



"Games People Play" Wrestles its Way to #1

James Ronald Whitney's risqué feature "Games People Play: New York" seduced its way to number one...grabbing the throne from Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," which had reigned for two weekends.

The reality-esque "Games People Play: New York," a 'game film' about three men and three women vying for a \$10,000 cash prize by performing provocative stunts, took its place on the...box office crest, opening in Gotham...

"Aside from winning an Emmy, it was the best professional news I had ever received," Whitney said, "Now anyone reading this better get his ass to the theater to see this unrated, totally twisted little movie that was made in just 72 hours."

| indieWIRE:BOT™ for the weekend ending March 15, 2004 - full chart | |
|--|---|
| Top Ten Indies | |
| | Film |
| 1. | "Games People Play: New York" |
| 2. | "The Passion of the Christ" |

-Brian Brooks

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES



BY ROGER EBERT

"Games People Play: New York" plays most of its games with the audience...As a viewer, we intuit that it is more, or less, than it seems: That in some sense, the whole project is a scam.

Yes, but a scam that involves real actors doing real things while they're really in front of the camera. The premise: Auditions are held to select six finalists for a game-show pilot. The winner of the contest will be paid \$10,000. The actors are asked to be attractive and "completely uninhibited," and so they are.

They're awarded points for their success at such events as: (1) Asking complete strangers for a urine sample; (2) Having men enact casting-couch seductions with would-be actresses not in on the gag; (3) Having women seduce a delivery man by dropping a towel and standing there naked; (4), persuading strangers to join a man and woman in a "naked trio" in a nearby hotel room, and (5) persuading a stranger in the next toilet stall to join them in the reading of a scene they're rehearsing.

Amazingly, the movie not only finds actors willing to play these roles, but men and women off the street who volunteer (in the case of the urine and naked trio gags) or are at least good sports (as in the dropped towel routine). After having been tricked into appearing in the film, they actually sign releases allowing their footage to be used.

These episodes are intercut with sessions where a psychologist named Dr. Gilda Carle and a publicist named Jim Caruso interview the finalists. I have no idea if these people are real, but their cross-examinations elicit harrowing confessions: One woman was raped at age 4 and then beaten by her father, another saw her father murdered, a third is bulimic, a man is a male prostitute, and so on.

The uncanny thing about the revelations at the end of the movie is that we cannot be absolutely sure if this is all fiction, or only some of it.

The film was made by James Ronald Whitney, whose "Just, Melvin" is one of the most powerful documentaries I've seen, about a man who abused and molested many members of Whitney's extended family and is finally confronted on screen...

"Games People Play" proves, if nothing else, that there are actors who will do almost anything to get in a movie. The actors here (Joshua Coleman, Sarah Smith, Scott Ryan, Dani Marco, David Maynard, Elisha Imani Wilson) are all effective in their scenes, sometimes moving, sometimes more convincing than they have a right to be...

A brilliant example of an experiment in psychological manipulation (four stars)...it evokes a strange and horrible fascination...!"



"GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York receives **5 OUT OF 5 STARS!**"



"This past weekend, **James Ronald Whitney's GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York** had the largest per screen totals of any movie in the United States, \$12,346, beating out **Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ** by nearly \$3,000...quite a triumph!...*GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York* is the big screen's first successful reality franchise, one whose only predecessor was last year's putrid *The Real Cancun* . Whitney is a proud member of the school of extreme reality nurtured out of HBO's New York offices by Sheila Nevins (promoted last month to President). His 2000 documentary *Just Melvin* , premiered on HBO after *The Sopranos*, while his Emmy-Award winning follow-up a couple years later, *Telling Nicholas* , was slotted right behind of *Six Feet Under!*"

—By Richard Horgan



"'GAMES PEOPLE PLAY' is a very special film from a very original director -- grounded in the fast-track pulse of now, but so fresh, moving, outrageous and smart it's unlike anything you've seen before, with enough shocks and constant surprises to knock you right out of your shoes!"

[Rex Reed & other Critics](#)



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EBERT & ROEPER
movie review!](#)



THUMBS UP!

Transcript of "Games People Play: New York"
Air Date 4/17

ROGER EBERT

Now for a seriously weird movie. "Games People Play: New York"...Some of the movie is fake, some of it is real, and at the end I was not absolutely sure what was fake and what wasn't. Six actors chosen in auditions and given outrageous assignments that involve a lot of nudity and public embarrassment.

CUT TO A CLIP FROM THE MOVIE

ROGER EBERT V/O

That was the director, James Ronald Whitney, explaining the challenge and Dani Marco dropping the towel. Here's another assignment: Try to collect urine samples from complete strangers on the street.

CUT TO A CLIP FROM THE MOVIE

ROGER EBERT V/O

Another game: Convince a stranger to make a threesome in a hotel room.

CUT TO A CLIP FROM THE MOVIE

ROGER EBERT

Although the strangers probably thought they were going to have sex. It turns out it's going to be a music performance in the nude. The imagination behind this film is cruel and sadistic. Are we supposed to think of these people as courageous, or good sports, or victims, or simply actors who will do anything to be in a movie?

RICHARD ROEPER

...I understand what you're saying. I think that's part of the reason why I am going to give this movie THUMBS UP. Because whether it's all real or fiction, you're right it's still confusing towards the end. Like who's playing who and what. These are real human beings who we see on screen willing to ah, getting naked is just the beginning, as you said with these people and there is something fascinating about that and yeah something very sad about that.

ROGER EBERT

I wondered whether they had a lot of turndowns before they got the people we see on screen.

RICHARD ROEPER

I would only hope so.

ROGER EBERT

I wonder how? Would you give a urine sample to a stranger on the street?

RICHARD ROEPER

I wouldn't even give it to a friend on the street.

ROGER EBERT

No, I wouldn't give it at all...

RICHARD ROEPER

That's just me...

ROGER EBERT

NO...

RICHARD ROEPER

But I'll tell ya, you mentioned two of these actors, I think this Dani Marco in particular she could be a star. I don't know if she's playing this character or it's really her or

whatever the case may be...

ROGER

It left me feeling sad. At the same time I have to say that it certainly was compulsively watch-able!

RICHARD ROEPER

It's a unique piece of work!



"GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York" is the best independent film I have ever seen!"

—Brian Sebastian



Games People Play (2003)



Directed by
[James Ronald Whitney](#)



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[Photos](#)

Genre: [Comedy](#) / [Documentary](#) / [Drama](#)

User Rating: ★★★★★★★★★★ 9.8/10 [Vote Here](#)

Runtime: USA:96 min Country: [USA](#) Language: [English](#) Color: [Color](#)

NEW YORK POST

"Ingenious! and the uninhibited contestants prove to be surprisingly good actors."

—Jonathan Foreman



...Wondering "how far people will go for fame?" James Ronald Whitney sets out to shoot a pilot for "the world's most uninhibited reality show." In 72 hours, six hard-bodied aspiring actors--three men and three women--compete for a \$10,000 grand prize by luring NYC citizens into compromising situations...

—Matthew Plouffe

Los Angeles Times

"With *GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York*, filmmaker James Ronald Whitney takes having it both ways to new heights...He satirizes reality TV while showing total nudity...TITILLATING and ENERGETIC...Whitney has plenty of hoops for them to jump through...Coleman, a personable prize-winning college athlete, and the lovely and imaginative Smith possess the strongest presences among the most attractive sextet, and have been rewarded...for their efforts by having been cast in the film's sequel, *GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: Hollywood*, already in post-production."

—Kevin Thomas



Games People Play: New York

If anyone has earned the right to invent another goofy reality TV series and place himself as the sadistic circusmaster handling the flaming hoops, it's James Ronald Whitney. Whitney's 2000 film, *Just, Melvin: Just Evil*, was the rawest confessional doc of its era, a film that revealed his grandfather to be child molester and possible murderer, while looking at the effect Grandpa Melvin had on ensuing generations - some of whom are just barely getting by, living in trailer parks and succumbing to heavy drinking. Whitney, who did a turn as a Chippendales dancer, put his own campy overachievements as a teen gymnast and quiz whiz under the microscope as well. He turns the camera outward this time, in a purported pilot for a reality show this time - offering aspiring actors and actresses the chance to win \$10,000 if they out-expose each other in a series of exhibitionist trials that include confessing their most traumatic moments to the camera, collecting urine samples from passersby, and convincing strangers to have sex with them in four minutes or less. Who's playing, and who's getting played, is the real \$10,000 question - and Whitney excellently maneuvers the manipulations to keep you guessing till the final credits roll.

—Susan Gerhard

The New York Times

Director James Ronald Whitney takes the reality television craze to the outer limits in this motion picture, which at once parodies the antics of shows such as *Fear Factor* and *Punk'd* while pushing the envelope of both the concept and his participants. After auditioning several hundred New Yorkers, Whitney recruits a cast of three men and three women to perform various stunts around the city, most of which involve nudity or sexual situations, with the cast member who is judged as the best walking home with a prize of \$10,000. But how far are the participants willing to go in pursuit of money and their 15 minutes of fame? And what does their combination of ambition and lack of inhibition tell us about the people willing to literally bare all without the clear promise of a reward? *Games People Play: New York* was the first in a projected series of three similar films from Whitney, with installments from Hollywood and the Bible Belt in the works.

—Mark Deming



GAMES PEOPLE PLAY
James Ronald Whitney, 2004

David Maynard, Joshua Coleman and Scott Ryan,
holding Gilda Carle

Review

Naked Ambition

Just as TV's Candid Camera prefigured reality shows like Punk'd and Scare Tactics...This feature-length provocation, GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York, from writer-director-producer James Ronald Whitney, who began his filmmaking career with JUST, MELVIN (2000)...chronicles the first round of "America's Most Uninhibited Game."

...Six contestants, handpicked from a grueling audition at which they must confess deep emotional traumas and improvise explicit sex scenes, are...directed to accomplish certain goals and given points based on how well they fulfill their assignments. Over a 72-hour period, the three men and three women...must complete tasks that range from persuading complete strangers to give them a urine sample to seducing unsuspecting delivery boys. The most elaborate prank involves pairs of contestants coyly enticing a stranger to their hotel room for "a naked trio" only to reveal that what they meant was that the three of them were going to do a hokey nude song-and-dance number.

Between rounds they're questioned by the game's judges...who encourage them to pick at their deepest psychic scars until they bleed. Drawing blood takes very little picking, since the contestants have a lot of issues: compulsive-eating or sexual disorders, childhood abuse, parents lost under traumatic circumstances, part-time hustling... the range of dysfunction is breathtaking...and the twist ending proves that the attractive contestants have more going for them than sheer nerve. But explaining what they're doing well spoils the ending as surely as shouting "Bruce Willis doesn't know he's a ghost!" at someone who hasn't seen THE SIXTH SENSE (1999)... There's no denying the freak-show appeal and you don't see frontal nudity like this on TV!

— Maitland McDonagh

Entertainment WEEKLY



" GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York"

The promise of reality stardom will make folks get freaky!

"Terrifying in its silliness...a frisson of shock!...A public audition is held to find six contestants who are willing to peel off their clothes, divulge their darkest secrets...Just about all of the participants are good-looking aspiring actors, and their willingness to get naked on camera is, in every respect, eye-opening....As the contestants talk of bulimia and prostitution and Tourette's syndrome, shedding enough tears for 10 Barbara Walters specials, Whitney pulls off a big twist, leaving you to ask, What is reality?"

-Owen Gleiberman

GLAMOUR

"An uproarious (and surprisingly subversive) satire that manages to be as intriguing, salacious and fun as the genre it's satirizing (not to mention a helluva a lot sexier). Mix FEAR FACTOR with the REAL WORLD, add a screen load of naked, buff young actors and throw in a third-act twist worthy of a spy novel and you have some idea of what's in store in James Ronald Whitney's mind-bending new film."

—Jim Baker - writer, GLAMOUR

PREMIERE

..."GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York" has twists that catch even the toughest skeptics off-guard. Too hot for TV...this high-concept documentary outlines a racy new reality series in which wannabe actors compete for the chance to bare all, improvise steamy "love scenes," and perform embarrassing adult pranks (like trying to seduce an unsuspecting delivery boy) for a shot at fame and \$10,000.

In his director's notes, self-proclaimed "reality whore" James Ronald Whitney (who won acclaim for his documentaries *Just*, *Melvin* and *Telling Nicholas*) blasts the current anything-goes trend in reality television. "It's all bullshit," he says.

Let's skip to the good stuff: Chock full of full-frontal nudity, *Games* sends its cast on such naughty assignments as collecting urine samples from strangers and enlisting passersby to join an all-nude song-and-dance trio. And where real reality shows freak out about their contestants' murky pasts, this one openly exploits its damaged-goods participants. The group includes a guy with Tourette's Syndrome, a gay male escort, a homophobe with deep-rooted mommy issues, a bulimic, and a childhood sex-abuse victim. These, dear friends, are the happy souls you can look forward to watching cavort naked on-camera (however, it would be remiss not to mention that all six score at least 9 on the external-beauty scale)...

—Peter Debruge



"Reality programming pushed to the max!"

—Kirk Honeycutt



BEAN SOUP TIMES



Reality Movie Pits Competitors Against Each Other in Quest for \$10,000

Forget television shows like Big Brother, Survivor, American Idol, Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire, Average Joe, Temptation Island, The Bachelor and even Donald Trump's The Apprentice. For if Games People Play is a sign of what's in store for America, reality movies may break even bigger than the reality TV craze.

The small screen is severely limited by the dictates of censors who freak out about Janet Jackson briefly baring a breast. This means that despite commercials which show sweaty, scantily-clad singles flirting shamelessly in hot tubs, the network programmers never let the reality show action get any steamier than a provocative back massage or maybe a passionate, but guilt-ridden kiss.

Nothing much ever happens, and the closest any of these programs have ever gotten to full-blown nudity is that tiled-out, gay guy on Survivor frolicking in the ocean.

By contrast, the outrageous Games People Play, breaks the reality mold, presenting some very complicated individuals, warts, neuroses, genitals and all, in front of the unblinking eye of an uncensored camera. Directed by Emmy Award-winner James Ronald Whitney (Telling Nicholas), this fascinating flick easily blows all the competition out of the water.

The ingenious Whitney wanted to find out just how far struggling actors and actresses were willing to go for 15 minutes of fame. So, he ran an ad in a New York City newspaper seeking: "3 leading men, 3 leading women, one of whom will earn \$10,000 in 72 hours, 21-30, non-union, in shape, attractive, and uninhibited- for an independent film." .

Operating under severe financial and time constraints, he hired a couple of celebrity judges, TV talk show therapist Dr. Gilda Carle and NY nightclub legend Jim Caruso. The film starts with their auditioning the hundreds of hopefuls who showed up for the casting

call at a Tribeca studio. From the (NC-17) rated selection process alone, it becomes apparent early on that there are plenty of people out there desperate enough to bare themselves, both emotionally and physically, for ten grand.

A compelling combination of shocking stunts and revealing therapy sessions, Games People Play lives up to its billing as "America's Most Uninhibited Game Show." To rack up the most points, contestants must approach people on the street for a urine sample, invite strangers up to a hotel room for a threesome, seduce delivery boys, and try bed aspiring actresses on the casting couch.

Because one's score is based on how far along each mark agrees to go, you can imagine the degree to which the entrants might compromise their values. This is evident at moments such as the one where contestant (Sarah), who had just resorted to nudity to prevail at a task, starts crying when asked, "What would your father say about what you're doing?"

During these down times, we get to see what damaged goods we're dealing with, because the movie mixes in some rather revealing personality profiles of its stars. (Elisha talks about) being molested at the age of 4. (Scott tells how he) was shuttled around foster homes after his mom died in a car crash. (Josh describes how he) is afflicted with Tourette's Syndrome and (Dani admits how she) suffers from bulimia. (David reveals that he) is a male escort and (Sarah describes how she), as a kid, hid under the bed when her father was shot during a raid on their UN compound.

This micro-budgeted production proves that you don't need much money to make an absolutely fascinating movie...Games People Play is a unique feat certain to herald in a new era of reality cinema... Sign me up to see the sequel, which is already referred to in the closing credits.

Clever, intriguing, exciting, surprising, scandalous, jaw-dropping and, ultimately, very thought-provoking. What more could you possibly ask of a reality movie? To paraphrase Trump, "James Ronald Whitney, you're hired!"

Excellent...Four out of four stars!

-Kam Williams



One of the assignments for female contestants in "Games People Play" is to try to weedle personal information from women in neighboring bathroom stalls.

Reality TV's move to big screen is surprisingly fresh!

'Games People Play: New York'
GRADE: B

Unrated but featuring full nudity, erotic situations, language

At first glance — and there is a great deal to glance at in this movie — “Games People Play: New York” looks like a study in desperation as aspiring actors and actresses cavort about onstage fully naked, baring their past and present in an effort to win a spot as one of six reality game show contestants who might win \$10,000.

That’s right, a whopping 10 grand. Who wouldn’t strip everything off and have simulated sex with a complete stranger in front of a crowd for a chance at that kind of money?

The money, of course, is secondary. What this game and movie are offering to the six attractive twentysomethings who ultimately compete is a chance at public exposure, with the emphasis on exposure. And yet what at first seems like an outlandishly exploitative and garish concept evolves into something both funny and surprisingly inventive by film’s end as the supposed dupes playing the game turn out to be far more than you expect...

The game involves each set undertaking specific, progressively more outrageous challenges. In the first, the guys have to go out on the street and ask strangers for urine samples while the gals have to garner personal information from women in neighboring bathroom stalls. And that's just the beginning. At the same time, two judges make the rounds of the contestants' hotel rooms for in-depth interviews about their lives and feelings.

The idea of expanding the reality TV craze onto film surfaced more than a year ago with a few ill-fated Spring Break-meets-Girls Going Wilder projects that either flopped or disappeared. Now director James Ronald Whitney has come up with an unrated, over-the-top concept designed to...appeal to people looking beyond this week's Idol-Bachelor-Apprentice flash of fame.

AND IT WORKS. Somehow Whitney manages to combine bulimia, urine tests, tearful confessions, erotic auditions, complete strangers, naked musical numbers, homophobia, male prostitution, Tourette's syndrome and copious nudity into a highly entertaining, enlightening and ultimately devious film here.

Whether he'll have equal success with subsequent efforts — "GPP: Hollywood" has already been shot — is hard to say, but the level of invention, as well as the level of exhibition, leaves most of the TV competition far behind. Part "Fear Factor," part "Candid Camera," part "Survivor" and many parts new, "Games People Play" is indeed a look at the fame machine, done with tongue in cheek, eyes open in wonderment and a brazen sense of playfulness that's hard to resist.

By Tom Long / Detroit News Film Critic



3 out of 4 stars!

GUILTY PLEASURES

"...Writer-director-producer-editor-composer James Ronald Whitney introduces his film as the pilot for "America's most uninhibited game show."

Between outrageous stunts that are heavy on full-frontal nudity and simulated sex, the contestants bare their souls.

David Maynard talks about his life as a male prostitute, and Dani Marco about her eating disorder. Joshua Coleman discusses his work as a bodybuilder. Sarah Smith and Scott

Ryan lost parents when they were young, and Elisha Imani Wilson's father beat her when she was four.

The...audition process starts with hundreds responding to an ad for three men and three women, ages 21-30, "in shape, attractive, uninhibited."

The crowd is whittled down for in-studio auditions, including a screen test that ends with an "uninhibited, erotic, three-minute love scene."

The last, in which strangers pair up, bare all and go at it in front of a room full of strangers, includes a male couple, a female couple and a woman screwing a man in the ass. That's nothing compared to what the chosen six will have to do with other strangers.

"Games People Play: New York" made me ashamed to be watching, especially when I found myself enjoying it, which was quite a bit of the time."



"A big-screen reality show that flashes plenty of tit and dick!"

—Chuck Wilson, LA WEEKLY



GAME' ON

By MARISA MELTZER



INSANE, FASCINATING..."Games People Play: New York" just opened at Chelsea's Clearview Cinema.

Director, James Ronald Whitney, who also takes on the role of mischievous emcee (his previous films include HBO's acclaimed "Just, Melvin" and "Telling Nicholas"), says, "I'm a reality TV whore - I watch all of it. But I also get frustrated with its limitations. I wanted to make a movie that tested how uninhibited

people could be - both physically and emotionally."

And the six unknown actors chosen for the 72-hour hour adventure were certainly put to the test in terms of what they were willing to reveal - literally.

"I think the nakedness was appropriate for the project," says actress Sarah Smith, who appears topless on the movie's poster. However, she adds, "my parents haven't seen it - I'm going to let them make that decision."

As for Whitney, he says: "I would never ask my actors to do anything I wouldn't do myself."

"Being on a billboard on 42nd Street blows my mind," says actor Scott Ryan. "And I'm still friends with the cast. It was such a bonding experience."

And as with any BUZZED-ABOUT reality show, there will be sequels. "Games People Play: Hollywood," is already completed, and "Games People Play: Bible Belt" will be filmed soon.

And Whitney is convinced that the Bible Belt won't be shocked by his brand of fun: "I think the mainstream is ready for this material."



Movie City News

June 24, 2003-- While the media continue to obsess over such glamour-puss festivals as Cannes, Sundance...I've just returned from CineVegas -- where, along with Mike Goodridge, of Screen International, and Holly Willis, of RES Magazine - I was enlisted to judge a dozen or so features and documentaries...Panel discussions included such artists as Dennis Hopper, Allison Anders, Keith Gordon, Clark Johnson and Grace Slick...

I was very impressed by James Ronald Whitney's consistently surprising Games People Play, which kept audiences guessing as to whether they were watching the pilot for a new reality-TV show, a carefully staged mockumentary or a torture test for actors willing to bear their souls and bodies for a shot at a measly \$10,000 prize. Besides the demands placed on the actors in his "extreme reality" show, Whitney forces viewers to come to grips with their own willingness to accept voyeurism and self-flagellation as entertainment.

It wasn't Cannes - or Chicago, for that matter -- but CineVegas sure made me feel good about movies again.

—Gary Dretzka

ENTERTAINMENT TODAY

Games People Play: New York

An amusing, roundly enjoyable social experiment wrapped in colorful docu-tainment swaddling clothes, Games People Play: New York is billed, both in press materials and by its director, Emmy-winning documentarian James Ronald Whitney (Telling Nicholas, HBO's Just, Melvin), in an introduction to the movie, as the filmed pilot episode of a series-baiting trilogy (sorry aspirant Los Angelenos, Games People Play: Hollywood is apparently even already in the can, with contestants from the first film serving as judges/hosts)...beautifully zonked-out hybrid, part Punk'd, part The Real World, part game show... Fantastically entertaining!

Games People Play also scores considerable points for at least tangentially addressing the fact that perhaps the interpersonal tumult on display may have some sort of latent connection with each individual's predisposition toward theatricality or performance. (The film would make for immensely interesting viewing for thoughtful, struggling and would-be actors.)

In the end...it is clever and certainly does come off as more realistic than most so-called reality TV. Ironic, given that everyone involved is an actor? Nah, at least they're finally being honest about their aspirations. Maybe we've finally achieved a societal breakthrough.

-Brent Simon



"Explaining 'Games People Play' in detail will spoil the ending as surely as shouting, 'Bruce Willis is a ghost!' would ruin 'The Sixth Sense'...the freak-show factor is off the meter!"



rating: ★★★★★ (out of 4!)

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York"

Reality TV hits the big screen with shocking results!

Okay, it was bound to happen. No one could stop it. With massively popular TV shows like *The Bachelor*, *Survivor*, *American Idol*, *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, *The Real World*, *Fear Factor* and *Dr. Phil* popping up everywhere, it was only a matter of time before some cutting-edge filmmaker figured out a way to capitalize and take it... uh, down to the next level: NAKED!

Emmy winning filmmaker James Ronald Whitney has come up with a reality concept so utterly all-encompassing that it combines the premises of all these types of shows into one explicit 99-minute "game show pitch." The effect is similar to watching a car accident pile up: you're horrified, confused, appalled and strangely drawn to the debacle. After watching it I felt manipulated, annoyed, sickened, amused and strangely enthralled by the sheer audacity of what Whitney pulls out of his hat by the end, which I won't give away here.

...A self-proclaimed "reality whore," Whitney holds an open casting call in NYC for "uninhibited" actors and actresses to use their "acting" talents to compete in "games" to win \$10,000.

Contestants happily bare all, body and soul, at the drop of a hat and with each other, in extremely compromising positions...There's also a soul-baring part which made me even more uncomfortable when these people, on request, told their darkest secrets on camera to strangers and then cried hysterically. All for money. And fame! They wanna live forever! Yikes.

After the auditions, six very attractive young men and women are chosen, and asked to basically become robots and do whatever they're asked. Whitney's next round of games involve more nudity, the manipulation of unsuspecting passers-by to pee in cups for fake urine tests, and working with more aspiring actors who are unwittingly auditioning for fake films...Particularly amusing was a segment called "The Naked Trio," where the contestants went out in pairs to coerce some poor schmo off the street into going back to their hotel for a three-way sex romp. Instead, the guy ended up as a naked background

singer performing a vaudeville song as part of "The Naked Trio." Bravo! It's lucky that one of these random guys off the street didn't pull a gun.

...I can't tell you why I'm being so cryptic but I don't want to spoil the ending, which is the reason to sit through this...I have to watch it again to see what I missed. Come to think of it, they got me. Damn!...I hate to admit it, but it's gonna be huge. God help us!

—Kimberlye Gold



" How far will people go for fame and fortune? You have no idea!"

Cute couples taking home a stranger for a "naked trio." A foxy boy asks a guy on the street for a sample of his urine. Seducing the all-too-willing deli delivery boy... Plus a few tears and cliffhangers along the way...It's just the tip of the randy iceberg of the antics of six actor wannabes who bare all--and yes, we mean all--in their quest to win a pot of cash and prove that they are the most fearless/shameless young acting talent alive.

Taking the gimmickry of reality-TV game shows to another, more manic level is director James Ronald Whitney's GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York (an L.A. installment is due soon)...Hilarious, sometimes harrowing, infinitely watchable (it's hard to turn away) look at what people will do to prove themselves. There are teary moments and confessions...You'll laugh; you'll cry; you'll cringe; you'll see some dick--and then you'll laugh some more. And you'll thank God you're not on reality TV!

-John Polly

The Washington Post

Games People Play: New York



Watching *Games People Play: New York*, a feature film that purports to have begun life as a pitch for a reality-TV series, I am reminded of a famous anecdote about George Bernard Shaw, who found himself seated next to an attractive woman at a party. "Madam," he said, "would you go to bed with me for a thousand pounds?" Despite receiving an indignant refusal, the writer persisted, eventually getting his dinner companion to admit that she might sleep with him for the then princely sum of 50,000 pounds. "And if I were to offer you five pounds?" Shaw countered, only to hear her exclaim, "Mr. Shaw! What do you take me for?" "We have already established what you are," Shaw replied. "Now we are merely haggling over the price."

In *Games*, the price for selling oneself in front of a national audience is apparently \$10,000, which is the relatively paltry prize filmmaker James Ronald Whitney offers to whichever one of six contestants (three men and three women) proves best at performing such "uninhibited" on-camera stunts as persuading strangers to provide urine samples and seducing immigrant deliverymen into receiving an all-nude massage. In a disturbing twist to this parade of debasement -- interspersed with excruciatingly private confessionals to the game's "judges," a celebrity publicist and a psychotherapist -- Whitney adds a surprise layer, turning the film's audience into the ultimate sucker. That, and not the copious exposed flesh and rampant emotional cruelty, is what makes *Games* actually rather interesting...it's a kind of *Candid Camera* on acid (or at least Rohypnol)!

- Michael O'Sullivan



'Games'...It may be your cup of T-- and A!

" Games People Play" is not a documentary about the Spinners. But whatever it is, it opens today at the Ritz Bourse...It's a wonder no one got the crap beat out of them during the making of the film.

A theme of the movie is that a struggling actor will do virtually anything for a chance at money and fame...What's more bizarre about "GPP" is that the people pulled in off the street will do virtually anything...for nothing.

Like any reality show, there are some twists and heartbreaks along the way...which should catch most viewers by surprise. "Games People Play" is definitely not for everyone...but it is different - and thanks to six attractive, likable actors, oddly riveting.

-HOWARD GENSLER



Games People Play: New York

...James Ronald Whitney previously made the intensely personal and searing autobiographical doc Just Melvin (renamed as Just, Melvin: Just Evil for HBO). For Games, he holds a casting call for actors who compete for a \$10,000 prize by doing zany pranks around Manhattan and confessing secrets that no one but an emotional voyeur would want to know.

Poor, weeping Brianne looks into the camera and explains that she "has just been sleeping with random people and could get AIDS." ...Games may be the apotheosis of reality-TV culture, complete with full nudity, toilet humor and lots of other naughtiness...Is this what it has come to? Are we just a bunch of doltish, confessional cheap-thrill seekers? Games People Play would have you think so, and judging from reality TV's ratings triumphs, it may be right. This is the kind of faux-dignified freak show that was once the stuff of parody and satire...!"

By Chris Vognar

Star-Telegram

Games People Play: New York, a feature film...it's a pretty scathing satire of reality fare, including itself, which makes it both what it is and a critique of what it is. I'm just not sure I like the feeling of squirming in that narrowest of gaps.

The Boston Globe

"Games People Play... Whitney's idea is to rub "reality" in a steaming heap of exploitation that would leave nightly addicts of "eliminate," "Taidaters," "Cheaters," or "The 5th Wheel" feeling completely satisfied. He brings in the hard-core sensibility that broadcast standards won't allow in those shows.

In "Games People Play," three men and three women run around Manhattan for 72 hours attempting to seduce...strangers for a \$10,000 prize. The six players are also actors, and another part of this contest is to discover which is the best performer...The ultimate victor is victorious because he or she can score the most total points across three events...

The hundreds of people who descend upon the show's open casting call passionately dredge up their most terrible diary entries for a spot in this...production. There seem to be dozens of stories of rape, attempted suicide, and promiscuity...

After the big confessional round and once all the middle-aged and unattractive applicants have been turned away, the remaining hopefuls are asked to do a scene with each other that involves a little acting and a lot of lust. Oh, and fully disrobing is a plus.

The final six, a tolerable bunch, reveal their troubles and insecurities -- eating disorders, male prostitution, Tourette's syndrome, nymphomania, etc. -- to the judges. Between these confessions, they perform ridiculous stunts. While the men are out accosting strangers for urine samples, for instance, the women are gathering personal information from the person in the next bathroom stall.

Another stunt involves the women individually dropping their towels, then seducing take-out delivery guys, most of whom don't speak English. At some point, the actress and filmmakers confess to the bewildered delivery guys that, in the words of Ashton Kutcher and MTV, they've been punk'd...

Last year, the release of the reality movie "The Real Cancun" prompted widespread fear and loathing. What happens to actors? What happens to civilization? Nobody saw it, and

the movie was ultimately harmless. But there's something unsafe and scary about "Games People Play." It has the homemade look of both a public access special and a "Dateline" undercover investigation. A lot of the action takes place at night in sterile hotel rooms and in other anonymous places. The whole experience feels...like walking alone down a long damp alley at 3 in the morning.

On the film's website, Whitney claims to be a "reality whore." Accordingly, in 2002, he made a documentary called "Telling Nicholas," in which the director...won an Emmy...!"

By Wesley Morris

San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

"The film offers plenty of male and female frontal nudity, and some mimed sex (in an audition scene where the actors are told to improvise erotic content). If your not ashamed of yourself by now, dear viewer, just wait till the participants indulge in tearful confessions--in front of the former Love Doc from MTV--about incidents involving bulimia, molestation and prostitution. And there's a surprise ending...

Director James Ronald Whitney has created a couple of highly praised HBO documentaries: 'Just, Melvin,' which dealt with childhood sexual abuse, and 'Telling Nicholas,' about the effects of Sept. 11, 2001, on one family...Whitney, I believe thinks of 'Games People Play' as a satire of reality TV, and wants viewers to question their own fascination with this lurid stuff."

-Walter Addiego

NEW YORK Magazine

"TITILLATING REALITY...for the big screen."

— Bilge Ebiri & Logan Hill

Philadelphia Gay News

Film lets the 'Games' begin

Three hunky guys - one of whom is gay - and three sexy women vie for \$10,000 in the new film "Games People Play: New York." This big-screen version of a "reality show" takes six actors, and puts them through 72 hours of sexual shenanigans. While writer/director James Ronald Whitney's film is certainly audacious, it remains to be seen if his "game show pilot" will take off.

What does come off, however, are the participants' clothes - and often...From the auditions - which feature two guys, two girls or one of each improvising an erotic, three-minute love scene (one involves toe sucking) - to the "games" themselves, everyone must bare their bodies.

And Whitney also has the cast bare their souls.

Each individual meets privately with a psychologist and a celebrity publicist where they reveal their deepest, darkest secrets. In these episodes, David confesses that he works as a male escort, while another, Sarah, describes watching her father being shot when she was a teen. Other participants describe their battles with bulimia, and Tourette's syndrome.

"Games People Play" uses these segments to uncover more about the players than the full-frontal exhibitionism. Yet most of the movie consists of the entertaining games. The women get to act out such things as "Delivery Boy's Fantasy" in which they must get a stranger naked within a specified time limit. Likewise, the guys get to do things like solicit urine samples from people on the street. It is brazen in the way of a fraternity hell week...audiences will be amazed at how the players participated for the outrageous scenes.

One event, titled "Naked Trio" involves two guys and a girl getting completely nude in a hotel room - to sing. Part of the fun of the film is seeing what shameful antics Whitney has in store for them...Overall, the male contestants are not shy, especially Joshua who has little trouble asking men on the street - some of whom are shamelessly attracted to him - to provide him with the urine samples. (Incidentally, blond stud Joshua earned the championship bodybuilder title Mr. Penn while enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania).

Likewise, David (the escort) has no reservations about being out - as when he tells a woman he's such a good kisser that he could turn her straight son gay...As with any good reality program, there is a final twist that while satisfying, many viewers will see coming.

"Games People Play" may not revolutionize the reality show craze as Whitney might hope, but this amiable film will certainly have eyes popping and tongues wagging.

-Gary M. Kramer

Detroit Free Press



3 out of 4 stars!

A lie, a gag or both? 'Games' leaves a mystery!

If the concept of metafiction -- fiction that is about fiction -- has you so confused you tend to shy away from bookstores, you will want to carefully consider whether to see "Games People Play: New York," especially if you are one of the millions of reality-show junkies.

**'Games People Play:
New York'**

THREE STARS

out of 4 stars

Not rated; nudity,
language, sexual
situations

1 hour, 40 minutes

An alleged documentary that so blurs the boundaries between real, unreal and surreal that they might as well not exist, "Games" is... just interesting enough to relieve the embarrassment you deserve for enjoying it.

We are supposed to believe, I think, that "Games People Play" is either the pilot for a risqué, cable-ready reality show or...the first in a trilogy of reality movies...Either way, it begins with a cattle-call audition for "uninhibited" actors, six of whom will be chosen to compete for a \$10,000 prize.

Before a pair of judges, an actor named Jim Caruso and a psychotherapist named Gilda Carle -- both of whom may be phonies for all I know -- the hopefuls, without much prodding, bare themselves emotionally and then physically. The latter is a prerequisite,

because nearly all challenges they will face in competition (most of which are more like "Candid Camera" stunts) involve full nudity.

Not surprisingly, all six contestants chosen by director-producer James Ronald Whitney (who, it should be noted, also takes a credit for the screenplay) are attractive and have suffered some serious psychological trauma or harbor some deep secret, or at least do their best to convince us that is the case.

They then proceed, scavenger hunt-style, to their assignments, which include seeing who can collect the largest number of urine samples from people on the street in a limited time, who can recruit strangers at a hotel to join two of them to perform as an all-nude trio and, for the women, who can seduce a delivery boy the quickest. The men, meanwhile, pretend to be producers in order to get women on their casting couch, which could be Whitney's own nod to metafiction...

The distinction is ultimately negligible whether "Games People Play" is all put-on, part put-on or all exploitation. As Lily Tomlin once asked, what is reality, anyway, except a collective hunch?

BY TERRY LAWSON
MOVIE CRITIC

The logo for NYPOST, featuring the word "NYPOST" in a bold, red, italicized font with a black outline.

"Full-frontal nudity is the least outrageous part of this picture!"

The logo for VARIETY, featuring the word "VARIETY" in a green, stylized, italicized font with a black outline.

"First in a trilogy...a heavy sex-and-skin factor!..."

Writer-director James Ronald Whitney assembles a team of six actors in their early 20s -- three buff, gym-sculpted lads and three ethnically assorted babes...The sextet is culled from an open-call audition, during which aspiring contestants reveal all, emotionally and physically...Boys must collect urine samples from strangers and coax actresses to uninhibited heights in a casting couch session; girls must engage women in neighboring bathroom stalls in elaborate dialogues and seduce delivery boys in record time. Split into teams of two, the couples must enlist a man off the street to sing in a naked trio act, all

recorded on invisible mini-cams.

The confessional segments involve the attractive but unfortunate contestants spilling their guts on experiences including bulimia, parental loss and abandonment, turning tricks and sexual molestation during intimate interviews with the judges, singer-performer Jim Caruso and psychotherapist Dr. Gilda Carle...perhaps the least sympathetic shrink on the planet -- as she spouts compassionate lines like, "But you were a male prostitute before this guy got cancer, right?"

...Next release, "Games People Play: Hollywood."

-David Rooney



"Titillating!"

—Paul Birchall



THE GAMES BEGIN

"Let's face it, many people are going to see James Ronald Whitney's new film, 'GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York'...and this reality film delivers!"

—Jeffrey Epstein



CINEVEGAS: Psychedelic on KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN, THIS GIRL'S LIFE, BREAK A LEG, THE FITTEST, and GAMES PEOPLE PLAY!

Hey folks, Harry here with the first report from The Psychedelic and the Las Vegas Film Festival known to the world as Cinevegas. I was a judge at this festival last year where I got to discover such jewels like POOLHALL JUNKIES and SPUN. Looks like there's some good stuff this year... 'Games People Play'--Reality TV meets Candid Camera meets Star Search meets Therapy Sessions meets NC-17 pranks in James Ronald Whitney's documentary-entertainment blend. A casting call in NYC leads to a 72-hour game where everything is not what it seems. Naked bodies and emotions are plentiful in this clever concept.

Contestants lure unsuspecting bystanders into revealing skin, personal information, and in one mini-game: urine. All this happens while contestants spill their guts to the cameras... A Hollywood edition is being completed with a Bible Belt chapter in the works.



GAMES PEOPLE PLAY



GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

"A Brilliant, Damning Satire...!"

Anyone who has spent time with me, read anything I've written or has listened to me ramble on endlessly knows how I feel about the reality TV craze. Uncreative, cheaply produced pieces of trash that take jobs away from talented writers and actors while providing an outlet for wannabe fame-seekers to have their 15 minutes while taking countless blocks of time away from us all. I hate them all. There have been surprisingly few attempts at satirizing the whole genre, outside of some direct-to-video nude-fests and the only successful outing, *Series 7: The Contenders*. *Games People Play* does not announce itself as a documentary nor does it establish a faux-spoof slant. When it was all over, I had no idea what its intention was, but I knew I had been entertained, made angry and will be thinking about it for a long time.

The obvious stragglers (at an opening audition) are eliminated immediately just before round two is initiated. The finalists are asked to strut, pose, reveal intimate details of their lives and improvise a graphic three-minute love scene with their fellow interviewees. This section becomes an immediate entry point into the hilarity and utterly pathetic nature of fame-seekers, all trying to flex and make an impression on not just the judges

but the camera watching them...

Three men and three women are eventually chosen to be the contestants...and when the six of them aren't giving it up full frontal, they're baring their souls to a Dr. Laura lookalike judge/psychiatrist and her shadow who dig into their pasts...

The game portions, taking up the middle of the film, are at times funny and ridiculous... How far will those actresses go with the love scene after we're reminded of Hollywood's definition of "casting couch"? What if the delivery boy went further than touching the one girl's ass after she dropped her towel in front of him? Will the cameras ever stop?

"Hopefully not" must be the answer for Joshua Coleman, Dani Marco, David Maynard, Scott Ryan, Sarah Smith and Elisha Imani Wilson whose 15 minutes stretched over a period of a 72-hour shooting cram session may be more significant than anyone could have guessed. For Games People Play takes on a kind of transcendent purity by its final frames for us and its stars. We've seen a lot of nudity and a prize has been awarded, but what we've really seen calls into question not just the previous hour but everything reality fans have become accustomed to and sold repeatedly week-after-week.

What then queries the mind is a triple-layer of "what have we just seen?" Whitney, a self-described "reality whore" and he's created a tightrope of satire and subjective voyeurism which toys with the audience's expectations and at the same time gives everyone exactly what they expect. The seduction scenes rival and, in most cases, outperform the soft-core Cinemax brethren. The revealing interviews spliced into the game go well beyond the superficiality of Survivor and Real World breakdowns, achieving heartbreak, frustration and, ultimately, surprise.

It's hard to satirize and to titillate at the same time, but perhaps the two are siamese soulmates that will never be excised. Whitney is already an accomplished documentarian with such works as "Just, Melvin" and "Telling Nicholas", powerful films which dealt with family molestation and 9/11, so its nearly impossible to accuse him of just trying for a quick buck on the reality scene. Even after the back-and-forth reactions I had during the film, it was an inescapable presence in my mind long after I left the theater. I believe Whitney's intentions are far loftier and I'll back that up in future discussions of Games People Play. But with Games People Play: Hollywood and Games People Play: The Bible Belt on the way, are we looking at a trilogy with even more secrets up its sleeve...? In reality, it's going to take a lot more than 15 minutes to discover the answer.

- Erik Childress, member_CHICAGO FILM CRITICS ASSOCIATION



At first glance, James Ronald Whitney's *Games People Play: New York* appears to be what one might call an extreme reality game - a combination of "Fear Factor" and "Candid Camera" with stunts so over-the-top that even an R rating would be unattainable. But first glances can be deceiving, especially when the viewer takes the time to look a little deeper. Sure, *Games People Play* is the ultimate guilty pleasure with plenty of eye candy (in the form of full-frontal male and female nudity), but there's more to the film than fit, naked bodies. Not only does Whitney (who admits in the production notes to being "a reality whore") do a credible ape of reality game shows, but he offers some emotional resonance. Part documentary, part parody, and part something indefinable, the film manages to succeed on its own terms and entertain on just about anyone's.

Certainly, the titillation aspect is high, causing *Games People Play* to deliver in a way that *The Real Cancun* didn't...In *Games*, there are some things Whitney unquestionably does well. The first is to take a cold, hard look at the inexplicably popular phenomenon of "reality television" (a misnomer if there ever was one). You know the kinds of shows that I'm talking about - where good looking people do incredibly embarrassing things in order to gain their fifteen minutes of fame and win a paltry cash prize. These shows get big ratings. Here, Whitney takes things farther than any network would ever dare go, and the six contestants come along for the ride, nipples pointing straight ahead and penises swinging. As one of them remarks, it's not really about the \$10,000 prize. It's about the challenge.

Games People Play has its serious side, as well. Without becoming maudlin, it touches on such sober issues as eating disorders, child molestation, and male prostitution. Each of the contestants has something ugly lurking in his or her past, and, as a result of a candid conversation, these stories come out...

One would expect *Games People Play: New York* to have widespread appeal within its target demographic, who will adore what Whitney has put on the screen, not just because it's funny and full of nudity, but because it's smart. Perhaps the best news of all is that this is the first episode of a trilogy. *Games People Play: Hollywood* is in post-production, and *Games People Play: The Bible Belt* will follow. The challenge for Whitney will be to take these other films in new directions. I look forward to seeing what that is.

—James Berardinelli, film critic for WCTC's "The Bernard Spigner Show"

La Movie Boeuf Games People Play

Milking this current fascination with real people doing really dumb things for big bucks for creative—and comedic—effect comes James Ronald Whitney's Games People Play (aka Games People Play: New York since there appears to be a Games People Play: Hollywood in the offing).

All comers must be in shape, attractive, and uninhibited, i.e., willing to strip themselves of both their clothes and their emotions, as each are put through their risqué paces, performing sex-related stunts in public and private while having their personal skeletons yanked from their closets by the game show equivalents of Dr. Joyce Brothers and Bob Barker.

Soon enough, through the magic of cinema (or, more accurately, the magic of rapid fire editing of cheesy digital video), the crowd has been reduced to three men (a gigolo, a Tourette's Syndrome sufferer, a young man who's mother was killed in a car crash when he was very young) and three women (a bulimic, a victim of sexual abuse, a young woman whose father was murdered when she was very young). David, Joshua, Scott, Dani, Elisha, and Sarah (respectively)...The hook here, of course, is that the better you are at laying bare your soul (and accompanying body parts), the better your chances of walking away with the cash.

—David N. Butterworth



Love it or hate it, reality television is here to stay, and its jump from small screen to large is inevitable...I don't know exactly where Games People Play: New York fits into that puzzle. In all honesty, it probably doesn't even belong on the same table as that puzzle, aside from ultimately being about reality television. Play isn't a big-screen spin-off of an already successful Nielsen juggernaut, nor is it a shrewd look at voyeurism set against the backdrop of what we're supposed to believe is an already successful (but completely fictitious) TV program.

Play takes place over just 72 hours, with the casting process taking up the first six. Potential contestants are first told to act crazy and uninhibited, without speaking, for 30 seconds. Then Whitney has each tell a painfully personal story, and he uses the audio from this portion set to the video from the first segment to create a carnival of

horrors as people flex their muscles and tear off their shirts while talking about date rape and not having any real friends.

The auditions get more titillating, degenerating into full, un-pixelated nudity and simulated sex using every possible combination of genders...These peculiar missions are occasionally interrupted by segments in which a pair of shrinks interview the six contestants, and that's when things get really weird. Some have the typical foibles (if you're a reality TV junkie, like me) such as bulimia and sexual molestation, but others tell tales of truly scandalous behavior, like male prostitution, political assassination and deadly automobile crashes. And things get odder yet, but telling you how might ruin Play (though it does make you wonder how Whitney is going to get away with Games People Play: Hollywood). It's a very interesting trip.

Personally, I was glued to the screen while I watched it...and was totally thrown by the last 15 minutes. But I'm a pervert and a voyeur, and I love reality-based shows. I'm no expert at predicting what people might like (My Big Fat Greek Wedding? What's wrong with you people?), but I would think hardcore reality fans, as well as fellow perverts and voyeurs, would enjoy it. Even a handful of folks who despise reality shows might get a kick out of the way Whitney puts the "reality" back into the genre.

—Planet Sick-Boy

Cinema Center

Review: Games People Play (James Ronald Whitney, 2004)

As an avid hater of reality television, the intelligence behind James Ronald Whitney's Games People Play was quite a surprise to me. .

As the picture to the left indicates, there's a complete unabashed confidence in Whitney's direction. He doesn't hold back from displaying graphic full-frontal nudity or intense sexual acts. Cinematically, I must admit that the freewheeling style and amusing situations were a total blast for me to watch. Unlike crap such as Survivor or Temptation Island, there's an honesty in Games People Play that eliminates the feeling of contrivance that permeates throughout the former shows. I actually believed that these folks were doing these things. Can't say the same about any reality show that I've seen...

That being said, what particularly interested me about Games People Play was the heart behind it. Beneath the sexcapadic surface, there's a touching look at inhibitions, where

they come from, and how to conquer them. Wild sequences are intercut with powerful confessions about traumatic and sad personal experiences. Among them are rapes, homosexual acts, and masochistic abuse with drugs and sharp objects. It's not pleasant to watch, but it's also not at all glorifying and makes the viewer contemplate the extremes that these people went to. Considering the large numbers of intense personal demons, it's no surprise that the contestants (and wannabe contestants) were willing to bare it all. It's an outlet for their suffering and frustration, and these convictions come across strongly enough to make Games People Play a rewarding, if difficult, experience.

...Give Games People Play a twirl...there'll be the normal slew of critics - and viewers - who find anything with bare skin or severe situations gratuitous by default, but take my word for it. It's not.

—Review by Gabe Leibowitz



Film Review: "Games People Play: New York"

Director Whitney stars us off with a brief setup of what we are about to see: he has put an ad in a local casting paper, looking for three leading men and three leading women, between the ages of twenty-one and thirty, in shape, attractive and uninhibited, to participate in the making of an independent project, which will earn one of them ten thousand dollars at the end of 72 hours of filming. How far are hundreds of starving actors willing to go to earn ten grand?

...Uninhibited is what Whitney asked for, and that is exactly he gets: hotter than an Andy Sidaris production...a cross between the outrageousness of Jerry Springer and the intimate depth of Oprah Winfrey. And when the last competition is completed and the contestants have cried their final tear, many of those who auditioned at the beginning return to see who has been chosen the winner. More tears are shed, cold hard cash is handed out, and the fate of each contestant, as well as some of the others who auditioned, is told as the end credits roll...with plenty of uncensored, free flowing flesh.

We are introduced to two charming young performers, Joshua Coleman and Sarah Smith. It is not accidental that, of the six players here, Coleman and Smith will soon be seen in the next edition of the game, as the judges of the recently completed "Games People Play: Hollywood," or that the perky blonde Smith is featured front and center in the ads, while the perky blonde Coleman rises head and shoulders above everyone else. (A third segment, based in the Bible Belt, is forthcoming.)

If this type of entertainment is your cup of tea, you will likely be amused here.



Fame Obsessed: Games People Play New York
How Far Would You Go For Fame?



If I tell you that Games People Play New York answers the age-old question “How far would you go for fame?” you will probably think I’m joking. How can a movie actually answer a question akin to “What is the meaning of life?” But I’m not joking. It does answer the question, and in the process it’ll shock the hell out of you...The reality craze we’ve been going through with the TV networks has reached high ratings and low moments, (I’m not particularly a fan)...Now take any of these shows, multiply the soul baring by ten and add in no particular order: seduction, bulimia, male and female nudity, Tourette syndrome, casting couch, prostitution, asking strangers for urine samples, more nudity, getting the delivery boy naked, faking sex and a naked trio, and you end up with Games People Play New York, truly America’s most uninhibited game!



Emmy Award winner James Ronald Whitney, director of HBO’s “Just, Melvin” and “Telling Nicholas”, a self proclaimed reality whore, wanted to see how far go for fame and fortune.

This “reality-movie” will make you react. You’ll think about it for days, and during most of it you just won’t believe your eyes or your ears...This is a must-see!...So check out the listing below, make sure you’re comfortable with the person you’ll see this with, if you’re not going by yourself, and get yourself to a movie theater.

For a teaser check out www.GamesPeoplePlayTheMovie.com

A follow up film, Games People Play Hollywood is already in the works. Keep up to date on its progress at www.gamespeopleplaythemovie.com

—By Alessandro D'Amico

QNetwork

Entertainment Portal



The levels of reality and artifice in *Games People Play* are so densely interwoven that it is probably futile to try to sort them out, which is the heart of writer/director James Ronald Whitney's elaborate ...game show, where each week three men and three women are selected to compete for points in various high-concept (and usually dirty) contests. Whitney claims he came up with the idea, which he considers the ultimate reality show, but had no idea how to shop it to producers, so he made this film as a way of demonstrating its potential. Thus, *Games People Play* is both the pilot show itself and also a quasi-documentary about its making...

The central idea of *Games People Play* is creating situations to see how far the contestants and the unwitting people on the street with whom they interact will go. It's a tests of limits in which only the most shameless will win, which, in a nutshell, is the essence of reality TV...Whitney simply takes that concept and runs with it, taking it to NC-17 extremes and putting all the results up on the screen.

NO BONES ABOUT IT, "GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: NEW YORK" IS HIGHLY ENTERTAINING—EVEN ENGROSSING! Much of this is due to the six-pack of attractive, willing twentysomethings— Joshua Coleman, Dani Marco, David Maynard, Sarah Smith, Scott Ryan and Elisha Wilson—who bare their bodies and souls for our voyeuristic pleasure. We get to know these people through one of the show's conceits, which is forcing them to sit down with a psychoanalyst and one of the show's producers and pour out the most awful moments of their lives in a kind of bizarre therapy session...

The game, which lasts 72 hours, consists of ridiculous hidden-camera scenarios... What is interesting, though, is the people involved, because they're not blank slates, but rather characters about whom we learn a lot...giving teary-eyed testimonials about their awful lives, replete with stories of date rape, eating disorders, prostitution, even seeing one's father killed. This makes for an uneasy, but strangely compelling juxtaposition in which we watch these people extend themselves to the limits on two fronts—one that is often breathtakingly hilarious in its "how far will you go?" ethos, the other painfully intimate. Yet, the two are deeply intertwined, as Whitney connects these people's willingness to do anything with their willingness to say anything. This, he asserts, is why *Games People Play* is more "real" than other reality shows: There are no limits on what he can show and what his contestants can do. It's a completely open field.

There is a twist near the end of *Games People Play* that throws everything we bought into for the previous hour and 20 minutes out of whack and further blurs the lines between the real and the artificial. This is a clever trick for a show, albeit one that can only work once, which leads one to believe that Whitney has been toying with us all along. *Games People*

Play, as the title suggests, is not so much a potential reality show as it is a cleverly disguised satire of the entire reality TV phenomenon...Part of its absurd genius is that it's never entirely clear what it is and what it isn't, which leaves it up to each individual viewer to decide. Now, that's reality.

Reviewer: James Kendrick

Score: ★★★ out of 4 STARS!



Games People Play: New York

This “Reality Show” is the way we like ’em!

Directed by James Ronald Whitney

...Six aspiring New York actors compete against each other for a paltry \$10,000 prize. They are called upon to strip naked and play risqué pranks on unsuspecting people on the street, and the unbridled enthusiasm with which they - as well as the dozens of failed auditioners for the movie - do this is eye-opening, to say the least...Many buff MTV Spring Break types eagerly drop trou and get busy for the camera, as well as the entire casting call. (Rex Reed's favorite, Joshua Coleman had the bright idea to have a woman fist him on film.)

The gags run from silly - the three girls have to try to start a conversation with women sharing adjacent toilet stalls; the boys have to collect pee samples from strangers - to even sillier - the girls seduce unsuspecting delivery boys until their “husbands” stormily intrude; they all have to enlist a stranger to perform a Naked Trio before the camera...

It's not all cheap laughs, however. During the serious confessional part of the auditions, people break down in tears describing personal histories of bulimia, child abuse and family loss. These play a big part in the film's big, climactic twist, which I, for one, never saw coming.

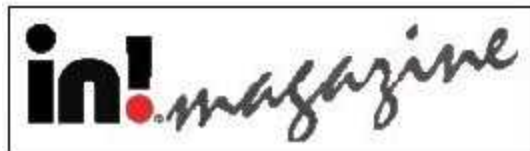
—David Noh

The Daily Pennsylvanian



4.5 out of 5 Stars!

Games People Play (James Ronald Whitney, 2004): Though I do enjoy the occasional reality game show...I still find myself actively questioning the "reality" of what we're being presented. James Ronald Whitney appears to have been plagued by the the same questions, and he has responded by making Games People Play, something that seems to function both as a "reality movie" and a satire of the reality trend. An elaborate casting call yields six contestants who will compete in "the most uninhibited game show ever," performing bizarre, uncomfortable and ostensibly embarrassing stunts for points. The one with the most points at the end of the 72 hour shoot gets ten thousand dollars in cash...A final "plot twist" puts everything we've just seen into question, and Games People Play becomes a curious thing: a reality game show that plays us...this little project is intriguing and strangely educational.



"How far will performers go for fame and fortune? You might be surprised. While \$10,000 might seem like chump change to the million dollars offered by FOX, some struggling New York-based actors will do anything to win it. I mean anything in the film, GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: New York, where three very attractive men and three equally lovely women must prove they are completely uninhibited, and bare everything emotionally and physically before the camera!"

-Jeremy Kinser



Games People Play: New York

"...Three pretty actors and three pretty actresses try to ensnare unsuspecting humans in sexually explicit candid-camera setups. These are intercut with tearful interviews between the players and TV therapist Gilda Carle...Whitney frames this as the pilot for a reality TV show..."

-J.R. Jones

The Philadelphia Inquirer

"Dubbed 'America's most uninhibited game show' by on-camera host Whitney...full-frontal voyeurism and teary confessions (bulimia, suicide and family tragedy) are also part of the package...Just as humiliation and torture are key in shows such as The Apprentice, Fear Factor and Cat-fighting Trailer Trash Bachelorettes Want to Marry a Millionaire Dwarf, the sight of people doing things they shouldn't - at least, not while the video camera is on - is the heart and soul of this feature!"

-Steven Rea



THE INDIE-EST OF THE INDIES

In *GAMES PEOPLE PLAY*: New York, director James Ronald Whitney has pushed the reality craze into its final frontier, going where no standards and practices have gone before: nudity. And not just any nudity. Complete, full-frontal, ass-barin', genital-flappin' nekkedness.

Yes, the gloves are off—along with the bras, boxers, and thongs. Whitney wants to explore the depths of the human condition even further by finding out just how profoundly people will embarrass themselves for the warm glow of the camera and the promise of a fat payday. The nudity serves as a nifty metaphor.

Allegedly the pilot for “the world’s most uninhibited game show,” *GAMES* kicks off with an audition notice in Backstage for attractive youngsters willing to bare their souls (and more) on camera. And wouldn’t you know it, ten million people show up. Like clockwork, the instant the camera rolls, out come the sob stories, off go the clothes, and here come the simulated sex acts—all before a crowd of hormonally crazed onlookers.

That huge turnout at the open audition should tell you how deeply Reality TV has taken root. There are so many ideas for these crapfests and so many channels desperately

looking for the next groundbreaking ratings grabber, that it seems perfectly normal for a dude with a soul patch to tell you to walk around Midtown asking strangers for urine samples.

Or to seduce delivery guys, or to see how far you can get with a fame-crazed starlet...Between the game segments, each of the six contestants is grilled by two "celebrity judges" (Dr. Gilda Carle and Jim Caruso), whose job it is to get the contestants to open up about some sick, depraved element of their godforsaken lives...Thanks to these interviews, we learn just how messed up the contestants are, and the effect is remarkable.

By the end, you'll be looking at the boyish Whitney with respect for his ability to build a premise and follow through with it. Besides, just how much of entertainment is not exploitation? Actors have been compromising themselves since Aristophanes, and reality TV has only served to deconstruct the process. I'd like to think it wasn't accidental for Whitney to include that quote from the initial audition, from the guy who complains, "You treat actors like shit!"

We all have our ideas of what talent means, but self-promotion is probably the most crucial and underrated skill of them all (see Ciccone, M)...I'll tell you what you'll be: titillated!



Games People Play: New York



Oh, reality TV... falling short of committing murder and rape, can the "contestants" in director James Ronald Whitney's reality game-show-format movie, "Games People Play: New York," really go too far in answering "How far will performers go for fame and fortune?" Well, there are no Tijuana donkey shows, but they do leave a jaw or two hanging, I'll give 'em that. Over a period of 72 hours, a group of six sexy young performers--Joshua Coleman, Sarah Smith, Scott Ryan, Dani Marco, David Maynard, and Elisha Imani Wilson--go from auditioning to all sorts of thespian tests that push the limits of their inhibitions (or rather, lack thereof), both emotionally and sexually, for points toward a \$10,000 prize. The "games" range from "Jackass"-esque pranks on the unsuspecting public to EST-style emotional confessions. And there's tons of nudity and

saucy antics. It may not seem much money when held against record high gas prices, but \$10,000 still buys you a whole lot of exploitation. Aided and abetted by entertainer Jim Caruso and TV therapist/author/professor Dr. Gilda Carle, Whitney seems determined to make us laugh, cry, and wince as his showbiz hopefuls clamor for that cash. The most successful sequences are also the most morally questionable: à la "Candid Camera," the female contestants are to seduce a deliveryman into a sexual situation, at which point a male actor bursts in and pretends to be the agitated boyfriend, all in hopes of panicking the suckered deliveryman. Most of the deliverymen don't appear to speak English so they're puzzled more than panicked when the "boyfriend" storms in...Amalgamating his apparent love of musical theatre, Whitney has contestants lure horny guys up to a hotel room for what appears to be a threesome but ends up a musical number...showtunesque theme songs (most of which Whitney co-wrote) that reek of a crosseyed "I wanna be a star! Love me!" urgency. Fathers and mothers, hug your friggin' children more, OK? That said, the actors do ultimately betray more promise than nude musical numbers suggest (Coleman, the blonde pretty one Rex Reed has gushed about shamelessly, appears in the second GPP installment, "GPP: Hollywood," which is in post-production). And I'm secretly looking forward to the promised third entry, "GPP: Bible Belt."

-Lawrence Ferber

NEWCITY CHICAGO

Games People Play: New York

It tickled Rex Reed! James Ronald Whitney's "Games People Play: New York City" begins with auditions for what the director-host calls "America's Most Uninhibited Game Show."

...This outrageous...effort culls hundreds of desperate New Yorkers down to just six, competing for a few thousand dollars...Satire or nudity-strewn weirdness? Subversion or embrace of the tacky historical moment? Yes, yes, yes, and yes. They're doing it all for you.

-Ray Pride

"GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: NEW YORK Games, which director James Ronald Whitney allegedly filmed to serve as a television pilot pitching "America's most uninhibited game show," is the latest addition to the reality genre...in which carrots are dangled, dignity is lost, and humanity is gleefully ushered into a deeper circle of hell...in 72 hours, beginning with the line of hopefuls who answered his call for six actors aged 21-30 who were "in shape and attractive." The film then proceeds like a cross between Candid Camera, Fear Factor, and Taxicab Confessions, with the final contestants participating in ridiculous contests such as "Casting Couch" and "Naked Trio." Fans of the reality genre will likely be entertained by Whitney's creation--which has already been turned into a franchise--though there's a little more going on here than the usual hoop-jumping by people desperate for their 15 minutes. The uneven tone of Games makes it difficult to know whether he wants you to laugh at these people or feel sorry for them, and a final twist adds a wink...!"

-Tricia Olszewski



Games People Play: New York

Our Review:

"See them cry! See them get naked!...for a shot at \$10,000!...Host-director James Ronald Whitney auditions...actors for the 'most uninhibited game show ever.' Then three male and three female fame-seeking contestants engage in a series of risqué, hidden-camera-style pranks and some probing, tear-soaked interviews about their screwed-up lives!"



Hot Pick for 2004

"Games People Play: New York, Emmy Award winning director James Ronald Whitney's look at what people will do for money, will be released in March by FabiLuce Films. This wild and uninhibited film tells the story of how far actors will go to win \$10,000. Hint: they will go *verrrrrrry* far



GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Ostensibly a pilot for a reality TV show, this weird documentary pushes the genre to the extreme. "Casting three leading men and three leading women (one of whom will earn \$10,000 in 72 hours). 21-30, non-union, in shape, attractive, uninhibited," reads the classified ad. After weeding out scores of freakish non-starters (a game septuagenarian; an ingénue sporting a red clown nose), director James Ronald Whitney narrows the hopefuls to a few dozen...Then, reminded that "uninhibited" means more than baring skin, they bare their souls. Tears flow as each in turn comes clean about bulimia, rape, and attempted suicide, disclosures voiced over footage of them pimping and primping earlier in the audition, to jarring effect.

The final six must perform tasks offering comic relief, such as procuring urine samples from strangers on the street or enlisting strangers to come to a hotel room for a "naked trio." Between the laughs come more stark confessionals: Tourette's syndrome; male prostitution; murdered parents. More shocking than these realities, though, is the director's bald-faced cynicism. (97 minutes)

-By Mike Miliard

The Cinematic Verses

Warning: Movie idols' egos may be harmed during the production of this web site

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY



I've often wondered what if anything will end the reality television craze. We've seen shows that involve contestants eating worms, shows that encourage and endorse infidelity, and shows that deceive and mislead. A reality show in which contestants are paid to kill each other has yet to be produced (although Daniel Minahan's film, *Series 7: The Contenders* may seem prescient someday). While James Ronald Whitney's (*Just, Melvin: Just Evil*) *Games People Play: New York* doesn't offer this, he does present us with six of the most uninhibited actors ever caught on film...

Six starving, fledgling actors vie for the ultimate prize, a relatively paltry ten thousand dollars. Over the span of three days, these thespians have to engage in a variety of social experiments that put their acting skills to the test. Collecting urine samples from pedestrians, simulating a casting couch encounter, and singing naked are but a few of their tests. If the participants perform well, they accumulate points that will get them closer to the ten thousand dollar purse. They are also exposed to grueling interrogations at the hands of the judges (a psychotherapist and a middling theater critic) as they try to dig into the psyche of the young actors.

Sarah Smith, Joshua Coleman, Dani Marco, David Maynard, Scott Ryan, and Elisha Wilson comprise the cast of *Games People Play: New York*. To their credit, all of them are fairly effective in playing their respective roles, which is essentially playing themselves, although an interesting twist in the end sheds light on just how gifted some of these young actors are. Their skills really shine during the interrogations in which many of them share intensely intimate, personal, and often disturbing parts of themselves.

Disturbed is how I felt through most of the film...Whitney asks those who are auditioning to do an improvised love scene on stage in front of the audience. The love scenes become racier and racier until the whole auditioning process effectively becomes a mass orgy replete with nudity, simulated penetration, toe sucking, and the like...

Perhaps more disturbing was the part of the audition in which Whitney forces aspiring contestants to make themselves emotionally vulnerable on camera. A young girl describes tearfully how she was sexually molested. Another young woman describes in graphic detail how she offered her ass as a peace offering to one of her lovers and can only achieve pleasure from one who abuses her. Whitney can't really be held responsible for this as these people auditioned of their own volition, but it's hard for me to believe during the editing process that Whitney didn't have some moral and ethical dilemmas with his content.



Nudity. Toe sucking. A threesome. And that's just the first fifteen minutes of the film *Games People Play New York*. Somewhere past *Temptation Island*, beyond the seas where *Shipmates* sail, there is a reality show so outrageous, it cannot be seen on television.

"I think that viewing audiences are ready for my concept," said director James Ronald Whitney, "a concept that explores how far six people would go for fame and fortune in America's most uninhibited game."

Whitney, who won an Emmy Award in 2003 for the HBO documentary *Telling Nicholas*, wanted to see if he could push six young actors to reveal all, both physically and emotionally. They did.

The director's concept was to shoot a pilot for a reality TV show where contestants would compete for \$10,000. He placed ads in New York papers for attractive, uninhibited actors, and they came. Indeed, hundreds of hopefuls lined up for an opportunity at self-flagellation in front of the cameras.

"You treat actors like %@#!" one man yells at the judges as he is cut. This is before the finalists collect urine samples from strangers, before they seduce deliverymen for points and before singing naked with people they just met.

After screening out many "unphotogenic" auditioners, round two begins innocently enough as the actors are told to pose in front of the cameras and be as carefree as possible. Quick camera cuts show the mugging, straining and strutting of the actors as they try to distinguish themselves from the crowd.

The film's tone darkens when contestants are asked to tell the judges something true about themselves that they've never told anyone else. One woman tells the judges that she was raped, another was molested as a child, and a young man says he is a male prostitute because he feels he has no other choice.

Surely the contestants on other reality shows have similar stories. What makes *Games People Play New York* different is that here the whole truth is exposed, not just the made for TV version.

When there is nothing left to reveal emotionally, contestants are asked to improvise an

uninhibited, erotic, three-minute love scene. This includes a young woman that strips bare and fakes an orgasm as a nude man sucks her toes; two women having sex on stage; and for three minutes, two men making out.

At the end of this round, the final three male and three female contestants are chosen. All of them are struggling actors: (from left to right) Sarah Smith, Dani Marco, Joshua Coleman, Scott Ryan, Elisha Imani Wilson and David Maynard.

The real lives of the six contestants are actually more complex than most fictional characters in films. (Ryan's) father was imprisoned for a violent crime when he was young. His stepfather abandoned the family and he was raised in foster homes. Nonetheless, he managed to graduate from an Ivy League university and win the bodybuilding championship title of Mr. Penn while still in school. Games People Play New York was the first feature film for which he auditioned.

Another standout in the cast is Smith. She began acting at the age of 15, formerly hosted her own extreme sports show, was a financial news anchor and performs stand-up at Caroline's Comedy Club. She is a lead in the upcoming movie Remedy which features Vincent Pastore and Frank Vincent of HBO's The Sopranos.

Despite all their professional training, nothing could have prepared the actors for the day the games began. After they were chosen as finalists, they headed straight for a hotel where they spent the weekend.

The men's first assignment? Nothing unusual, just a test to see who could collect the most urine samples from strangers. The first challenge for the women was a little easier, as they were told to keep up a conversation with a stranger in a neighboring stall of a public restroom. The male and female contestants were then paired up and instructed to pick up a man, coax him back to their hotel and teach him a song and dance routine in the nude.

After the prize was awarded to the cast member with the most points, and after the film credits rolled, the question one might ask is, "what have I just seen?" Nudity, exploitation, frustration, desperation and how far people will go in pursuit of a dream.

In other words, Games People Play New York can best be described as an introductory course in voyeurism. TL

MOVIE REVIEW

"Games People Play: New York"

"...The perversely watchable "Games" is a big-screen...TV pilot of sorts for a reality series where contestants do things like get people on the street to hand over urine samples. When they aren't doing that, they're taking off all their clothes or getting apparently unsuspecting deliverymen to do likewise. Unrated, the film includes rampant full frontal nudity and scene after scene of simulations of various sex acts, two involving girl-on-girl or guy-on-guy action...

At the 2000 Sundance Film Festival, Whitney debuted "Just, Melvin: Just Evil," his finely crafted, detailed documentary about his sexually abusive grandfather, who inflicted intense pain upon his family.

...the "Games People Play" franchise might well continue. There is already a "Games People Play: Hollywood" and "Games People Play: The Bible Belt" in the works..."

-By Bob Longino

Movie review: 'Games People Play'

"...From "Survivor" to "Fear Factor" to "American Idol," people are willing to expose themselves...for 30 seconds of fame.

"Games People Play," a movie/game-show pilot/reality program by director James Ronald Whitney, only furthers this trend by layering deception and faux sexuality in 99 minutes...

Whitney gathers together six "contestants" from 100 or so attractive actors, ages 21-30, who are willing to be "real" and "uninhibited"...He then sends them on a series of scavenger hunts, including collecting urine samples from the general public and later, luring strangers into a "naked trio." Winners of this...receive \$10,000.

The "naked trio" gag, in which strangers expect sex but instead get a nude song-and-dance production number in a hotel room, inspires the sharpest laughs...A few lines from

its theme song..."Being uninhibited will make me go far / And if I go to hell, at least I'll be a star!"

-Robert K. Elder



REVIEW: "Games People Play: New York"

Let me just say that this movie couldn't have come out at a better time. "Games People Play: New York" is an uninhibited and unrated look into the world of reality game shows, which offers us a glimpse into the lives of 6 actors who will do ANYTHING to become a star....while competing for a cash prize at the same time. This movie is a must-see for all reality t.v. fans. SEE THIS FILM!

-by Movie Guy



"Unlike the Monopoly and Parcheesi of yore, the televised mind game is the sport du jour. And in keeping with the contemporary thirst for the voyeuristic, sadistic reality show, Games People Play is a brain fuck of the highest order.

Whitney's film originated with an ad placed in a Manhattan paper looking for "in shape, uninhibited, attractive" actors to compete in a filmed game show for a \$10,000 prize. The anxious thespians were soon snaking around the block, vying to audition. The film's lip-smacking preference for sadism is set early on when one of the game's two judges, publicist Jim Caruso...balks at his assignment to tell the older, out-of-shape members of the line to scram...

In a series of hazing rituals...the actors chosen to stay are asked to perform increasingly disturbing stunts founded on public nudity and emotional purging. Whitney's "auditions" include having participants dredge up painful memories of childhood rape, bulimia,

prostitution and mental illness. Next, the actors are asked to disrobe...the actor's life as a masochistic racket defined by painful self-disclosure followed by "don't let the door hit you on your way out" rejection...

The ultimate objective of these brutal, crotch-bearing tribulations is...how depressingly low people will go...in pursuit of fame.

Whitney began his career with a critically admired documentary, Just Melvin: Just Evil, about his family's legacy of sexual abuse..."

-BY FELICIA FEASTER



Games People Play: New York (NOT RATED)

Capitalizing on the reality show genre, "Games People Play: New York" is a look at what people will do for fame. A film crew puts an ad in a newspaper in Manhattan asking for good-looking people who are willing to take their clothes off, and it's amazing to see the oddballs who show up...and there's no moral barometer to keep people from going too far...First, the actors are paired up to do a dramatic couples scene which requires some nudity. Some of the teams are male/female, but some are same-sex teamings depending on the luck of the draw, requiring men and women to kiss and simulate sex in homoerotic circumstances, sometimes completely naked.

The concept by James Ronald Whitney looks like it's going to be a series, going to cities across the country to see who can get people to do the strangest and most bizarre things. The final six in the contest go out on the streets to get people to do things like pee in a cup for them or be part of their "Naked Trio" act where they're pulling someone off the street to film nude while performing a ridiculous dance.

Some of the final six are star material. Josh Coleman and Sarah Smith are extremely cute (they're the most revealing on the movie poster), but can they parlay this into "American Idol" fame? And if they can, won't they be embarrassed when their naked pictures turn up all over the Internet? Or maybe, that's part of the audition process...

-By Mike Szymanski



"Games People Play: New York...Written and directed by award-winning documentary filmmaker James Ronald Whitney ("`Just, Melvin," "`Telling Nicholas"), "`Games People Play: New York" is provocatively billed as "`America's most uninhibited reality TV show."

In truth, it is a freak show that should be studied by mental-health specialists. It features aspiring male and female actors in New York who respond to an ad for young, attractive people not averse to nudity.

The cruelty of the process begins almost at once as unattractive aspirants, some of whom respond with hostility, are quickly sent packing. Dozens of people make the first cut and participate in skits involving nudity and simulated sex. The final six aspirants will do anything to reach their goal of fame and success. This includes luring strangers off the street to join them and their partners in "`threesomes" (don't do this at home, kiddies) and revealing their deepest, darkest secrets as long as a camera is running and turned on them... "`Games People Play: New York," which has spawned "`Games People Play: Hollywood," is a complete success in one respect: It is a perfect marriage of exploiters and exhibitionists...!"

by James Verniere



Games People Play Imagine an episode of Fear Factor...with all the stunts and bug-eating replaced by naked seduction role-playing and painful soul-baring confessionals extracted by two cold-hearted judges who are sorta like American Idol's Simon Cowell... Ostensibly, this is supposed to be a reality game show, with mostly unclothed guests...(collecting urine samples from strangers is the first task) for \$10,000... Yes, you see plenty of beautiful people naked... There's an interesting turn of events near film's end...two more of these things are planned.

-L.Y.T.

Murphy's Movie Reviews

Games People Play: New York

Anyone who knows anything about the television industry is aware that there is a cyclical nature to it. Back in the early 1980s, there was much discussion over the death of the traditional sitcom and then along came "Cosby" and half-hour series enjoyed a resurgence. Then it was the hour-long drama that was endangered. Because production costs were becoming exorbitant, network executives embraced "reality" programming, something that first found a niche on cable channels (e.g., "The Real World" on MTV). Last year, there was an attempt to cash in on this craze with *The Real Cancun* and *From Justin to Kelly* (featuring the winner and runner-up of the initial "American Idol" competition), but both failed at the box office. Now, however, there is a fascinating and enjoyable movie that manages to evoke the freewheeling exuberance of cable (programs like HBO's "Taxicab Confessions") with the classic American game show.

Games People Play: New York is the brainchild of James Ronald Whitney who first garnered attention at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival with his uneven but unflinching documentary *Just, Melvin* which dealt with incest and a highly dysfunctional family. That HBO-produced film went on to a theatrical release before debuting on cable. Whitney's next project was the Emmy-winning documentary "Telling Nicholas" about how one family coped with the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Now for his first quasi-fictional movie, he opted to create a "pilot" for a proposed TV reality series -- an uninhibited game show in which contestants would compete for cash. Whitney placed ads in the local trade papers and set about casting the project. He engaged New York-based cabaret performer Jim Caruso and relationship expert Dr. Gilda Carle (the 21st-century's answer to Dr. Joyce Brothers) as judges.

The film, shot on video in documentary style, begins with prospective performers lining up for the audition and the inevitable weeding out of those not deemed unsuitable. Eventually there were over 100 applicants who were asked to pose for the camera and then speak about their lives, a sequence that owes a great debt to the Michael Bennett-directed Broadway musical "A Chorus Line." Then the perspective entrants were asked to act out a scene between a honeymooning couple. Many opted to shed their clothes and their inhibitions on camera. Finally six finalists -- three men and three women -- were chosen to compete for a cash prize of \$10,000.

Then the fun really begins. The sextet is divided into teams and given tasks to accomplish, ranging from the men being asked to obtain urine sample from strangers to couples having to convince a third party to return to a hotel to partake in something called

"a naked trio." Between tasks, Dr. Gilda and Jim Caruso interview the contestants about their lives with each eventually divulging dark secrets, including eating disorders, a side career as a paid escort, and the impact of the death of a parent.

The six aspiring performers, Joshua Coleman, Scott Ryan, David Maynard, Dani Marco, Sarah Smith and Elisha Imani Wilson, are all charismatic and quite brave in their willingness to bare not only their bodies but their souls.

Like any good reality show (think "Survivor"), Games People Play: New York employs several twists, including an especially clever one at the end. Whitney and his talented cast provide a fun, fascinating and ultimately rewarding look at what might turn out to be a must-see cinematic series. There's already a sequel Games People Play: Hollywood with another in the works. At this rate, Whitney may not need the small screen, provided he can continue to come up with new surprises to his game show.

Rating: B+

Running time: 96 minutes