7 WOMEN AND THE SILENT SCREEN

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Women were more engaged in movie culture at the height of the silent era than they have been at any other time since. Female filmgoers dominated at the box office; the most powerful stars were women, and fan culture catered almost exclusively to female fans; writers shaping film culture through the growing art of movie reviewing, celebrity profiles, and gossip items were likely to be women; and women's clubs and organizations, along with mass-circulation magazines, played a signature role in efforts to reform the movies at the height of their early success. In Hollywood women were active at all levels of the industry: The top screenwriters were women; the highest-paid director at one point was a woman; and women held key leadership roles in the studios as executives and heads of departments like photography, editing, and screenwriting. Outside Hollywood women ran movie theaters, screened films in libraries and classrooms, and helped to establish venues for nonfiction filmmaking. Looking at the extraordinary scope of women's participation in early movie culture – indeed, the way women *built* that movie culture – helps us rethink conventional ideas about authorship and the archive, drawing in a broader range of players and sources. As Antonia Lant reminds us, the binary notion of women working on "both sides of the camera" needs to be significantly complicated and expanded in order to accommodate all of the ways in which women engaged with and produced early film culture (2006, 548–549).

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Exhibitors, Moviegoers, and Fans: "Remember the 83%!"

Women were prized moviegoers early on. Exhibitors began aggressively courting female patronage in the early 1910s, hoping that by cultivating white, middle-class women in particular they might elevate cinema's cultural cachet. As the primary consumers in many families, women were also presumed to be in a position to influence the entertainment choices of others. Matinee screenings, commodious service, and theater redecorating schemes invited women to integrate cinemagoing into their daily routines of shopping, socializing, childrearing, and work, while contests, prize giveaways, and merchandising tie-ins with local storeowners framed cinemagoing in an analogous relationship with shopping. In fact, many of the design modifications recommended to theater owners – improved lighting and ventilation, mirrored common areas, perfumed deodorizers, and uniformed attendants – borrowed heavily from department store interiors, spaces already associated with women's leisure (Stamp 2000, 20). In some cases the gentility associated with feminine accommodations and female patronage extended to theater owners themselves, and there are a few examples of female exhibitors during these years. Alta M. Davis, manager of the Empire Theater in Los Angeles, believed the movie business was a "great field" for women, particularly those "of the progressive type who are not satisfied to let the masculine element of every community dominate, plan, manage, and originate everything" (2006, 674).

The campaign to woo female filmgoers paid off and by the early 1920s women constituted an unmistakable majority of movie patrons. Audience estimates vary widely and are notoriously unverifiable, but the pattern is clear: One 1920 assessment suggested that 60 percent of audiences were women, another calculated the figure was closer to 75 percent, and in 1927, *Moving Picture World* determined that 83 percent of moviegoers were female (Studlar 1996, 263; Koszarski 1990, 30). Young working women stopped into the movies on their way home, visiting theaters clustered along shopping streets and trolley lines in urban centers; mothers came with their families in the evenings; black women in Chicago could hear jazz in their neighborhood theaters; small-town women might attend a movie theater fashion show sponsored by one of their local merchants; Mexicana women gathered at Spanish-language theaters in Los Angeles' growing Mexican entertainment district; and young women everywhere escaped to the movies with their beaus as moviegoing became thoroughly integrated into the country's dating culture. At the movies women saw serial heroines exhibiting feats of athleticism and bravery, "flapper" stars like Clara Bow and Joan Crawford embodying daring new modes of femininity, European stars like Pola Negri and Greta Garbo importing an exoticized sexuality, matinee idols like Rudolph Valentino and Ramón Novarro challenging traditional masculine norms, and they watched scandalous "sex comedies" and radical films on feminist causes like contraception

7.1 *Photoplay*, January 1920.

and suffrage, finding entertainment in the era's shifting sexual and political mores. A highly participatory fan culture, geared almost exclusively to women, extended the moviegoing experience well beyond the theater through contests, letters, fan clubs, scrapbooking, and souvenir-gathering (Studlar 1996, 268).

Women were also increasingly visible working in theaters as ticket sellers, pianists, and ushers, particularly in sumptuous movie palaces staffed by vast armies of employees. "Roxy" Rothapfel calculated that "over 350 persons" were "connected with the active operation" of his Capitol Theater in Chicago, many in positions that might have been filled by women, including restroom attendants, ushers, cashiers, clerks, musicians, "wardrobe women," and cleaners (2002, 101). Despite the diversity of job opportunities, commentary about women who worked in movie theaters was largely devoted to "those whose bodies and personalities are put to the task of 'luring them in,'" Ina Rae Hark has found, the archetypal example being the "girl in the box office" (2002, 147). Yet the use of female employees as "added attractions" at the theater required a delicate hand. "The ticket seller should be a bright and attractive young lady, neatly dressed and wide-awake," the *Motion Picture Handbook* suggested in 1916, adding that "many a theater loses business it might otherwise get simply because of an untidy looking ticket office presided over by an unprepossessing, gum-chewing girl." At the same time, exhibitors were cautioned not to let ushers and accompanists inside the theater compete with the entertainment on-screen; ushers should be "attractive, but not too pretty," and facilities should be provided to partially obscure pianists from view (quoted in Stamp 2000, 32).

It is evident from descriptions of both patrons and theater employees that some anxiety surrounded women's presence in the feminized sphere of movie houses. Would comely employees do more than attract patrons? Would finely dressed moviegoers distract others from the show? The caricatured "movie-struck girl," whose profound love of the movies could only be understood as a desire to appear on-screen herself, condensed many of these anxieties. As I've argued elsewhere, this stereotype not only infantilized female viewers, it also obscured the extraordinary range of work women performed in the early movie industry as screenwriters, directors, editors, designers, tastemakers, and photographers, as well as outside the industry as journalists, educators, activists, and exhibitors.

Filmmakers, Stars, and Extras: Women at Work in Early Hollywood

"The film business offers to a young girl many opportunities, from the highest skilled art to the lowest unskilled manual labor," noted *The Girl and the Job* (Hoerle & Saltzberg 1919, 235), a comprehensive 1919 guide to vocations for women. Moving quickly beyond the idea that young women ought to pursue acting careers, the authors directed readers toward an array of options open to women in motion picture work, noting that many conventional occupations, like stenographer and seamstress, were needed in the new industry and often commanded higher-than-average wages, while also pointing out new opportunities available for women in this still-evolving field. Scenario departments were usually equally staffed by women and men, they noted, while many women were employed as film cutters, editors, title writers, and publicists. "In this, as in perhaps no other line, is ability recognized and advancement offered," they concluded (Hoerle & Saltzberg 1919, 242). Of all the Western cities benefiting from westward migration in the first decades of the twentieth century, only Los Angeles attracted more women than men (Hallet forthcoming). Indeed, there is good reason to presume that many ambitious women traveled there with the aim of living rather unconventional lives – outside of marriage, free from their families, economically self-sufficient, and creatively employed. Two such "Girl Picture Magnates" were profiled in *Photoplay* (Jordan 1922). Unmarried and self-supporting, they had immigrated to Los Angeles separately in 1915, then pooled their financial and artistic resources, setting up house together and establishing their own production company.

Despite an abundance of opportunities, the most prevalent image of women working in Hollywood was that of the "extra girl" seeking work at the studios in the hope that she might someday become a star. *Woman's Home Companion* (June 1918; Page 1918) described a "pathetic breadline of waiting actresses anxious for 'extra' work" lined up outside studio gates each morning. One observer reported that "tens of thousands of film aspirants" flocked to Hollywood each year, "ranging from the fourteen-year-old school girl in love with a certain film hero to the grandmother of fifty-odd who has suddenly discovered her histrionic talent" (quoted in Stamp 2004, 332). Helen G. Smith warned *Photoplay* readers: "The reason that they are called 'extra' girls is because of the extra amount of work that one has to do. The only thing that isn't extra is the pay" (quoted in Stamp 2004, 341). Concerns about moral and sexual transgressions amongst "extra girls" were common. The long hours and "easy camaraderie" of movie sets, some felt, could lead to sexual exploitation, fears that became more pronounced after several "casting couch" scandals in the teens, and that escalated still further when Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle became implicated in the death of would-be starlet Virginia Rappe. Anxieties sometimes took on racist overtones as well, with one 1921

newspaper report suggesting that "10,000 girls" moved to Hollywood each year in search of work in an industry controlled by "morally degenerate" and "un-American" Jews (quoted in Hallet forthcoming).

Soon fan magazines were publishing exposés of extra work, warning women not to make the journey out to Los Angeles. With the city's Welfare League kept busy looking after women who had not found success looking for movie work, the YWCA established a "Studio Club" in Los Angeles in 1916, providing residents with social and educational opportunities, including visits with industry notables like actress Geraldine Farrar and filmmaker Lois Weber. When the YWCA embarked on a national fund-raising campaign to expand the Studio Club in 1923, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) lent its support and the wives of several prominent studio executives and filmmakers signed onto the campaign. Thanks to their efforts, a new Hollywood Studio Club, designed by noted architect Julia Morgan, opened in 1926. As Heidi Kenaga demonstrates, through its involvement with the Studio Club, the MPPDA succeeded in refiguring the "extra girl" as the "Studio Girl," "a respectable, middle-class emblem of decorous femininity" (2006, 131, 137). Alongside the Studio Club, the MPPDA was also involved in efforts to regulate the employment of extras on movie sets, engaging Mary van Kleeck, a top industrial sociologist with the Russell Sage Foundation, to conduct a study of Hollywood extras in 1924. While van Kleeck found little evidence that female extras were deliberately exploited, she criticized the industry for "neglecting its employment problems" and the MPPDA took action (quoted in Kenaga 2006, 132). In early 1926, the Central Casting Bureau was established with a women's division headed by former assistant secretary of the California Industrial Welfare Commission Marion Mel, who had led that organization's investigation into the working conditions of women and child extras. Central Casting thus had the dual effect, according to Kenaga, of controlling unfavorable publicity about the exploitation of movie-struck girls, while at the same time taming and containing the least powerful members of the labor force through "a *de facto* company union" (2006, 132).

Elsewhere (Stamp 2004) I have made the point that the persistent image of young women waiting outside studio gates in Hollywood, denied access to the riches inside, created an impression that women were shut out of the industry and that appearing on-screen was the sum total of women's engagement with the cinema – an image that belied the state of the field during a period when so many women worked at all levels of the industry, many in positions of creative or executive control. In no other field were women as powerful as they were in screenwriting. Women wrote at least half of all silent films and writers like Frances Marion, June Mathis, Anita Loos, Bess Meredyth, and Jeanie Macpherson were the highest-paid and most-respected writers of their day. As Anthony Slide remarks, "How many male screen-writers from the silent era are remembered today?" (1977, 10). Their influence was profound: Women were responsible for crafting many of the era's landmark screen personalities (Mary Pickford, Rudolph

Valentino, Douglas Fairbanks, Clara Bow, and Gloria Swanson), as well as some of its definitive filmmaking modes – social problem films, sex comedies, and historical epics. Working alongside these high-profile screenwriters were a host of other women involved at all levels of the writing process in studio writing departments that employed clerks, manuscript readers, story editors, continuity writers, and title writers. By the 1920s, women held at least half of all positions in the writing departments at most of the major studios, described by one commentator as a "manless Eden" (Holliday 1995, 114–115; MacMahon 1920, 140).

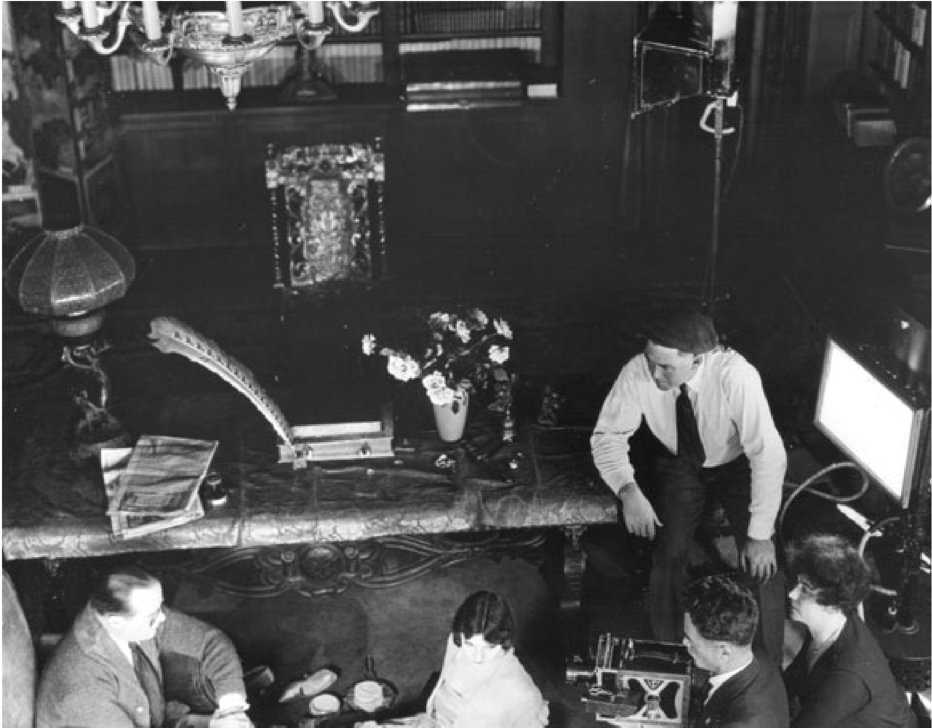
This was an era when women's voices were particularly valued. If audiences were primarily female, many felt, women were better able to "determine and understand women's likes and dislikes, and thus be able to give them the kind of pictures they enjoy," as Frances Marion once put it (quoted in Lant 2006, 552). "Remember the 83%!" cried screenwriter and journalist Beth Brown in 1927, exhorting studio executives to cater to the female majority (Brown 2006). Screenwriting also suited women, as Anne Morey points out, for it provided work that could be completed almost anywhere, could be tucked around other domestic routines if necessary, and did not particularly threaten traditional conceptions of femininity (2003, 48).

June Mathis was, without question, the top screenwriter of the 1920s, author of well over 100 titles in her 12-year career. Appointed head of the scenario department at Metro in 1918 when she was only 27 years old, Mathis was the first woman to occupy such an executive rank. In that capacity she influenced the studio to cast unknown Rudolph Valentino in her script for *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921); the film launched Valentino's stardom and became one of the top-grossing pictures of the decade. Mathis then became story division director at Goldwyn where she worked on several of Alla Nazimova's films and wrote other iconic roles for Valentino in *Camille* (1921) and *Blood and Sand* (1922). As Thomas Slater (in press) notes, these roles helped not only to shape Valentino's screen persona, but also to redefine masculine norms in the aftermath of World War I. Mathis later became production executive at Goldwyn where she was instrumental in the formation of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, helped rewrite and reedit Erich von Stroheim's monumental *Greed* (1925) and adapted the screenplay for *Ben-Hur* (1926). Mathis was not alone in helping to shape the signature screen personalities and film trends of the era. Jeanie Macpherson wrote virtually all of Cecil B. DeMille's best-known early work, including his groundbreaking sex comedies, his iconic biblical epics, and formative roles for Gloria Swanson. Their creative partnership lasted for three decades, ending only with her death. As one contemporary put it, "from her brain has sprung the Big Ideas for all the Cecil B. De Mille features: from her hand has come the completed scenarios replete with original business for the picture dramas that have stood, each one of them, as milestones in the photoplay's progress" (Beach 1921). Screenwriter Frances Marion was largely responsible for crafting Mary Pickford's persona, writing principal roles for her in three 1917 pictures – *Poor Little Rich Girl*, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook*

Farm, and *The Little Princess* – along with many others that followed. Anita Loos helped define Douglas Fairbanks's unique brand of upbeat athleticism in her screenplays for five early films that made him a star, including *His Picture in the Papers* (1916) and *Wild and Woolly* (1917).

Screenwriters like these often wielded considerable influence at different stages of production, consulting with wardrobe mistresses, property masters, and set constructors during preproduction, directors, actors, and script girls during shooting, then title writers and editors during postproduction (Holliday 1995, 156). Observers noted, for instance, how Mathis sat at the side of director Rex Ingram throughout the shooting of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* in 1921 (Holliday 1995, 170). Screenwriting also sometimes led women to positions of creative control in studio management, as Mathis's career demonstrates. Other notable examples include Marguerite Bertsch, who became head of Vitagraph's scenario department in 1916, only three years after she joined the studio, and Kate Corbaley, who became a story editor at MGM, working closely with Irving Thalberg and Louis B. Mayer (Slide 1996, 62; Morey 2003, 93).

If women were imagined as idealized scenario writers, they also became instrumental in the evolving professionalization of screenwriting through university instruction. Beginning in 1917 and continuing well into the 1930s, Frances Taylor Patterson taught classes on "Photoplay Composition" through Columbia University Extension. Guest lecturers included prominent Hollywood women, like Clara Beranger and Eve Unsell; a transcript of Unsell's 1919 talk was included in Patterson's 1920 book *Cinema Craftsmanship*. Patterson also appears to have taken screenwriting instruction well into the realm of film analysis, for she successfully lobbied Columbia to install analytical projectors so that she could screen and analyze films in class (Polan 2007, 56–61). At USC Beranger was one of the founding faculty members in the School of Cinematic Arts when it began in 1929, as a collaboration between the campus and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Beranger would teach screenwriting there for several decades. Many Hollywood screenwriters began authoring their own writing guides as well, including Marguerite Bertsch, who published *How to Write for Moving Pictures* in 1917, and Anita Loos who coauthored a series of columns with John Emerson for *Photoplay* in 1918, subsequently published as *How to Write Photoplays* (1920). Many correspondence schools also offered instruction in scenario writing; the best known and most comprehensive of these was the Palmer Photoplay Corporation founded in 1918. As Anne Morey notes, Palmer literature reached out to women "with a particularly welcoming tone" (2003, 106). Board members included women prominent in the industry, such as Lois Weber and Jeanie Macpherson; Weber's script *For Husbands Only* (1919) was one of those included in the curriculum for students to analyze; Macpherson authored a manual on *The Necessity and Value of Theme in the Photoplay* (1920); Kate Corbaley, former story editor at MGM, headed the company's sales department; and successful female graduates, who purportedly outsold their male rivals, were touted in Palmer promotions.



7.2 Lois Weber (right) directing *Too Wise Wives* (1921). (Courtesy of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.)

Alongside well-known screenwriters and aspiring amateurs, women were also active directing pictures in the late 1910s and early 1920s, perhaps more so than any other period since. Lois Weber was the best-known and most prolific female filmmaker of this period, responsible for writing, directing, and sometimes acting in hundreds of shorts made between 1911 and 1916, and at least 44 feature films from 1914 through 1934, including *The Merchant of Venice* (1914), the first American feature directed by a woman. Weber wrote and directed a series of high-profile films on social issues of the day, including religious hypocrisy in *Hypocrites* (1915), capital punishment in *The People vs. John Doe* (1916), drug addiction in *Hop, the Devil's Brew* (1916), poverty in *Shoes* (1916), and contraception in *Where Are My Children?* (1916) and *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* (1917). Her name was routinely mentioned alongside contemporaries like Griffith and DeMille as one of the top talents in Hollywood. In 1916, she became the first and only woman elected to the Motion Picture Directors Association, a solitary honor she would retain for decades (Stamp 2011).

Though Weber was the most prominent woman directing pictures in the silent era, she was by no means alone: Pioneering filmmaker Alice Guy Blaché continued to direct features in the late teens and early 1920s, including *The Ocean Waif* (1916);

comedienne Mabel Normand began directing many of her Keystone shorts after 1914 and released her first feature, *Mickey*, in 1918; Alla Nazimova directed several features, including an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* in 1923; and editor Dorothy Arzner began directing as well, with *Fashions for Women* in 1927. Some studio environments yielded particularly fruitful opportunities for women, most notably Universal where, alongside Weber, many women directed in the late teens, including Cleo Madison, Ida May Park, Lule Warrenton, Ruth Stonehouse, Elsie Jane Wilson, Grace Cunard, and a young Jeanie Macpherson (Cooper 2010). Several of these women had acted under Weber's direction, and it is likely either that she explicitly helped them in their move from acting to directing, or that, at the very least, she provided them with inspiration. Elsewhere many prominent performers, such as Lillian Gish, Mrs Sidney Drew, and Margery Wilson, also pursued opportunities to direct. Through a combination of acting, writing, directing, and producing, Nell Shipman embodied a series of athletic, independent, outdoorsy heroines in films such as *Back to God's Country* (1919) and *Something New* (1920). Working largely outside the industry, Shipman crafted a model of active feminism on- and offscreen (Armatage 2003). So rich was the field that a 1920 guide to *Careers for Women* included a chapter on "The Film Director," written by Ida May Park.

Still, when searching for models of female authorship in early Hollywood, it is important to look beyond the title "director" or "screenwriter," for many women assumed positions of creative control in other capacities. Many female stars, for instance, formed independent production companies in the late 1910s, seeking to have more input over the projects in which they were involved and resulting in what one observer described as a "her-own-company epidemic" (quoted in Mahar 2006, 155). Mary Pickford, unquestionably the top star of the late 1910s and early 1920s, provides a particularly compelling case in point because her girlish on-screen persona belied the substantial authorial control she exercised behind the scenes. At the height of her fame, Pickford successfully negotiated a series of contracts that not only insured she would retain a greater percentage of the profits from her films, but also, more importantly, gave her measurable creative control. In 1916, she demanded (and got) a salary equivalent to Charlie Chaplin's, noting that she, not he, was the bigger star. That same year she formed her own production unit within Famous Players, the Pickford Film Corporation, insuring that she had a voice in selecting her own projects, assigning directors, casting roles, and designing publicity. When she signed with First National in 1918, Pickford's contract guaranteed her complete creative control from script to final cut. Although often uncredited, Pickford also produced many of her own films. Long after her acting career ended, in fact, Pickford continued her work as producer. Pickford was also instrumental in establishing significant Hollywood institutions, beginning in 1919 when she cofounded United Artists with Chaplin, Griffith, and Fairbanks. In 1926, she became one of the founding members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Finally, demonstrating a prescient

interest in preserving and insuring her historical legacy, Pickford purchased most of her early films back from the Biograph Company in 1925.

If Pickford exerted authorial control largely out of view, Dorothy Davenport Reid provides a more visible example of the varied contexts for female authorship in early Hollywood, as Mark Lynn Anderson has shown. When her husband, matinee idol Wallace Reid, died from a drug overdose in 1923, Davenport Reid reinvented herself as an authority on social issues. She returned to the screen to star in *Human Wreckage* (1923) about the illegal narcotics trade, and under the banner of "Mrs. Wallace Reid Productions" helped make two additional social problem films, *Broken Laws* (1924) about juvenile delinquency and *The Red Kimona* [*sic*] (1925) about prostitution. Although the exact nature of her contribution to these productions remains unclear, each film features a brief prologue in which she speaks directly to the audience about the topic at hand, advocating for particular policies and changes in popular attitude. According to Anderson, "Davenport Reid's ability to become a 'film author' rested, in part, on her ability to speak from the sometimes contradictory positions of Hollywood producer, actress, widow, mother, and social reformer" (Anderson 2011). In other words, her feminine experience and voice were central to her authority on these subjects.

Like Davenport Reid, Elinor Glyn exerted authorial control in an unconventional manner that has sometimes obscured her contributions to early Hollywood. Glyn arrived in Hollywood in 1920, having already achieved fame as a romance novelist. As Anne Morey argues, "Glyn was ultimately more successful as a branded article than she was as a screenwriter" (2006, 110). Positioning herself as an expert on all things European, Glyn marketed not only her texts but also her extra textual knowledge about the tastes and habits of wealthy nobility, and a sophisticated, "continental" approach to sexuality, penning articles for fan magazines on such topics as "How to Get a Man and Hold Him" and "Sex and the Photoplay." Also known for coaching actors behind the scenes, Glyn was said to have "remade" Gloria Swanson in 1921, transforming her from a young, rather asexual woman with curly hair and frilly dresses into a mature sex symbol with slicked back hair and tight, slinky gowns – an image Swanson would retain throughout the decade. Alongside June Mathis, Glyn also played a considerable role in shaping Rudolph Valentino's persona, apparently ghost-writing some of his fan magazine "autobiographies." Though Glyn did not receive official screenwriting credit on many screen adaptations of her fiction, the projects were described as having been "made under her personal supervision" and she offered her services as a consultant on manners, dress, and mise-en-scène, sometimes even appearing in on-screen cameos, most famously in the 1927 production of *It*. As one reviewer remarked of *Three Weeks* (1924), "the whole picture carried a suggestion of her constant supervision" (quoted in Morey 2006, 112).

Outside Hollywood, women were active in crafting alternative forms of production in documentary and the avant-garde. Husband-and-wife teams Martin and Osa Johnson and Carl and Mary Jobe Akeley made "adventure genre" and

naturalist pictures with footage shot on location in Africa and other locales (Griffiths 2002, 248). Photographer Frances Hubbard Flaherty collaborated with her husband, Robert, on ethnographic documentaries such as *Nanook of the North* (1922), and would later chronicle their efforts in her book *The Odyssey of a Filmmaker* (Griffiths 2002, 142). Because these women worked alongside their husbands, the historical record has sometimes obscured the exact nature of their collaboration. Antonia Lant, for instance, finds evidence that a photograph of Osa Johnson filming in Africa was subsequently altered for the cover of the couple's book, *Camera Trails in Africa*, to show Osa "helping" her husband Martin, who is thus reconfigured as the primary filmmaker (2006, 264–267).

Less visible, but no less important, were women working behind the scenes in professions like editing, costume design, and art direction – all fields in which women had been traditionally employed and which were beginning to achieve professional respect and recognition. Women had worked as negative cutters and film splicers from the earliest days of motion pictures, performing the menial tasks of preparing prints for distribution. As the field evolved into a creative practice critical to feature-length storytelling, several women rose to prominence. Dorothy Arzner, later better known as a director, first worked in the 1920s as a highly respected editor at Paramount's Realart, where she eventually became chief editor. Arzner recalled that alongside her own editing work, she also "supervised the negative cutting and trained the girls who cut negative and spliced film by hand. I set up the film filing system and supervised the art work on the titles" (quoted in Mayne 1994, 25). Arzner's work editing *Blood and Sand* (1922), Valentino's first star vehicle, established her reputation, for she was able to integrate stock footage and new material together in the film's bullfighting sequences. Jane Loring, a friend of Arzner's, began as an assistant editor at Paramount in 1927, launching a very successful career, particularly renowned for her ability to cut image and sound together during the transition to sound film in the late 1920s. A lesbian like Arzner, Loring cut quite a figure at the studio. "She used to wear slacks and overcoats and men's hats," one observer remembered (Mann 2006, 239). As their craft evolved, editors were often given considerable autonomy in shaping films. Describing her early days working on pictures directed by Clarence Brown, celebrated editor Margaret Booth recalled, "I cut a number of his pictures and never saw him in the cutting room" (quoted in Rosenblum & Karen 1986, 62). Other directors, recognizing the importance of a well-assembled film, worked closely with editors and maintained career-long partnerships with favored collaborators. Anne Bauchens, for instance, served as DeMille's editor for most of his career, beginning as coeditor on *Carmen* in 1915, his third year as a director (Lewis 2006).

If Jazz Age stars like Gloria Swanson, Norma Talmadge, and Clara Bow embodied Hollywood's evolving glamour culture, women working behind the scenes also played a considerable role in shaping and circulating their modern look. Clare West, one of the first costume designers employed by the studios, helped elevate the traditional position of "head of wardrobe" – responsible for

purchasing ready-made clothes and tailoring them to fit – to that of a "studio designer" charged with implementing a unique creative vision. By the mid-1920s, most studios employed such a person and by the end of the decade all studios had a costume department headed by a noted designer. West began her career on *Intolerance* (1916), helping to create costumes for the multiple historical epochs depicted in the film. She was hired by DeMille two years later to oversee costumes at Famous Players-Lasky. Early to recognize the centrality of costuming to production design, DeMille knew West's work could "make people gasp." Edith Head began her celebrated, decades-long career at Paramount in 1924, when she was hired as a costume sketch artist. She began designing costumes for the studio the following year, rising to become one of Hollywood's most admired designers by the early 1930s. Unlike many of her male counterparts, Head consulted extensively with the women she clothed ("International History of Costume Design" and Landis & Kirkham 2002, 247–251). Natacha Rambova's set and costume designs also added considerably to Hollywood's glamour culture, particularly its association with an exoticized "East." After working on four DeMille pictures, including *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920) with Gloria Swanson, Rambova worked with Alla Nazimova as costume designer and art director on Nazimova's failed project *Aphrodite*, as well as *Billions* (1920) and *Salomé* (1923), considered Rambova's most daring work. Rambova also designed costumes for several of her husband Rudolph Valentino's films – *Camille* (1921), *The Young Rajah* (1922), and *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1924) – helping to shape his unconventional image.

Perhaps more important than images of stars on-screen were still photographs that circulated in and around films, published in newspapers, magazines, and press books, and offered to fans as souvenirs. Ruth Harriet Louise, MGM's chief portrait photographer between 1925 and 1929, crafted incandescent images of the studio's top players, particularly its women, among them Joan Crawford, Greta Garbo, and Norma Shearer. As Robert Dance and Bruce Robertson maintain, Louise's photographs were "not merely a byproduct of the movies" but "critical to their success" (2002, 2). Louise Brooks, Garbo's contemporary, put it best: "When you think of it, what people remember of those stars is not from films, but one essential photograph . . . When I think of Garbo, I do not see her moving in any particular film . . . She is a still picture – unchangeable" (quoted in Dance & Robertson 2002, 2). The image locked in Brooks's imagination was more than likely taken by Ruth Harriet Louise.

An extensive network of social and professional connections, both formal and informal, bolstered these collaborative working relationships. One example might be the social events Frances Marion hosted for Hollywood's most powerful women, allowing stars to mingle with screenwriters, producers, and directors, as well as wives of influential male filmmakers and studio executives. Dubbed "hen parties" by the press, they were, in fact, signature elements of women's culture in early Hollywood. A photograph of one such gathering shows actors like the Talmadge

sisters, Colleen Moore, and Theda Bara alongside Dorothy Davenport Reid, journalist Adela Rogers St Johns, and Marion herself, among a host of others (Beauchamp 1998, 231). Women working on the lower rungs of the industry also socialized together at residences like the Hollywood Studio Club and at more informal gathering spots like the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Cahuenga in Hollywood (Stamp 2004, 334). Many of these women formed lasting friendships that in some cases yielded professional collaborations. Marion and Pickford, close friends, worked together for years, as Marion became both Pickford's main screenwriter and the ghost writer for her "Daily Talks" newspaper columns. Marion also remained close friends with Lois Weber after the director aided Marion early in her career. Screenwriter Bebe Daniels remembered spending many nights sitting with her friend Dorothy Arzner in the editing room, an experience that, she recalled, "taught me more about writing for the motion pictures than anything in the world could have taught me" (quoted in Mayne 1994, 25).

In other instances, professional guilds and clubs helped to build personal and professional relationships amongst women. The Screenwriters Guild, founded in 1920, was open to both men and women and through its social arm, the Writers' Club, hosted many events at its clubhouse on Sunset Boulevard. As Holliday observed, "the boundaries of work and play were fluid," allowing women to participate in "behind-the-scenes deal-making, intrigue, and story conferences" (1995, 177–178). Female journalists swapped "shop talk" at regular weekly meetings of the Hollywood Women's Press Club, formed in 1928. The group included founder Louella Parsons, who first hosted meetings in her apartment before they moved to the famed Brown Derby restaurant, *Photoplay* editor Ruth Biery, Regina Carewe, film writer for the Hearst syndicate, along with many of the well-known feature writers for *Motion Picture* and *Motion Picture Classic* (Barbas 2006, 124–125). These writers, as I will demonstrate, created a rich intertextual discourse on the movies, America's moviegoing habits, and its favorite movie stars, shaping early motion picture culture through a feminine eye.

Critics, Writers, and Tastemakers: Film Culture as a Feminine Sphere

By 1915, writing about the cinema comprised a key element of film culture. Daily newspapers began regular movie reviewing in the mid-1910s, fostering a critical discourse about performance techniques, preferred plot lines, and cinematic style. Reviews were published alongside a growing body of film journalism that included profiles of movie stars' homes, wardrobes and family lives, advice for those hoping to work in the industry, and commentary on cinema's cultural value and its industry practices. Moviegoing culture thus extended well beyond theater boundaries to encompass a wide range of discourses on stardom, personality, art, industry, gender, race, and ethnicity published in an array of sources including

daily newspapers, mass-circulation monthlies, fan magazines, trade papers, and other publications. Women were central authors of this discourse, the principal celebrities profiled within it, and often its primary audience as well, demonstrating that far from being a marginal adjunct to mainstream movie culture, women sat at its heart.

Prominent early film journalists included Grace Kingsley at the *Los Angeles Times*, syndicated columnist Gertrude Price, and Irene Thirer who introduced her influential three-star ratings system to *New York Daily News* readers in 1928. Myra Nye, society columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* between 1915 and 1935, also wrote frequently on movie stars in a feature she called "Society of Cinemaland." Others remained anonymous, identified only by initials or pseudonyms, the most famous being "Mae Tinee," the feminine *nom de plume* used by staff writers at the *Chicago Tribune*.

The *Los Angeles Times* was the first newspaper to take an active interest in the motion picture business, assigning Grace Kingsley to be a movie columnist in 1913 and creating a section called "The Preview" to feature writing on the industry, its stars, and its projects (Goodman 1961, 149; Gottlieb & Wolt 1977, 148). Recent sources sometimes refer to Kingsley as a "gossip columnist," but her writing furnished detailed portraits of Hollywood's major players, including many of its women. For instance, Kingsley chronicled Dorothy Arzner's move into directing in 1927 with a piece entitled "Leave Sex Out, Says Director" (Mayne 1994, 194). Like Kingsley, L.A.-based nationally syndicated columnist Gertrude Price helped promote women's work at all levels of the film industry, and in doing so, fostered a keen female fan base for the movies, as Richard Abel documents. By his calculation, some two-thirds of Price's articles were focused on women in the industry – performers, directors, and screenwriters alike (Abel 2006, 140–153). Mabel Condon, West Coast correspondent for the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, was one of several women writing for industry trade papers, though these forums remained largely male-oriented as the wider discourse on cinema shifted to a decisively feminine address. Still, on the pages of *Moving Picture World* Margaret I. MacDonald drew attention to women working in Hollywood and reminded exhibitors and tradesmen about the importance of their female clientele.

Film coverage in daily newspapers also played a notable role in helping to define cinema's growing impact on society, particularly for young women caught up in its fan culture and middle-class women active in the reform movement. L.A.'s largest Spanish-language newspaper, *La opínion*, published a regular cinema page featuring Spanish translations of columns by Louella Parsons and publicity items on many female stars including Latina actresses like Dolores del Río and Lupe Vélez. The paper reported on films it considered offensive to Mexicans and chronicled the influence of American mores on Mexicano moviegoers, especially the controversy surrounding "*las pelonas*" (the bobbed-hair girls) influenced by Hollywood's flapper culture (Monroy 1999, 173–187; Gunckel 2008, 325–330). African-American newspapers, such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Age*, shaped responses to

the cinema in black communities by circulating reports of films and industry practices they considered racist, promoting the educational and cultural value of cinema for black audiences, and publicizing African-American filmmakers and stars like Edna Morton, dubbed "Our Mary Pickford" (Everett 2001, 159–177; Stewart 2005, 114–154).

Mass-circulation women's magazines targeted female readers even more directly, positioning women as the primary audience for the movies, as well as an important influence on moviegoing tastes and habits in others. Women's monthlies devoted considerable coverage to the movies beginning at least as early as 1912 when *Ladies' World* published the first serialized fiction tie-in with the movie serial *What Happened to Mary?*. The trend continued in the late teens and early 1920s as publications like *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Woman's Home Companion* – all with circulations over one million – published profiles of women working in Hollywood, analyses of the "movie-struck girl" phenomenon, and tips about how to get screenplays sold, all the while exhorting readers to take an active role in advocating for "better films" in their communities. A steady stream of ads featured female movie stars promoting beauty products, clothing, and accessories.

While journalists contributed to an evolving critical commentary on movies and movie culture, a growing fan culture provided movie aficionados with intimate details about their favored players. Romances, marriages, divorces, childhoods, and children all became targets of increased curiosity, as did homes, kitchens, closets, and dressing tables. Fan culture increasingly tailored its appeal to women, by catering to supposedly "feminine" preoccupations with romance, beauty, decorating, and family life, rather than the technical and scientific details that had colored much of the earliest film publicity (Studlar 1996; Fuller 1996, 115–132). Women authored much of this early fan discourse, forming its "backbone," according to Anthony Slide (1992, 6). A quick survey of fan magazine writing in the late 1910s and 1920s reveals that at least half of the featured pieces in each volume were written by women. Adele Whitely Fletcher, Gladys Hall, Fritzi Remont, Pearl Gaddis, and Aline Carter, among many others, were all regular contributors to *Motion Picture*. At *Photoplay* the majority of writers were women, the best known being Ruth Waterbury, Elizabeth Peltret, Mabel Condon, Agnes Smith, and Frances Denton. Well-known journalist Adela Rogers St Johns also contributed to *Photoplay* in the 1920s, bringing her distinctive, emotional style to tales of life in Hollywood in both factual pieces and fiction, most notably a serialized novella dubbing Hollywood the "port of missing girls." In some cases, the prominent role played by female writers translated into positions of editorial leadership: Florence M. Osborne became editor of *Motion Picture* in 1925, and Ruth Biery served as West Coast editor for *Photoplay* where editorial assistant Kathryn Dougherty also made important editorial decisions and eventually took over the editorship in 1932 (Barbas 2006, 125; Barbas 2002, 71; Lant 2006, 563).

Alongside fawning portraits of stars' homes, careers, wardrobes, and families, fan culture also spawned a gossip industry reporting on the sometimes less-than-savory aspects of Hollywood life in items with which neither studio publicists nor the stars themselves were complicit. Gossip, perhaps even more than fan magazine reporting, helped female fans negotiate and assimilate rapidly changing gender norms and shifting sexual mores, a view only confirmed by a survey of the era's signal scandals: Mary Pickford's "quickie" divorce and marriage to Douglas Fairbanks in 1920; the star scandals of 1921 and 1922, all of which involved questions of feminine propriety; Charlie Chaplin's marriage to a pregnant and 16-year-old Lita Grey in 1924, after having divorced his similarly teenaged bride, Mildred Harris; and Rudolph Valentino's "unconventional" marriage to Natacha Rambova. Chief among early gossip columnists was Louella Parsons, best known for her daily column "Flickerings from Film Land," syndicated between 1926 and 1965 in hundreds of Hearst newspapers nationwide with a readership estimated at six million. Parsons positioned herself *within* Hollywood, becoming a regular at the Cocoanut Grove night club and parties held at San Simeon and Pickfair, evolving into a kind of celebrity herself, providing readers with a unique and privileged window on Hollywood culture (Barbas 2002, 91–96).

Writers famous in other fields contributed to the evolving discourse on cinema, publishing pieces on everything from moviegoing habits to Hollywood trends. Janet Flanner, Paris correspondent for the *New Yorker* in the 1920s and 1930s, began her career as a movie reporter for her local paper, the *Indianapolis Star*, in 1916. Before setting up shop in Paris, she wrote pieces for *Filmplay Journal* describing her experiences watching movies abroad in the early 1920s, including one particularly trenchant piece about the impact of Islamic practices of sex segregation on cinemagoing habits in Turkey. Noted fiction writer Katherine Anne Porter published items in *Motion Picture Magazine* and novelist and playwright Mary Roberts Rinehart wrote for *Photoplay*, contributing a particularly biting commentary on Hollywood's cult of the "new" (Rinehart 1992, 59–60; Flanner 1992).

While oftentimes dismissed as mere purveyors of gossip, it is clear that female journalists writing for daily newspapers, popular magazines, industry trade papers, and fan publications were much more than that. They helped pioneer the art of movie reviewing, helped draw attention to the many women, not just high-profile stars, working in the new industry, and helped to foster a critical distance from Hollywood trends, all the while – yes – providing privileged access to the medium's ethereal celebrities and crafting a fan culture by, about, and for women.

Censors, Reformers, and Educators: "Ultimately a Woman's Responsibility"

If female journalists and women's magazines helped shape an evolving critical and cultural discourse about popular cinema, female reformers and educators took an equally active role in evaluating, monitoring, and attempting to regulate cinema

and cinemagoing. An industry that had invested so much energy into courting female patronage now found those patrons discerning, critical, and always vocal. As Anne Morey remarks, "women used filmgoing to advance their own influence, parlaying their role as consumer into a more obviously political function as the arbiters of their own and others' consumption" (2002, 333). On the one hand, women's activism drew upon an outmoded view of middle-class women extending a maternal hand into the public sphere, taking care of "less fortunate" working-class and immigrant communities; on the other hand, it also drew upon newly radicalized women's organizations recently successful in their campaigns for women's suffrage and Prohibition, both ratified in 1920.

Positioned as gatekeepers of culture and morality, women had been a visible force in regulating cinema early on. As narrative features began to dominate the market after 1915, reformers turned their attention to the content of films, rather than theater conditions that had been their primary concern initially. The National Board of Censorship was staffed largely by middle-class women who volunteered to evaluate films prior to their release. By 1915, 100 out of 115 volunteers were female (Grieveson 2004, 101). Less is known about personnel who screened films at many of the state film censorship boards, but it is likely that many were also women active in progressive reform movements. When Chicago replaced its police censorship board with a 10-person commission of salaried civilians in 1914, for instance, women occupied half of the seats (Hallet forthcoming).

Among the many prominent women's organizations taking an active interest in cinema was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which stepped up its scrutiny of the movies after the successful passage of Prohibition. WCTU members visited local cinemas to rate the appropriateness of current offerings, sending appreciative letters to companies that produced "wholesome" pictures and protesting to mayors and police chiefs about pictures they considered "vulgar." Particularly concerned about the effects of filmgoing on the very young, local chapters published statistics on children's movie attendance and sent literature on the hazards of moving picture shows to all new mothers in their area. WCTU groups sponsored screenings of educational films in churches and community halls and influenced local politics, successfully preventing the showing of Sunday movies in several states through special elections (Parker 1996, 75–83; Parker 1997, 213–216). Recognizing cinema's new prominence in the cultural domain, the WCTU would proclaim, "motion pictures are having a far more injurious effect upon public morals in general than the saloon ever had" (quoted in Parker 1996, 87).

A more moderate strain of activism was centered in the Better Films Movement, a grassroots campaign to promote "quality" pictures coordinated largely through women's magazines and clubs. By the mid-1920s, most members of the National Federation of Women's Clubs had established their own Better Films department. The all-woman International Federation of Catholic Alumnae (IFCA) reviewed up to 11,000 films annually, then circulated lists of recommended titles to Catholic schools across the country. The National Congress of Parents and Teachers,

comprised largely of women, circulated a pamphlet on "Endorsed Films" to parent–teacher organizations nationwide. Popular magazines like *Woman's Home Companion* and *Ladies' World* also encouraged readers to exercise their civic "duty" and advocate for quality pictures in their communities by helping to spread the word about recommended titles and demanding better fare from local exhibitors. Through its Good Citizenship Bureau *Woman's Home Companion* ran a Better Films Service that published lists of recommended films for its readership, coordinated by Bureau director Anna Steese Richardson (Lant 2006, 271–273; Stamp 2000, 13). For African-American women, cinema's potential to uplift was particularly profound. Writing in *Half-Century Magazine*, a monthly geared toward upwardly mobile black women, Jean Voltaire Smith argued against the black church's traditional opposition to popular amusements, suggesting that cinema might be a medium that could not only educate African-Americans, but also help to bridge the gap between the less educated and the elite. "Would it not be better then, to encourage more of our people to produce pictures – films of the clean, helpful sort, that will uplift; urge them to build class moving pictures theaters, rather than discourage them from attending picture shows?" she wrote (quoted in Everett 2001, 157). Though women's magazines and industry sponsors alike often characterized the Better Films Movement as a group of mothers simply advocating wholesome entertainment for their families and their communities, many women active in the movement had long track records of public activism and social service. Catheryne Cooke Gilman, who led the Better Films Movement in Minneapolis before assuming a position of national leadership, had been a schoolteacher and a settlement worker at Chicago's famed Hull House, and had also been active in campaigns for women's suffrage, sex education, and children's welfare. As Cynthia Hanson points out, Gilman's interest in motion pictures also manifested a decidedly Progressive attitude to the project of reform – a belief that if social problems were documented, publicized, and discussed, society would respond because all Americans shared a common standard of morality (1989, 204–205). This view was severely tested as Gilman came to realize that neither the filmgoing public nor Hollywood producers necessarily shared her own sense of propriety. After many years espousing the belief that "better" films would triumph if women simply guided audience tastes and Hollywood proclivities, Gilman ended up an advocate for federal regulation of the motion picture industry.

Ultimately, early efforts by women to evaluate, review, and critique films had a lasting impact on movie culture, according to Richard Koszarski, who argues that the Better Films Movement was "ambitious, well-organized, and certainly the earliest national effort to promote film as a medium of social and artistic importance" (1990, 208). Through their interest in promoting quality cinema, some Better Films activists became involved in the "little theater" movement that sought to expand the distribution of European art films in the United States. Mrs Regge Doran founded one such example, Hollywood's long-standing Filmarte Theater, in 1928. That same year New York's Little Picture House was opened by

a group of society women (Horak 1998, 22; Guzman 2005). They planned to offer programs of films and educational talks aimed at schoolchildren and "women who go to lectures, who go on shopping expeditions, and many who go nowhere and are bored" (quoted in Lant 2006, 582).

When Will Hays assumed leadership of the MPPDA in 1922, he wasted no time in cultivating women's groups that had been critical of Hollywood. Hoping to gain their support in his efforts to ward off federal censorship, Hays publicly supported the Better Films Movement and efforts to promote children's matinees, spoke regularly to women's organizations, and cultivated relationships with prominent activists like Catheryne Cooke Gilman. When the MPPDA stepped up industry self-regulation in 1927, forming a Studio Relations Committee to evaluate scripts and completed films, representatives from major women's organizations, including the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the IFCA, and library groups, were invited to preview prerelease prints in a special Hollywood screening room (Morey 2003, 110–111; Wheeler 2007, 81–83). The following year Hays invited clubwomen to elect a designate to serve on the Studio Relations Committee itself. They chose Alice Ames Winter, past president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, to be, as one observer described, an ambassador for "the feelings and wishes of womanhood" (quoted in Wheeler 2007, 83).

Hays's efforts to woo female reformers were not always successful, however, as several of his allies became disillusioned with the MPPDA's efforts to police the industry from within. Gilman ultimately distanced herself from Hays following the star scandals of 1921 and 1922, particularly outraged that Hays did not object when Fatty Arbuckle returned to work after Virginia Rappe's death (Hanson 1989, 207). Maude Aldrich, director of the WCTU's motion picture department, refused Hays's offer to serve on the MPPDA's public relations council, choosing instead to continue advocating for federal control of motion pictures. Both women joined the Federal Motion Picture Council, formed in 1925, which sought to create an independent commission, similar to the recently established Federal Trade Commission, that would supervise the film industry, inspecting and modifying, if necessary, films containing "sex, white slavery, illicit love, nudity, crime, gambling, or excessive drinking" (quoted in Wheeler 2007, 79). Women remained the public face of the group's campaign: The Council proposed that at least four of the commissions' nine seats would be occupied by women, and Gilman was elected president in 1928 after the Council's board of directors decided motion picture reform was "ultimately a woman's responsibility" (quoted in Wheeler 2007, 81).

While reformers and clubwomen focused attention on regulating the movie industry, others saw cinema's educational potential, especially in film titles and distribution outlets that circumvented the control increasingly exerted by Hollywood's commercial interests. As both arbiters of culture and targets of reform, women were instrumental in promoting, screening, and watching films in nontheatrical settings like churches, schools, libraries, museums, clubs,

workplaces, and community centers. New publications like *Educational Film Magazine* and *Educational Screen* provided information to educators, social workers, librarians, and clergy, while books like *Motion Pictures for Community Needs: A Practical Manual of Information and Suggestion for Educational, Religious and Social Work*, coauthored by Gladys and Henry Bollman in 1922, furnished practical tips on how to book films from exchanges and how to equip and run a screening facility. Many of the 100 film programs suggested by the Bollmans were specifically targeted for female audiences at YWCAs, girls' reformatories, women's clubs, and settlement houses. The Educational Films Corporation, founded in 1915 by Katherine F. Carter, furnished motion picture "entertainments" for "clubs, hotels and private residences," also offering to equip "schools, churches and educational institutions with the necessities of moving picture projection" (MacDonald 1915). Before forming her own company, Carter had been in charge of General Film's educational division, a situation not uncommon at other commercial studios and exchanges that ran educational divisions headed by women. Elizabeth Richey Dessez, director of the educational department at Pathé Exchange, for instance, had had a long association with the Better Films Movement prior to her appointment.

The introduction of 16 mm technology in 1923 further aided the circulation of films outside commercial exhibition circuits – one estimate calculated that some 15,000 churches, schools, and clubs were screening films that year alone. By 1927, that number had nearly doubled (Maltby 1990, 190). The new gauge particularly helped to spur a "visual instruction" movement amongst schoolteachers, and the female teacher as projectionist soon figured in accounts of the modern classroom (Waller 2011). Anna Verona Dorris, author of *Visual Instruction in the Public Schools* (1928), the first such comprehensive guide, was particularly concerned to help women feel at home using 16mm technology in the classroom. "Anyone who is capable of operating an automobile can learn to operate any type of motion-picture projector," she wrote (quoted in Waller 2011). Librarians, most of whom were women, were also instrumental in supporting nontheatrical screenings and cultivating an educated film culture amongst their patrons, as Jennifer Horne (2011) has documented. Librarians suggested books that might be read in conjunction with screenings at local movie houses, hosted matinee screenings alongside children's story hours, and programmed groups of travelogues, newsreels, and historical dramas together around particular themes. Libraries also began to acquire films for in-house screenings and circulating film collections, becoming major supporters of educational and documentary filmmaking. Recognizing cinema's potential as an instrument of progressive social change, feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman imagined the construction of free public film libraries across the nation, financed, she speculated, with the help of noted library benefactor Andrew Carnegie.

If women could master the projector in classrooms and libraries, surely they could do so at home too. Ads targeting affluent female consumers promoted

16 mm as a "domestic" gauge that allowed women to become both purveyors of healthy entertainment for their families and amateur filmmakers themselves. Department stores like Macy's and Gimbel's began renting 16 mm projectors to their customers, while *Ladies' Home Journal* featured advertisements for 16mm "home theater" systems showing women programming "healthy, edifying, and safe family fare" in their homes (Wasson 2007). Bell and Howell's advertisements for amateur 16 mm cameras circulated images of women filming their children at home or in nature, suggesting the equipment's ease of operation, as well as its seamless integration into middle-class family life. In 1928, the company even introduced a flat, lightweight camera, the Filmo 75, designed to fit into a woman's pocket or purse (Zimmermann 1995, 61–62).

Cinema's educational potential was not lost on more radical groups as well; many early feminist organizations produced films to garner support for their causes. If one strand of female activism focused on policing cinema during these years, another recognized its extraordinary persuasive authority and the importance of visual rhetoric in any feminist campaign. Women's suffrage groups, among the earliest to grasp cinema's powers of influence, released features including *Eighty Million Women Want —?* (1913) and *Your Girl and Mine* (1914), using theaters to mobilize supporters after screenings (Stamp 2000, 168–176). The fight to legalize birth contraception, or "voluntary motherhood," was dramatized in several films, including *Where Are My Children?* (1916) and *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* (1917), both written and directed by Lois Weber. In *Birth Control* (1917) activist Margaret Sanger reenacted scenes from her storied career on-screen, then toured the country with the film promoting her cause (Sloan 1988, 86–87; Norden 2004). Activists like Sanger and the suffragists saw moviegoers not as innocents in need of moral protection and "betterment," but as potential fellow radicals who might be marshaled for action.

Whether monitoring films at their local cinemas, screening films in classrooms, libraries, and settlement houses, opening alternative theaters and exhibition outlets, or producing advocacy pictures, women stood at the heart of dual efforts in the Progressive Era to reform American politics, classrooms, and workplaces through the use of moving pictures and to reform cinema itself. A history of cinema that recognizes this work of advocacy and activism moves women from the margins to the center, assigning this labor its rightful place alongside filmmaking, screenwriting, and journalism in shaping film culture during the silent era.

Conclusion: "History Has Not Been Kind"

A stand-alone essay on women and the silent screen implies that women occupied an ancillary relation to early film culture – the conjunction suggests a summative relationship between women and cinema rather than the fundamental

interconnectedness I have outlined above. At the same time, such an essay is clearly necessary, since women have been repeatedly and routinely written out of conventional histories of the field, a process that began in the 1920s and early 1930s and continues to this day: Women, apart from big-name stars, were largely absent from the earliest film histories written by Terry Ramsaye, Benjamin Hampton, and Lewis Jacobs; and when women did begin to appear, as they did in Andrew Sarris's influential taxonomy of American directors, they amounted to "little more than a ladies' auxiliary" (1996, 216). As recently as 2009, one introductory film text informed readers that there had been a "brief vogue" for women in Hollywood during the silent era, under the heading of "feminine mystique" (Gianetti & Eyman 2009, 45). A recent spate of scholarship has begun to amplify and complicate this reductive history, not only by including and celebrating the work of early filmmakers like Lois Weber and early screenwriters like June Mathis, but also by working to broaden the very terms under which women's extraordinary contributions to early film culture are understood. What I hope to have demonstrated here is the absolutely central role that women played in defining silent cinema – that a history of this era simply cannot be told without accounting for women at its center. Women were instrumental in defining early film culture: as the majority of filmgoers and stars, as critics, journalists, and tastemakers commenting on films, filmgoing habits, and the new celebrity culture; as reformers and educators eager to adapt the medium for progressive aims; as screenwriters, filmmakers, and creative artists responsible for defining not only the era's most memorable screen personas but also its dominant genres. As Anthony Slide concludes, "never again would such women shape the tastes of a generation" (Slide 1977, 10).

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