

Leading men from the old studio system, like Richard Chamberlain and Tab Hunter, finally feel safe coming out after hiding in the closet all those years – writing their respective autobiographies: Chamberlain's *Shattered Love: A Memoir* and Hunter's *Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star*. One wonders if Rock Hudson had not died of AIDS in 1985, would he, too, have penned a confession?

For Hunter, coming out was never an option in his days under contract with Warner Studios. "No one 'came out.' There wasn't a word then. It wasn't around in those days," explains Hunter. "The word 'gay' wasn't around in the 1950s. If it was around, people would never, ever admit to it or mention it. It was just not one of those things. People weren't in your face like people are today."

Dating in the 1950s usually didn't include having sexual relations during the first few dates, so a man's sexuality didn't come into question. "Back then, the average woman wouldn't have considered men like Tony (Perkins) or me gay – only proper and well-mannered."

Asked if he believed that a straight actor would be typecast after playing a gay role, Hunter explodes, "I don't pay attention to any of that nonsense. That's all bullshit!"

And now?

Romantic lead/action hero Hugh Jackman could have easily short-circuited his romantic lead/action hero career by taking on the role of flamboyantly gay songwriter Peter Allen on Broadway in *The Boy From Oz* had Jackman not had the charisma and talent (and wife) to pull it all off. Jesse L. Martin, known for his no-nonsense, definitely hetero role on all four of the "Law & Order" TV shows, un-apologetically revisits the gay role he originally played on Broadway in the film version of *Rent*, and steals the movie.

Being gay onscreen or offscreen is still a popular topic of discussion. Long have Tom Cruise and Kevin Spacey litigated and ignored rumors of alleged homosexual rendezvous no matter whether the element of truth exists or is absent. Why won't we let celebrities keep their sexuality a secret? In an era where the need to know the tidbits of information about those who grace the screens is fueled by the media generally, is it the sexuality we seek clarification of, or is it just that we can't abide a secret? **-MPM**

## PASSING THE TORCH

### THE ROLE-MODEL RELAY WE PLAY BETWEEN GENERATIONS

By Kate Tremills

In these days of Generation Why, everything is under scrutiny. Information sources are suspect as teenagers get hit with flashy media images, impossible expectations and the cynicism of war. Determining how to be a man is a greater challenge than ever, especially when the identity fence posts keep moving.

Traditionally, boys learned all they needed to know from their fathers: how to throw a ball, the best way to win a fight, lessons in wooing women; a relationship idealized in movies like *The Bicycle Thief*, *Frequency* and *Life is Beautiful*.

Since the dawn of the Information Age, the father-son relationship has become far more complex. Maybe it's the pressure and pace of the world, or that every generation asks tougher questions. Life just

## JUNG'S WARRIOR MODEL OF MAN IS... A WOMAN?



Girlfight's Michelle Rodriguez (2000)

"I think [female action movies are] here to stay just as much as male action films are here to stay," says Tom Rosenberg, producer of the *Underworld*, *Underworld: Evolution*, the Oscar-laden *Million Dollar Baby* and *Aeon Flux*. Noting, "Women can do, are doing and will do everything that men do," he shares, "We're working on a script now where it was originally conceived for a male star and we rewrote it for a female."

"I think the interest in seeing women in these roles is because we intuit that men and women both have elements of masculinity and femininity within themselves," says Karyn Kusama, director of *Girlfight* and *Aeon Flux*. "I think gender remains the most elusive and mystifying social issue for a lot of people, and things like gender politics, identity issues, and masculine and feminine ideals still bewitch us. So seeing more masculinized women in films might be a reflection of an interest in messing with the prototypes."

Leonard Goldberg, producer of the upcoming *Wonder Woman*, the *Charlie's Angels* films and the original *Charlie's Angels* TV show back in the '70s, recalls that in 1999, when the first *Matrix* was shown, the female character, Trinity, scored enormously with the audience. "Not only are these female warriors appealing to women, they also give young girls someone to look up to. Boys always had Spiderman, Batman, and other comic book heroes, but women never really had anyone like that except for Wonder Woman."

"If you do it right, you add a large female audience without losing a male audience," says Rosenberg. "And that's important. I know that happened to us in *Underworld*, with Kate Beckinsale. Both guys and women were very into her character." Observing that there are very few male actors who can really pull off the action hero role, Rosenberg posits that it makes sense to expand "into the other gender."

By Amy Sorkin Kurland

isn't as simple as knowing how to throw a ball anymore.

With their collective finger on the pulse of a generation, a bevy of young men have released films that sharply examine the father-son relationship. Jason Reitman (son of movie icon Ivan Reitman) adapted the novel *Thank You for Smoking* into a comic indictment of the age of spin. Noah Baumbach, co-writer of many Wes Anderson flicks, released *The Squid and the Whale*, a portrait of a young man's journey through his parents' divorce. Emerging from the world of advertising, Mike Mills adapted an odd little novel called *Thumbsucker*, about a teenager who refuses to quit sucking his thumb. And Joshua Michael Stern crafted his directorial debut, *Neverwas*, about a grown man coming to terms with his famous but troubled father.

In *The Squid and the Whale*, Bernard (Jeff Daniels) is a novelist who doles out advice to his son, Walt, based on how clever he'll sound. "In the life of an artist," explains Daniels, "believing in yourself is essential. Unfortunately, Bernard has distorted that belief in himself into self-absorption. By the end of the film, Walt can no longer see his artistic hero, only the hero's pain and weaknesses."

The protagonists in *The Squid and the Whale* and *Neverwas* share the dilemma of dealing with a famous father. While *Squid's* Walt steps out of his father's shadow to define himself, *Neverwas's* Zach feels compelled to confront his father's demons. Zach (Aaron Eckhart) is so deeply affected by his father's suicide that he returns as a psychiatrist to the hospital where his father sought treatment.

"Whether we like it or not," Eckhart ponders, "we look up to our fathers. We have to take our cues from [them]. When a son is in distress or has questions, he wants the answers from his father. Zach didn't get the answers. [He] has to find them for himself."

Where *The Squid and the Whale* and *Neverwas* look at growing up in the shadow of greatness, *Thumbsucker* and *Thank You for Smoking* examine the tenuous connection between fathers and sons in a pressure-filled world. When everyone from rock stars to teachers shape a boy's choices, fathers can be reduced to a footnote.

In *Thank You for Smoking*, Nick (Aaron Eckhart) realizes he must change his relationship with his son, Joey. Reitman explains that Nick "asks his ex-wife for more time with his son to make sure he is getting a proper perspective of the world. If anything, getting to know his son better is a complication for Nick. Joey forces [him] to think about whether or not he can be a father and a tobacco lobbyist simultaneously."

For all of his faults, Nick has a clear definition of what it means to be an individual and a man. "Part of masculinity is having a code," says Eckhart. "It's a code that you live by. Nick certainly has a code and he doesn't apologize for it. He's teaching Joey to have a voice. To stick up for what [he] believes in."

Where Nick steps up to the plate, the father in *Thumbsucker* has no idea how to help his son. Embarrassed by his son's habit, Mike tries to force Justin (Lou Pucci) to be normal. Justin caves, giving up his thumb and stepping out into the world. "[Justin] doesn't really have much of a back-story except for his parents," says Pucci, "because he hasn't really done anything. This is about his first experiences by himself."

At a certain point, the father-son relationship seems destined for competition and confrontation. The child becomes an individual by disputing his first idol. Today's generation understands this in psychological terms – the process of individuation, or a healthy sense of oneself as separate and unique from the parent.



Roberto Benigni's Oscar-winning *Life is Beautiful* (1997)

The rite of passage is not, however, a recent discovery but rings true to our deepest social roots. "If you look at Joseph Campbell or any mythology," says Eckhart, "you'll always see that, in the adventure of the child, he becomes a man by forsaking the parents or forsaking the symbols of the parents. Then doing things his own way – failing and then succeeding."

In a world where boys grow up faster than ever, fathers face a hefty challenge. As role-models, they not only have to solve their son's problems, they have to face their own demons. Passing the torch of masculinity has become a complex mix of communication and action. This past year's films suggest that on the journey to manhood, sons need honesty, effort and love. As hard as it may be to accept, the rest is up to them. **-MPM**

## THE BUDDY SYSTEM

### THE TRADITION OF SUNDANCE KIDS AND SIDEKICKS

By Christopher Piehler

Buddy films are the bread and butter of Hollywood. The *Rush Hour* series won no Oscars, and *Dude, Where's My Car?* shed no new light on the plight of the middle class, but movies about male friendship create devoted followings, especially among men. Men don't just watch these movies, they quote them incessantly, they dress up like the characters for Halloween, they even sit through tepid sequels. Why?

"I KNOW YOU ALL OF TWO MINUTES AND ALREADY I DON'T LIKE YA." (*Midnight Run*)

Buddy films are essentially platonic, all-male romantic comedies. Like romantic comedies, buddy films start with an unlikely couple. Think Robert Redford and Paul Newman in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte in *48 Hours*, Mel Gibson and Danny Glover in *Lethal Weapon*. These star-crossed duos are often racially mixed because buddy films replace sexual tension with racial tension in order to create the