

Emily Macune

2/13/19

MS 117: Fan Culture and Celebrity

Introductory Essay

The Perfect Man

For this essay I will be referring to a historical feature of Sgt. Glenn Ford's wedding day from the Jan-Jun 1944 issue of Photoplay and a contemporary celebbitchy article about People's Sexiest Man Alive frontrunners in 2014, focusing on Neil Patrick Harris. Both articles focus on famous actors, both white and male. Although both of their public images are presented by publications to attract consumers, their presence in celebrity gossip media functions differently in accordance to the cultural norms of their respective time periods.

While Sgt. Glenn Ford's piece is a feature and Neil Patrick Harris' mention is a short couple of paragraphs a website, constantly posting content that gets lost in the masses, running on a 24 hour news cycle, both articles reinforce ideas of "the perfect man." Both men's physical appearances take on normativity in whiteness, thinness, cis-ness, and ability, yet the social and historical context of their bodies define the meaning and capitalist potential of the reproduction and circulation of their images. Ford was presented in the context of his wedding. All of the images surrounding the story of his wedding day were of himself, his wife, and his children. This particular piece was released in 1944, towards the end of WWII, when many men were coming back from the homefront and encouraged to start families. Ford was the perfect figure of nationalism, joining the armed forces in a time of war, starting a family, playing into the model of the nuclear family, keeping socialism off

of our good ol' American homefront. Ford's image could be idealized and aspired to by voyeuristic young men and played right into the daydreams of housewives and teenage girls. Photoplay, a media outlet, reinforced ideas of American nationality at the time by featuring Sgt. Glenn Ford.

Neil Patrick Harris differs from Sgt. Glenn Ford in being openly gay and loudly vocal about his sexual preferences. It's a part of his brand and has become a part of Harris' appeal to consumers. People Magazine puts out a "Sexiest Man Alive" edition every year, and considering an openly gay man such as Harris (who would be the first openly gay man to ever be People's Sexiest Man Alive) sparks new and exciting buzz around an old tradition, without taking too big of a risk. I say that it is not much of a risk in this contemporary moment because Harris identifies as gay, he is also a married white thin able bodied cis-man with kids that represents the aspirational narrative of the American dream in a queer context that appeals not only to straight women, but gay men as well. As queerness and gayness have become trendy, media outlets like People have relied more and more on pinkwashing, or whitewashing and utilizing social justice movements (creating the illusion of being more tolerant) for personal gain, often only financially benefiting the people in power rather than the folks that are being marginalized.

Although both articles present the idealized version of the perfect man, both publications present this image to the public in an accessible way, allowing readers to feel like fame is attainable for anyone. Sgt. Glenn Ford's story is simply about a man who loves a woman, gets married, and then leaves to serve his country, all while being a famous actor. Neil Patrick Harris was being considered as man of the year because of his ability to be so

“normal” in the face of his gayness, to lead the American dream with his kids and husband.

Their stories are not put into a glamorous context, but rather one of satisfying simplicity.

Stars: they’re just like us.

Sources:

Bedhead. “People’s Sexiest Man Alive Frontrunners: Chris Pratt & Neil Patrick Harris?”

Cele/Bitchy, 14 Nov. 2014,

www.celebitchy.com/397424/peoples-sexiest-man-alive-frontrunners-chris-pratt-neil-patrick-harris/.

Cummings, Mitzi. “Order of the Wedding Day - For Sgt. Glenn Ford and His Bride.” *Photoplay*, Jan-Jun 1944, 24.