to build film stars careers and make money for the studios. Most screen personalities since Lawrence and Bara have gone through rituals of pre-film promotion tours, studio-arranged dating and coverage and interviews for fan magazines.

The creativity and liberties taken with truth in press releases may have harmed the credibility of Hollywood and the downfall of some of its stars, but it sold the stars to the public and the public continued to show interest in this sort of information on Hollywood. How much credit publicity departments and practitioners deserve for creating and selling stars is uncertain. Studio executives, fans, the media, and the stars who went along with studio dating, interviews, exploiting their lifestyles and going on tours all contributed to the popularity of Hollywood and the motion picture industry. Publicity people tapped the resources used to sell and promote products, and used these resources to sell contract players. The journalistic backgrounds many publicists
had proved to be useful when working with the media and putting out information which attracted human interest.

Publicity departments and agents did more than promote a star or a film. They served as the lifeblood of Hollywood, constantly working with a variety of people and activities with the goal of selling stars and motion pictures to a country which wanted these things sold to them. Publicity departments were an integral part of the business and fantasy called Hollywood during pre-World War II years, and acted as forefathers for entertainment publicists and techniques of the following decades.
FOOTNOTES

1. Scott M. Cutlip and Allen C. Center, Effective Public Relations, p. 15.
2. Steven C. Earley, An Introduction to American Movies, p. 25.
12. Ibid., pp. 19-21.
20. Ibid., p. 270.
22. Joan Mellen, Big Bad Wolves- Masculinity in the American Film, p. 4.
24. Ibid., p. 208.
25. Ibid., pp. 272-274.


32. Walker, op. cit., p. 121.

33. Skolsky, op. cit., p. 146.

34. Rosten, op. cit., p. 110.

35. Ibid., p. 110.


40. Skolsky, op. cit., p. 93.


42. Ibid., pp. 279-281.

43. Ibid., p. 281.

44. Ibid., p. 271.

45. Ibid., pp. 283-286.

46. Ibid., p. 282.

47. Ibid., p. 251.


49. Jowett, op. cit., p. 11.

50. Ibid., p. 10.

54. Rosen, op. cit., p. 43.
57. Wlaschin, op. cit., p. 18.
58. Finch, op. cit., pp. XI-XII.
59. Ibid., pp. 127-129.
60. Ibid., pp. 130-132.
63. Rosten, op. cit., pp. 116-117.
64. Zierold, op. cit., p. 54.
65. Ibid., pp. 54-55.
66. Ibid., p. 55.
68. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
69. Ibid., p. 60.
70. Finch, op. cit., p. 282.
71. Ibid., p. 268.
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