**‘Skip the Warts’: Personal Branding and Pornification in *The Look of Love* (2013)*.***

**Abstract**

As the owner of the notorious Raymond Revuebar in Soho, and as publisher of pornographic magazines, British businessman and property magnate Paul Raymond had a lasting impact on British culture. *The Look of Love* seeks to assess that impact in its dramatisation of his life.

This biopic locates Raymond as an early exponent of ‘personal branding’ via scenes which depict his flair for public relations and his crafting of a public image emphasising wealth and luxury. The biopic also critiques this process, suggesting that his commitment to personal branding leads him to commodify those closest to him, among them his former wife, girlfriend and daughter. Where typically the juxtaposition between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ self has been utilised in biopics to convey a figure’s personality, *The Look of Love* exploits actor Steve Coogan’s associations with impersonation to rework this convention: the film suggests that even in supposedly ‘private’ moments, Raymond was always seeking to impress an audience via his recreations of iconic film characters.

But just as Raymond is represented as committed to this branding project, exploiting those around him to consolidate it, the film itself commits to this version of his life at the expense of others: namely, how Raymond’s ventures and activities were critical in the developing pornification of British society. It is telling that the film includes a sequence in which Raymond instructs a prospective female model to ‘skip the warts’ when recounting her life story: there are warts which the film itself leaves unexamined.

**Key words**

Biopic; Pornography; Pornification; Paul Raymond; Personal Branding; *The Look of Love*

Following the release of *The Look of Love* (2013), a British biopic about pornographic publisher and club owner Paul Raymond, director Michael Winterbottom discussed the difficulties in researching a man dubbed the ‘King of Soho’:

It didn’t really feel like people knew the real Paul Raymond, the man behind the mask so we thought maybe in the film it’s almost a bit like there isn’t a Paul Raymond. He just has all these public images and sort of exists in public spaces … In a way the real Paul Raymond is the public Paul Raymond. (quoted in Wilkinson 2013)

This interpretation is difficult to reconcile with the conventions employed in biopics, whereby lives are structured into contrasting ‘private’ and ‘public’ worlds, creating a ‘collision’ (Minier 2014: 99) or ‘juxtaposition’ (Bingham 2010: 113). *The Look of Love* does contrast Raymond’s ‘public’ achievements – opening the Raymond Revuebar in 1958, expanding into men’s magazines and property ownership – with his ‘private’ parenting failures, notably his failure to prevent his daughter’s drug overdose in 1992; but the film’s portrayal of this contrast is complicated by its depiction of Raymond’s commitment to personal branding, the process of ‘constructing a personal brand through conscious image management’ (Grzesiak 2018: 18). The film presents Raymond’s ‘public’ successes as underpinned by this process – ‘[h]e was always selling the Paul Raymond brand’ (Winterbottom, quoted in Wilkinson 2013) – corrupting his personal relationships with his wife, girlfriend and daughter. Thus, the film offers a commentary on the perils of personal branding, the rhetoric of which ‘endorses the process of turning oneself into a product – in effect, engaging in self-commodification’ (Lair, Sullivan and Cheney 2005:319). Yet in displaying how building a personal brand corrupted Raymond’s personal life, the biopic fails to consider adequately another important aspect of his public life: the extent his clubs and publishing contributed to the growing ‘pornification’ of British culture.

This study provides a brief history of Raymond, and how he can be located in debates regarding the pornification of British society. It considers the tension between Raymond’s perceived commitment to personal branding, as portrayed in *The Look of Love*, and biopic conventions. Though the film offers some account of Raymond’s career as a club-owner and publisher of pornographic magazines, particularly in its representation of his involvement with *Men Only*, it foregrounds Raymond’s *familial* relationships at the expense of his working ones, which limits the potential to consider Raymond’s relationship to debates regarding pornification. The study then examines those sequences which illustrate that Raymond (portrayed by Steve Coogan) sought to cultivate a personal brand, via a fabricated backstory and the exploitation of those closest to him. It considers how the film utilises Coogan’s skills in mimicry to suggest that Raymond’s life was one premised on impersonation. Though this is a style of performance frequently associated with biopics (which often require an actor to mimic the visual cues of a known figure), it is employed differently in *The Look of Love*: rather than merely impersonating Raymond, Coogan’s portrayal also suggests that Raymond himself was an effective impersonator. In presenting Raymond’s private life as one of impersonations, and suggesting that away from the cameras he was always to some extent ‘acting’ for a perceived audience, the film utilises this performance style to complicate the private/public life opposition typical of biopics. Overall, *The Look of Love* offers a commentary on the dangers of ‘self-commodification’ associated with the process of personal branding, suggesting that Raymond’s public façade corrupted his private life. Yet the film neglects Raymond’s contribution to the mainstreaming of pornography in British cultural life, and the exploitation of women on which his career was based. In the film Raymond instructs a model to ‘skip the warts’ when recounting her life story, but there are warts which the film itself leaves unexamined.

**Paul Raymond: pornographer and entrepreneur**

Geoffrey Quinn was born into an Irish Catholic family from Liverpool in 1927 (Mort 2007: 43), he later worked in a mindreading act where he began using the name Paul Raymond (Willets 2010: 38). He opened the Raymond Revuebar in London, using the proceeds from a vaudeville show which included topless women positioned on rotating stands (to circumvent the Lord Chamberlain’s law which prohibited moving nudes). It was a career ‘characterized by a willingness to take economic and cultural risks and by an ability to spot market opportunities at critical junctures in the fortunes of the entertainment industry’ (Mort 2007: 43). The Revuebar prompted debates concerning the nature of sex and consumerism in the capital; it was also the target of numerous undercover police operations (Mort 2007: 28-29; 42). Raymond later branched out into pornographic magazines including *Men Only* and *Mayfair*. *Men Only* would become the best-selling men’s magazine in the 1970s and, in keeping with Raymond’s risk-taking, included the first representation of sadism in a soft-core magazine (see Collins 1999: 116). His pursuit of property demonstrated his business acumen: Raymond exploited a slump in Soho prices in the 1970s and amassed a fortune.

Any account of Raymond’s contribution to British culture needs to assess the extent to which such ‘risk-taking’ informed attitudes to pornography, and how such activities might be framed within discussions of the ‘pornification’ of British society:

This is the most significant current discourse about porn, whose boundaries stretch to include such evidence of pornographic drift as lads’ mags, page three of the Sun, labiaplasty, pubic shaving, cosmetic surgery and women’s willing self-objectification as lap- and pole-dancers. (Hunter 2014: 168)

As a means of considering ‘transformations in the role and position of pornography in media culture,’ pornification can be related to changes in media technology and regulation, and the visibility in broader culture of sexually explicit images (Paasonen 2016). This includes pornography’s movement to online web-based platforms in the 1990s and 2000s, and with it an ease of access and diversity of content which exceeded traditional physical products. Further developments relate to deregulation, including the revised legal status of pornography in the majority of western countries since the 1970s. Pornification also relates to pornography’s popularity and influence on mainstream culture, including how mainstream products may draw on its style and visual character (Paasonen 2016). However, the concept is also problematic: it lacks a specific and precise meaning and those who employ it ‘do so precisely so that they can avoid any of the particularities of sexually explicit media’ (Smith 2010: 106). There is therefore a danger that such terms gloss over the differences between different kinds of practices, imagery and cultural forms. When such terms are used in discussions of Bratz dolls, anime, *Sex and the City* episodes, playboy key rings, Viagra and *Cosmopolitan* magazine among various other examples ‘we should be ringing alarm bells at the conflation and supposed obviousness of the connections’ (Smith 2010: 106). Pornification also risks neglecting how pornography’s contemporary significance may be shaped by earlier trends and cultural phenomena, and the term must be handled with care ‘if one is to avoid making the kinds of ahistorical generalization that easily emerge when outlining cultural transformations at the expense of their continuities’ (Paasonen 2016). *The Look of Love* had the opportunity to consider such continuities and transformations by representing Raymond’s activities in different periods and how these may have shaped contemporary attitudes and understandings.

The pornification of 1970s Britain was marked by two developments. There was a ‘mainstreaming’ of pornography, illustrated in *The Sun*’s topless ‘Page 3’ models, the *Confessions of...* sex comedies, and the acceptance of top-shelf magazines such as *Men Only* and *Mayfair*. This was accompanied by the rapid growth of pornographic businesses, such that by the late 1970s Soho had 54 sex shops, 39 sex cinemas and cinema clubs, sixteen strip and peep shows, and various other sex-orientated businesses. A growth in provincial areas was also evident, illustrated by David Sullivan’s chain of Private Shops which opened across Britain in 1978 (Hunt 1998: 23–24). Raymond was heavily involved in both developments, as publisher and as landlord of numerous Soho properties which he rented to sex merchants (Willets 2010: 310–311).

After his death in 2008, his life was chronicled in the documentary *Soho Sex King: The Paul Raymond Story* (Channel 4 2008) and in Paul Willetts’ biography *Members Only: The Life and Times of Paul Raymond* (2010) upon which *The Look of Love* was based. Raymond left an estate of property and assets valued at £370 million which (following legal challenges and High Court rulings which were closely followed by the press) was divided 80:20 between his granddaughters and his son, Howard (Shah 2011: 11). *Members Only* recounts Raymond’s life in linear fashion, and draws on newspapers reports and interviews with figures who knew him. Unlike the adaptation, the biography details Raymond’s childhood in some detail and particularly the stammer he sought to overcome through different remedies (2010: 2; 204-205). Such details provide depth to Raymond’s character, but they would be difficult to reconcile with Winterbottom’s portrayal of Raymond as a ‘construct of his own PR’ (quoted in Roddick 2013: 34). Willets also describes Raymond’s astute public relations: his ‘well-rehearsed’ lines to journalists (2010: 395) and flair for promotion (2010: 96; 97; 216; 341). This included sending 30,000 copies of *Men Only* to the Royal Navy during the Falklands War in a show of support to British forces (2010: 358). As Willetts remarks, ‘For journalists he was an attractive subject, combining fame, humour, controversy and a willingness to speak with often puckish candour’ (2010: 218). His contrasting behaviour hinted at different ‘versions’ of Raymond: for example, keeping close tabs on club expenses (2010: 380) but providing donations to an association for stammerers (2010: 403). There was also ‘a gentle side of his personality that he kept well hidden’ (2010: 314). Such characteristics are reflected in Willets’ assessment of Raymond’s relationship with his children. Following Raymond’s divorce from Jean Raymond (who left for Miami with their son, Howard) the relationship between Raymond and his daughter Debbie was ‘simultaneously strengthened and compromised by her financial dependence on him’ (2010: 310). Raymond exploited Debbie’s spiralling cocaine use to strengthen their relationship: when Jean attempted to get the police involved Raymond refused to support his former wife and this further estranged mother from daughter (2010: 381). Yet following Debbie’s death from a drug overdose in 1992 ‘he tended to shun the press attention he’d done so much to encourage’ (2010: 414).

Willets also considers Raymond’s significance to the development of pornography in Britain. He notes that Raymond’s clubs became dated following the emergence of lap dancing venues (2010: 419). He also identifies a shift in 1997 when Raymond’s publications began to face competition from hard-core pornography, lads’ mags such as *Loaded* (1994 – 2015), and the soft-core offerings in the *Daily Sport* (2010: 419). This reflected the shifting legal status of hard-core pornography, which by 2000 could be acquired via licensed sex shops on video and DVD (see Hunter 2014: 153). Willets describes the internet as a further rival for Raymond but one which ‘hadn’t yet developed into the threat that it would soon become’ (2010: 419).

**Personal branding pioneer**

Though itincludes many episodes from Willets’ biography, *The Look of Love* is particularly concerned with Raymond’s cultivation of a personal brand, as Winterbottom attested: ‘[e]veryone has their own version of who Paul was … [h]e was a construct of his own PR’ (quoted in Roddick 2013: 34). Consequently the film did not follow established biopic conventions. The biopic genre tends to portray the subject’s ‘public’ and ‘private’ worlds, such that they are forced to decide between their ‘private’ inclinations and ‘public’ responsibilities. In his study of Hollywood studio biopics, George F. Custen noted that subjects often have to choose between love and a career (1992: 149). Women surrender to the former at the expense of the latter, whereas for men ‘the career/love conflict has the male star so wrapped up in his career that he is unable to give love’ (1992: 105). As such, ‘[t]he collision between the public and the private figure’ is ‘an age-old convention of biopics’ (Minier 2014: 99). Such lives are constructed into the ‘public,’ their known accomplishments and notable achievements, and ‘private,’ their personal desires, romances and responsibilities.Raymond was perceived to be a figure pre-occupied with self-presentation and this made it difficult to locate him within this generic public/private paradigm, as Winterbottom admitted: ‘he was quite an early proponent of PR, the idea that your name or your character could be your brand. Of course, these days celebrities are throwing things on the back of their celebrity but he was already doing that’ (quoted in Wilkinson 2013). Thus Winterbottom perceived Raymond as a pioneer of personal branding.

Personal branding has been discussed in books such as *You Are a Brand!* (Kaputa 2012), which ‘promote personal branding as a positive spin on the chronic insecurity of the contemporary job market, wherein creative professionals compete against a globalized workforce and businesses favor flexibility and project success over loyalty to their employees’ (Harold 2013: 342). Other commentators have noted the damaging effects which such a mind-set could have on one’s sense of self: ‘commodifying ourselves in the interest of maximizing our “exchange value” or “market worth” means that we envision ourselves as marketable objects. Doing so necessarily implies that the criteria of self-definition we use become more narrowly instrumental, impersonal, and contingent’ (Davis 2003: 48). *The Look of Love* frames Raymond as a chameleon-like figure who rarely abandons his public image – his personal brand – even in supposedly private moments: ‘[i]t was quite a fractured or fragmented picture of him. Everyone had a completely different version of Paul Raymond … it was hard to get a very intimate sense of who he was’ (Winterbottom, quoted in Wilkinson 2013). Within the film, this personal brand corrupts him and those around him: Raymond exploits those in his private live in the same manner as those who work in his clubs and magazines. The biopic was also informed by other factors, not least how Raymond’s life offered an opportunity to construct a British public history of pornography.

**‘a very difficult relationship’**

*The Look of Love* was a co-production between Winterbottom’s Revolution Films and Steve Coogan’s Baby Cow Productions, the pair having worked together on *24 Hour Party People* (2002), *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005) and the various films and television productions in *The Trip* (2010–2020) series. Coogan felt that Raymond ‘was an interesting character who was sort of largely ignored because he was associated with porn … the British have got a very difficult relationship with sex’ (quoted in Collett-White 2013). Similarly Melanie Williams, while noting exceptions, suggests that ‘[i]n a national cinema not traditionally renowned for its sexual candor, the stiff upper lip has tended to triumph over the stiff anything else’ (2006: 59).The subject of *The Look of Love*, namely, an entrepreneur in British pornography, marked a shift in British biopic production, reflecting pornography’s changing cultural status more broadly. It can be viewed as evidence of the ‘mainstreaming’ of sex in contemporary western culture, illustrating that ‘[p]orn has turned chic and become an object of fascination in art, film, television and the press (Attwood 209: xiv). *The Look of Love* can also be viewed as an intervention into *British* public history in a way comparable to those North American biopics released since the 1990s which focus on disreputable subjects including pornographers (*The People Versus Larry Flynt,* 1996) and sex-addicted sitcom stars (*AutoFocus* 2002). Such films focus on figures who ‘push hard at the limits of taste and acceptability’ (Bingham 2010: 147), a charge which could be extended to Raymond’s activities in Britain.

There are also connections between the filmmaker’s interest in the distinction (or lack of) between Raymond’s private and public life and the sexualisation of western societies, which in its various manifestations, discussions of sex on talk shows, media ‘sexperts’ etc., is linked to the manner in which ‘the boundaries between the public and the private are changing in our culture’ (Attwood 2009: xv). Thus the biopic’s generic framework appears ripe for exploration of the shifting nature of pornographic content. A key continuity which can be mapped onto biopics, personal branding *and* pornography is a preoccupation with ‘authenticity.’ Claims to authenticity frequently centre on the extensive research (and expense) carried out in the making of biopics (Custen 1992: 44), while advice concerning personal branding stresses the importance of credible performances: in *How to Sell Yourself: Winning Techniques for Selling Yourself…Your Ideas…Your Message* (2002) Arch Lustberg instructs readers to assess their facial expression using mirrors to help them to appear authentic in social interactions (see Vallas and Cummins 2015: 307). Pornography exploits media technologies to secure greater degrees of realism, such as by the employment of amateur models by professional pornographers (Hardy 2009: 5). Each version of ‘authenticity’ is therefore to some extent superficial: an appearance or ‘look’ of authenticity, one which matches Winterbottom’s assessment of Raymond.

Winterbottom had previously directed *9 Songs* (2004), a film depicting the relationship between Matt (Kieran O’Brien) and Lisa (Margo Stilley). The film’s depiction of real intercourse ensured controversy (see Williams 2006: 59–63), but the film was also problematic for its privileging of Matt’s perspective over Lisa’s. A similar issue pervades *The Look of Love*: it refuses to address the experience of those women who worked for Raymond in his clubs and magazines. Winterbottom explained: ‘we thought we’d focus on his relationship with the women in his life, rather than the world of women in his clubs’ (quoted in Molony 2013: 20). This prioritising of Raymond’s familial relationships over those with the women in his businesses marginalised the role of women in the sex industry and their exploitation, and thereby neglected Raymond’s significant contribution to the pornification of British culture.

**‘the women in his life’**

Both Raymond’s former wife Jean (Anna Friel) and his girlfriend Julia Rosamund Harrison (Tamsin Egerton), whom he constructed into theatre performer and *Men Only* journalist ‘Fiona Richmond’, appeared in his productions. This makes Winterbottom’s claim, that his film focussed on the women in Raymond’s ‘life’ and not those in his ‘clubs,’ ambiguous at best. It also has implications for the film’s representation of Raymond’s role in the pornification of British culture. The film ‘has a marked non-censorial attitude to Raymond’s profession in porn’ (Forshaw 2015: 153) and its message ‘might be seen as a warning that drugs, rather than sex, can damage your health irrevocably’ (Mather 2021: 119). This aligns *The Look of Love* with *Boogie Nights* (1998) and *The People Versus Larry Flynt* which are ‘non-judgmental’ and ‘lacking condemnation’ (McNair 2017: 260) concerning those involved in pornography’s production.

Winterbottom’s suggestion that Raymond’srelationship with women is at the film’s centre accords with the conventions of biopics and historical films. Whether the representation focuses on actual figures or invented characters ‘the historical thinking involved is much the same: individuals (one, two, or a small group) are at the centre of the historical process’ (Rosenstone 2006: 15). But this focus is also significant because of Winterbottom’s directorial approach in *9 Songs*: ‘One key aspect of *9 Songs* is the decision to tell the story from Matt’s perspective … [r]ecounting events from his point of view inevitably affects the camera’s focus’ (Williams 2006: 61). For instance, towards the film’s end there is a sequence of Lisa masturbating with a vibrator while Matt watches. Williams notes how, unlike the film’s other sex sequences (which involve Matt), this act must be ‘burdened with narrative significance—it is made to “mean” the end of the road for the couple’ (2006: 62). This ‘burdening’ illustrates an uneasiness with female masturbation and broader notions of female sexual autonomy. As such, *9 Songs* ‘deprives Lisa of a living, speaking, separate existence’ (2006: 61). Similar issues arise in *The Look of Love*, where the subject is a figure who profited from the commodification of female bodies via his clubs and magazine publications: omitting their experience denies these female workers a ‘living, speaking, separate existence’ beyond their use for Raymond specifically.

A scene in which *Men Only* editor Tony Power (Chris Addison) explains to Raymond the commercial significance of John Menzies’ agreement to stock the magazine in their newsagents reflects pornography’s movement ‘from the torpid muddy shadows into the central current of British life’ (Willets 2010: 246) and shows some commitment to illustrating Raymond’s role in the pornification of British culture. The misogyny and objectification which were pronounced features of *Men Only* (see Collins 1999: 116) are addressed in the film via scenes depicting the exploitation of models and the publishers’ willingness to capitalise on legal loopholes. One sequence depicts Raymond, Tony and two publishers debating the legality of prospective photographs for *Men Only*. The scene follows one depicting the photo-shoot itself, where Tony supplies cocaine to the young model (who never speaks) before proceeding to direct her on set while Raymond watches. The subsequent debate rests on the location of the woman’s middle finger and whether it suggests penetration. One member of the editorial team identifies the photographs as ‘obscene’ and questions whether they should consider themselves pornographers given the photography’s explicit nature. The sequence thus foregrounds the editors’ enthusiasm for exploiting ambiguity and their efforts to capitalise on vivid imagery.

Further scenes represent a younger Raymond deciding to exhibit women on rotating podiums to circumvent legislation. Thus the film links Raymond’s readiness to take risks to the development of pornographic material in Britain: ‘Raymond saw an opportunity and sensed a demand which he was pleased to satisfy’ (Mather 2021: 120). These sequences highlight the dubious approaches adopted by manufacturers to persuade models to perform, and Raymond’s attempts to push at the boundaries of acceptability in different ways and in different periods. The film expresses the latter via colour: whereas the theatre show is presented in black and white, the photo-shoot appears in vibrant coloured hexagonal patterns, recalling David Hicks’ honeycomb designs which first appeared in the 1960s. The use of colour foregrounds the increasingly explicit nature of Raymond’s productions as he moved into publishing magazines. Yet the scenes do not reflect how these activities were shaped by broader cultural shifts, not least notions of ‘permissiveness’ which developed in 1960s and 1970s Britain when Raymond was acquiring magazines and shaping their editorial direction: ‘[p]ornography fed as well as fed off permissive culture, influencing everything from advertising to high art’ (Collins 1999: 100). Given Raymond re-launched *Men Only* in 1971, scenes exploring his involvement with the publication would help to portray the broader changes in acceptability which were underway at the same time. Yet this runs counter to the traditions of the genre which emphasises individuals at the expense of (complex) historical processes.

 The film also depicts inconsistencies in Raymond’s attitude, for example contrasting his denial to journalists that *Men Only* degrades women, with a cover of the magazine displaying women splayed across a snooker table, bright stars masking their anatomy. Yet detailed consideration of this inconsistency is sacrificed for comedy. The snooker table sequence includes a nod to earlier sexually suggestive content in Britain: the brightly-coloured caption ‘Let Jo and Paula Chalk Your Cue’ positioned beneath the women as they kiss on the table recalls Donald McGill’s seaside postcards in the early 20th century. However, the scene also includes a further moment where Raymond requests the women apply Vaseline lotion to each other, and then complains when the bottle remains in shot. This is not an isolated incident of comedy: in the sequence in which Raymond and the editors discuss the model’s middle finger, Raymond jokes that it was not inside her *during* the shoot. The inclusion of these comments in both scenes ensures that they have a comedic (read ‘Carry on’) quality. Films such as *Carry On Spying* (1964) and *Carry On Cleo* (1964) were themselves reminiscent of McGill’s postcards and were characterised by sexual innuendo: ‘rooted in an era when sexual activity had to be laughed about because it could never be discussed more openly’ (Medhurst 2007: 131). Sequences in *The Look of Love* suggest that the ‘difficult relationship’ Coogan identified lingers on (and rumours regarding new *Carry On* films persist as well, see Edwards 2020).

Other sequences suggest a contradiction between Raymond’s public performance and the realities of the Soho club scene. The film references the *Sunday Times*’ accusation that prostitution was taking place in Raymond’s ‘The Pink Pussy Cat’ club under the headline ‘Sex for Sale.’ This involved a 1983 undercover ‘sting’ in which manager Carl Snitcher explained to two female journalists how much ‘hostesses’ should charge for sex (Willets 2010: 367). In a third of the frame Raymond defends himself – ‘these allegations bear no relation to the way I conduct my business’ – but the remainder of the frame includes images of female dancers and groups of ogling men inside Raymond’s clubs. However, *The Look of Love* avoids other issues of exploitation, including those relating to workers’ rights, illegal images and institutional corruption. It does not address how Revuebar showgirls typically worked short-term contracts with little security (Mort 2007: 47). Raymond’s dealings with John Mason, whose hardcore pornography was advertised in the Revuebar, are also omitted (Willets 2010: 155). Though the film represents the accusations of prostitution, it does not address the ambiguous role performed by the ‘hostesses’ whose task it was to cultivate relations with male customers to ensure they spent money (2010: 161). This omission is problematic given Soho’s continued associations with sex work (see Tyler 2011: 1482). Furthermore, Willets’ account paints a detailed picture of Soho as the context for Raymond’s dealings: a bohemian, multicultural melting-pot but one terrorised by ruthless gangsters (2010: 130-133). There was thus a murky underbelly to Raymond’s businesses which he himself refused to discuss and which the biopic largely ignores (other than brief sequences at the end which depict Raymond being chauffeured through Soho with his granddaughter Fawn (Jennifer Ellis) and pointing to the various properties she will inherit). Raymond sought to cultivate an image of respectability: ‘For Paul Raymond, whose stock in trade was relatively sophisticated sexual imagery, respectability was an essential requirement for advertisers and readers alike’ (Smith 2005: 157). This respectability also supported the argument that publishers could regulate themselves without the need for outside censorship. *The Look of Love* hints at this in a scene where Raymond explains to Tony ‘I do not want to show too much pink, no penetration.’ Yet the reality was more complex: the film does not explore how behind this veneer of respectability it was possible to find hardcore pornographic material (for example involving sexual activity between women and dogs) in the sex shops Raymond let to tenants in Soho properties (Willets 2010: 285).

Raymond had ‘probably done more than anyone else to turn nude entertainment, be it strip-shows or pornographic magazines, into an accepted – if arguably corrosive – ingredient of British life’ (Willets 2010: 419) and had ‘helped to turn the sex industry from an illicit enterprise into a vast, rapacious business, into a phenomenon that permeates and debases culture’ (2010: 431), but this broader context for Raymond’s career is largely neglected in the film. This failure contrasts with representations which explore contemporary ‘corrosive’ facets of pornification. The television drama *Adult Material* (2020) follows British porn star Haley Burrows (‘Jolene Dollar’), and her exploitation at the hands of American porn director and actor ‘Tom Pain.’ It provides a female perspective on the business which Raymond had a role in shaping, without *The Look of Love*’s jokes and gags. As will now be discussed, the film is much more preoccupied with how Raymond generated a personal brand. Yet this is only a part, albeit a curious part, of the Raymond story. His relationship to the growing intrusion of pornography into broader areas of cultural life remains to be addressed. .

**‘Not bad for a boy from Liverpool’**

*The Look of Love* invests more time in framing Raymond as a personal branding pioneer. The film includes scenes which depict him fabricating his life story through the recording of a documentary, modelled on *For the Record: Paul Raymond* (1969). One sequence includes an establishing shot of Raymond’s sprawling house outside London, before showing him walking alongside Debbie (Rose Ames Blackaby) on horseback. He then looks at the camera: ‘not bad for a boy who arrived from Liverpool with five bob in his pocket’ he says, with a knowing smile. The scene foregrounds his wealth via a fabricated life story based on meritocracy: ‘storytelling is an inseparable part of personal branding - in building our own brand, we tell about ourselves’ (Grzesiak 2018: 18). It offers a staged version of private life and depicts Raymond’s use of the media to consolidate his brand identity.

Raymond was always, in Willets’ words, ‘consciously embellishing his image as a self-made man’ (2010: 416). He claimed to have hitched a ride on the back of a lorry to London in 1950, omitting mention of his prosperous extended family (Willets 2010: 39). The film also represents some of Raymond’s DIY stunts which lend credibility to his self-made persona. One sequence opens with Julia in her guise as Fiona Richmond, wearing a red wide-brimmed cowboy hat, complete with gun belt and thigh-length red boots, riding a white horse through the Soho streets. Press photographers scurry about as Raymond highlights Fiona’s role in his theatre venture *Let’s Get Laid* and the stunt’s associations with the ‘Lady Godiva’ legend. Such gimmicks resemble the antics of Virgin Group founder, Richard Branson, who used similar tactics to promote his businesses. When seeking to generate publicity for Virgin Cola, Branson drove a tank through Times Square in New York into a wall of cans adorned with the Coco-Cola logo. He is an example of effective personal branding: ‘You have to be willing to use yourself, as well as your advertising budget, to get your brand on the map’ (Branson 2008: 63). As portrayed in the film, Raymond’s enthusiasm for publicity locates him in a lineage of entrepreneurs who understood the value of cultivating a personal brand.

*The Look of Love* also includes scenes which indicate that the personal brand masks a further identity, dating from the period when Raymond was known as Geoffrey Quinn. His estranged son from that period, Derry (originally named Darryl and played by Liam Boyle), visits Raymond’s penthouse. As the pair eat dinner, Derry shows Raymond photographs of Raymond/Quinn with Derry’s mother Noreen O’Horan. ‘Another life,’ Raymond sighs, placing the photographs on the dining table. Later, Raymond stares into the mirror and repeats: ‘I’m Paul Raymond,’ ‘I am Paul Raymond’ and again, pointing at his reflection this time, ‘I am Paul Raymond.’ Raymond’s beloved penthouse is out of focus in the mirror’s reflection, and the dark room is punctured by a beam of light which highlights the left side of Raymond’s reflection, casting the other side in shadow. He approaches the mirror and searches his reflection. For a moment his entire face is lit, before he remarks: ‘I’m Geoffrey Quinn.’ In a similar mirror scene in *Boogie Nights*, ‘Dirk Diggler’ (Mark Wahlberg) notices the attention another porn actor is receiving and feels threatened. He then seeks solace in the bathroom where he works himself into a state of arousal while looking in the mirror. Such mirror sequences ‘signal male doubt, inadequacy, or breakdown of the constructed and performed self’ (Donnar 2016: 188). *The Look of Love* locates the ‘performed self,’ pivotal to Raymond’s brand, as a burden which has implications for Raymond’s identity: ‘[h]aving defined their personal brand, individuals are now *compelled* to become this brand; it must dictate the single persona that they are now allowed to be’ (Shepherd 2005: 600, emphasis added). Underneath the performer ‘Paul Raymond,’ who arrived in London with ‘five bob,’ there is a ‘Geoffrey Quinn,’ associated with child abandonment and cheap variety tours.

**‘a very good Honey Ryder’**

The film critiques Raymond’s commitment to the Raymond brand by foregrounding his exploitation of those closest to him, reflecting the self-commodification encouraged by personal branding. Jean is a prop utilised by Raymond to grow his business, specifically when she appears in a *Men Only* photo-shoot. Raymond’s commodification is evident in his proprietorial control: he exploits Jean’s peroxide blonde hair via a setting featuring lavish golden curtains and stuffed tigers. Images show Jean in various positions, the blue ‘Men Only’ branding logo visible in the corner. His ownership of the shoot is secured in the photograph spreads which fill the frame: next to the images, ‘JEAN’ appears in golden font and underneath that ‘photography by Paul Raymond.’ The self-promotion which forms part of personal branding ‘requires a carefully controlled and utilitarian way of relating to others. They too must be objectified in the interest of the bottom line’ (Davis 2003: 49). This objectification of his former wife’s body is bound up with furthering Raymond’s brand as the chief source of pornographic entertainment.

The breakdown of Raymond’s relationship with Jean is related to his pursuit of Julia, but this pursuit also serves the Raymond brand. As the pair dine together in a restaurant Raymond, capitalising on their discussion of Sean Connery, suggests ‘You’d make a very good Honey Ryder,’ referencing the first ‘Bond girl’ portrayed by Ursula Andress in *Dr No* (1962). The Bond prefix ‘emphasizes that the woman is defined by her relationship with Bond and lacks an individual/independent identity’ (Funnel 2018: 12) and the scene foreshadows Raymond’s fashioning of Julia into his own ‘girl,’ Fiona Richmond, a valuable tool in theatre productions including *Pyjama Tops* (1969) and subsequently as a *Men Only* journalist. When she subsequently leaves Raymond, his revenge follows market principles: forbidding her to live with Debbie (Imogen Poots) because the tenancy agreement forbids her from subletting (he is her landlord), and firing her from *Men Only* under the guise of a revamp. Such punishments reflect the logic of personal branding which ‘threatens to either lead people to ignore their relationships or to commodify such relationships within the frame of a market discourse’ (Lair *et al*. 2005: 327).

That Debbie remains clothed throughout her performance in the Raymond-backed *Royalty Follies* suggests a protectiveness which does not extend to his wife or girlfriend. But *The Look of Love* emphasises that Raymond is unable to demonstrate appropriate fatherly care because of his commitment to the Raymond brand. This issue is addressed via the film’s flashback structure. In the film’s opening, Raymond returns to his apartment building following Debbie’s death where he views VHS footage of Debbie from *Family Values*, a documentary they appeared in together: Debbie describes to an off-screen interviewer the bond they share.The video serves as ‘a reminder of a past happiness that now exists only on tape’ (Mather 2021: 114), but it can be understood in other ways as well. The remainder of the film forms a flashback, but it occasionally returns to this scene of Raymond watching the footage. Later *The Look of Love* recreates the *Family Values* documentary, but here the camera is positioned so as to reveal the interviewer, cameraman and Raymond, positioned out of shot, as well as Debbie herself. After asking whether Raymond is a good father (‘fantastic,’ she replies) the interview ends, and father and daughter walk away debating their responses (‘I think I was more nice about you’ he remarks). For father and daughter, the documentary is itself an opportunity to cultivate the Raymond brand. The film then depicts Debbie snorting cocaine alone and walking through the streets of Soho in slow-motion, suggesting that behind this façade lay vulnerability. Raymond’s viewing of *Family Values* illustrates that he would rather ‘skip the warts’ in his daughter’s life and instead remember Debbie as she presented herself for the cameras.

**A satisfying impression**

The scenes which foreground Raymond’s impersonations and role playing mark a departure from the biopic’s traditional approaches to representing a subject’s life. Biopics have modelled their subjects around a template in which their public lives are shown in opposition to their private lives: ‘[t]he longstanding appeal of biography lies in its promise to juxtapose the public and private selves, completing a full and satisfying impression of the subject’s personality and motivations’ (Bingham 2010: 113). *The Look of Love* does offer scenes – the narrative ‘present’ of Raymond watching the footage of Debbie, Raymond being comforted by Fiona in the penthouse bedroom after she announces she is leaving him – which suggest Raymond has momentarily dropped his façade, but other scenes suggest these were rare departures from the ‘front’ which Raymond displayed in public.

The role of Raymond required an actor who could negotiate ‘all these public images’ on screen. Winterbottom and Coogan had previously collaborated on *24 Hour Party People* and *A Cock and Bull Story*, both of which displayed a degree of self-reflexivity. The former focused on Tony Wilson’s Factory Records and the Manchester music scene. Evan Smith notes the film’s ‘explicit self-awareness’ and its ‘willingness to overtly demonstrate the techniques used in constructing the films’ narrative’ (2013: 468). Coogan’s Wilson breaks the fourth wall throughout, while his voice-over narration is sometimes undermined by character dialogue. For instance, Wilson describes in voice-over that he and his wife Lindsay (Shirley Henderson) wish to have children accompanied by images of them embracing in countryside, but later Lindsay suggests to the on-screen Wilson that having children would be a ‘nightmare’. The film foregrounds multiple perspectives and in doing so undermines the authority of Wilson’s commentary (ibid. 479). *The Look of Love* may lack *24 Hour Party Peopl*e’s more radical features, but Winterbottom’s interest in offering different perspectives on the same event and character is evident in both films.

Whereas Raymond formed a ‘construct of his own PR,’ Coogan’s star-image is informed by his commitment to portraying a fictionalised version of himself in film and television programmes. This is significant because biopic performances are multi-layered:

As biopic subjects are generally celebrities themselves, biopics are built through layers of performance: the performance of reality or a perceived reality, the subject’s performance of his or her own identity, the actor’s performance of the subject’s public and private identities, and the actor’s performance of his or her own celebrity identity as it reflects on the embodied subject. (Cartmell and Polasek 2020: 7)

There are complex continuities between subject and actor. Firstly, Coogan’s career cannot be approached without discussion of Alan Partridge, a character created by Coogan and Armando Iannucci, who appears in programmes which parody sport journalism, current affairs and chat shows, including BBC Radio’s *On the Hour* (1991–92), *The Day Today* (1993–94) and *Knowing Me, Knowing You with Alan* Partridge (1994). The recent *This Time with Alan Partridge* (2019 – present) evidences the character’s enduring appeal. Partridge’s success ensured Coogan’s personality ‘became difficult to disentangle from his most famous creation’ (Dacre 2009: 114) and he pursued roles to separate himself from the character. Yet his role in *A Cock and Bull Story*, based on Laurence Sterne’s novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1769), displays evidence of the pomposity and tactlessness associated with Partridge (Dacre 2009: 114). In this film, Coogan and fellow actor Rob Brydon play ‘variations of themselves’ (Allen and McCabe 2012: 153). The film moves between scenes from the novel (the film within a film) and scenes of the actors as they work on the film, with further scenes concerning the ‘real’ Coogan and a press scandal about his infidelity. Thus the film asks the viewer to ‘consider Steve Coogan as Steve Coogan, Steve Coogan as an actor in Winterbottom’s Tristram Shandy, and Steve Coogan as Tristram Shandy all at once’ (Daly 2010: 92). Both Coogan and Brydon then appeared together in *The Trip* (2010), a BBC programme in which they travel around England reviewing restaurants and which was organised around ‘a parodic slippage between the already-known male performers and the fictionalised versions of those media selves’ (Allen and McCabe 2012: 151).This theme continued in *The Trip to Italy* (2014), *The Trip to Spain* (2017) and *The Trip to Greece* (2020).

Coogan’s portrayal of versions of himself across screen media is comparable with the way ‘[e]veryone had a completely different version of Paul Raymond.’ This is reflected in *The Look of Love*: at dinner, Coogan-as-Raymond impresses Julia with a Sean Connery impression, one which Coogan previously performed in *The Trip*. Coogan’s associations with fragmentation, expressed via the endurance of his Partridge persona and his commitment to portraying versions of himself, are threaded into the film’s depiction of Raymond. This has ramifications in relation to discourses of personal branding, which ‘allows an individual to analyze and define themselves by using their unique personalities, associations, and traits to construct an idealized self’ (Waller 2020: 19). To frame Raymond as an early exponent of the ‘idealized self,’ *The Look of Love* utilises Coogan’s history of portraying different ‘Coogans.’ A further ‘layer’ of performance is on display, Coogan’s own celebrity identity being coated in a history of self-impersonation befitting the chameleon-like tendencies Winterbottom perceived in Raymond. Both actor and subject engineer versions of themselves to suit their different audiences.

It is significant that the film includes acts of impersonation given that the biopic is the most likely film genre to feature the imitation of one actor by another (Naremore 2012: 38). It forms one process performers adopt to secure a degree of physical resemblance: vocal and physical training, elaborate diets and prosthetics can all feature as part of the preparation for a role, and such processes frequently garner significant publicity and critical praise (Donaldson 2014: 106). Though frequently associated with parody and cliché, impersonation is then a significant issue in biopics, particularly when actors are faced with the challenge of portraying figures present in our ‘collective visual memory’ (Vidal 2014: 141). This is less problematic when the figure is from the distant past, but when the subject has featured in screen media it becomes complex: ‘[t]he actor needs to give a non-comic, reasonably convincing impersonation of a known model while also serving the larger ends of the story’ (Naremore 2012: 38). Raymond can be considered a ‘known’ model: he featured in television interviews, including *For the Record: Paul Raymond* (recreated in the film) and *Good Afternoon* for Thames Television in 1975. Yet impersonation is presented differently in *The Look of Love* because its depiction of Paul Raymond involves Coogan-as-Raymond’s impersonation of famous fictional characters. There is the aforementioned sequence in which Raymond assumes Sean Connery’s Scottish accent. While dining in a restaurant, Raymond asks Julia to recount her life ‘warts and all’ before suggesting she ‘skip the warts.’ Julia mentions that she was a nanny for a girlfriend of Sean Connery who, she claims, once kissed her. Raymond assumes Connery’s Scottish accent and reworks the James Bond line: ‘I’m shaken, but not stirred.’ Later in the publishing office with Tony, Raymond replicates Marlon Brando’s iconic performance of Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* (1972). Raymond puffs out his cheeks and gestures with open arms in the manner of Brando’s Corleone, but does so while saying ‘pass the butter,’ a reference to a scene from *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) in which Brando’s character Paul rapes a woman using butter as lubricant.

Even in supposedly ‘private’ moments, away from journalists and documentary crews, *The Look of Love* suggests that Raymond was always performing. James Naremore suggests that in all acts of biopic impersonation, regardless of their accuracy, ‘the audience will inevitably be aware that an actor is imitating a famous personage’ (Naremore 2012: 38 – 40) but *The Look of Love* foregrounds the act of impersonation by deliberately exploiting Coogan’s vocal dexterity, a skill harnessed via his vocal imitations of politicians and celebrities in *Spitting Image* (1984–1996) and *The Trip* series (Allen and McCabe 2012: 151). The depiction of Coogan-as-Raymond impersonating different characters continuously reaffirms Winterbottom’s perception that it was difficult to formulate an ‘intimate’ sense of who Raymond was, to get a sense of what he was like in ‘private’ because he was so committed to his ‘public’ image.

Thus Raymond’s behaviour away from the documentary crews and journalists emphasises his inauthenticity. Impersonation can be viewed positively in relation to an effective impersonation carried out by a talented comedian, or it can also be associated with duplicity, fabrication and imposture (Pickering and Lockyer 2005: 180). In *The Look of Love*, both the positive and negative connotations associated with impersonation are presented. Firstly, the film offers moments which showcase Coogan’s own considerable talents via his recreation of iconic film characters. These occur while Coogan is also portraying a historical figure, and this in turn informs the characterisation of Raymond as a fabrication. In depicting Raymond’s behaviour in private as one of a series of impersonations, *The Look of Love* deprives the viewer of the ‘satisfying impression’ of Raymond’s personality typical of biopics and their juxtaposition between the public and private self. Instead, it offers a figure devoid of character and soul.

**Conclusion**

That ‘[e]veryone had a completely different version of Paul Raymond’ necessitated a particular approach to representing Paul Raymond’s life in *The Look of Love*. The film represents a figure dedicated to generating a personal brand centring on business acumen and wealth through his endeavours and media appearances. It also points to the perils of personal branding, the repression of an ‘authentic’ self, one veiled in a Raymond persona, his exploitation of others, and his refusal to consider ‘the warts’ in his and his own daughter’s life stories. Continuing to rework the biopic’s generic formula, as the pair had done effectively in *24 Hour Party People*, Winterbottom and Coogan portray Raymond’s private life as one of impersonations, suggesting that even in his private moments Raymond was always cultivating a public image. This complicated the private/public structure typical of the genre, and also offered an alternative approach to the impersonation conventionally associated with the biopic, harnessing Coogan’s ability to present Raymond as a chameleon-like entity twisting to suit the demands of his audience. *The Look of Love* does offer a ‘satisfying impression’ of its subject, albeit not in a manner typical of biopics.

Yet the film’s omission of various facets of Raymond’s life is significant. The decision to make a biopic about a key figure in the history of British pornography may itself reflect porn’s shifting cultural status, but the failure to critique the more exploitative aspects of Raymond’s career suggests that the ‘difficult relationship’ the British have with sex inhibits a full examination of the subject. The film gives a detailed account of how Raymond exploited his personal brand, but it omits detailed consideration of the extent to which Raymond influenced the pornification of British culture. The comedy laced throughout many of scenes indicates that *The Look of Love* is to some extent illustrative of the very issue it sought to address: the difficult relationship the British have with issues of sex, manifested most clearly in earlier forms of popular culture and their enduring popularity. Just as Raymond was perceived to be a series of public images, *The Look of Love* offers a superficial treatment of pornography, reduced at times to a platform for gags.

The film also fails to address the exploitative nature of pornification, including exploitation of the women whom Raymond employed, and the exploitative environment in Soho where he worked and prospered. Just as Raymond exploited women he also exploited Soho and its low property prices, renting property to merchants and traders who furthered Soho’s association with exploitative sex. However, the biopic’s ambition to locate individuals at the centre of the historical process here renders such complexities peripheral.

Despite attesting to different ‘Raymonds’ in relation to Debbie, Julia and the journalists who hang on his every word, *The Look of Love* struggles to consider one version particularly pertinent to contemporary British life: the Raymond relating to the pornification of mainstream British culture. That wart is largely ignored.

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