# Dreams from Domesticity:

*Careers, Community, and Consumerism in American Film Fan Magazines of the 1930s*

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# INTRODUCTION

Films and film fan magazines are often looked upon as avenues of escape from everyday life. This assumption, while true to some degree, underestimates the power of film to influence daily culture and help Americans make sense of their changing world. Film fan magazines like *Photoplay, Movie Mirror, Modern Screen* and *Picture Play* did just that in their glory years of the 1930s. These magazines provide a valuable way of examining the roles film played in the lives of moviegoers, and how movie studios, audiences, and the films themselves shaped cultural values and gender, class and national identities. Because their readers were predominantly adolescent girls and young women, the magazines also offer insight into changing gender ideals and gender roles. By looking at the messages promoted in the magazines and the responses from both magazine readers and critics, it may be possible to determine the cultural values and anxieties of a segment of the American population that otherwise spoke loudest through their money at the box office.

Fan magazines played a role in creating a sense of unity and community across the United States. Through the pages of the magazine, fans could participate in a national film fan culture by communicating with other fans about their opinions on the images portrayed by film and film fan magazines. The magazines served as a teaching tool on how to interact with film through direct and indirect instructions on how to participate in fan culture. *Photoplay* offered readers a list of "Thirteen Don'ts When Writing to a Star," to help readers navigate the new territory of film fandom.[1] Magazine writers also encouraged readers to follow certain rules of behavior by utilizing the voice of film stars

[1] *Photoplay*, Oct 1936, 101.

and the privileged position of authority the stars held. In one instance film stars Carole Lombard and Paul Lukas advise readers on ten ways to attract a man or a woman.[2] The magazines also presented a positive spirit for readers to align with in a time of economic Depression. One article tells readers to "Pick the Goal You Want to Reach" as "That's the Way to Success."[3] The messages in the film fan magazines are messages of hope. They tell readers that anything is possible with the right application of effort, know-how, and consumer goods purchasing. Film fan magazines exemplify emerging American ideas surrounding consumerism and deeper rooted beliefs that individual personal effort was the path to success.

Although the magazines glorified the rewards of hard work, they also played upon desires for a quick buck. Contests and advertisements promising money were just one way of reaching a better reality with minimal effort, though individual physical and mental makeovers following the advice of how-to articles were more frequently promoted as avenues to success. Women, as the most avid readers of film fan magazines, were most often the targeted audience of these self-help articles. The definition of success promoted to women readers is telling of general attitudes towards women in the 1930s and gives insight into the ways in which women responded and were expected to respond to Depression-era concerns about the economy, changing gender roles, and the way to get ahead. Film fan magazines presented conflicting messages on women's roles in the economy, with some articles championing the rewards reaped by hard working career women, while other segments glorified the woman of the domestic sphere. The

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[2] Lary May. *Screening out the Past : The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 32.
*Movie Mirror* (May 1932): 20-23, 114.
[3] May, *Screening Out the Past*, 32.
*Movie Mirror* (May 1932):, 38.

image of women presented in the magazines serves as a bridge between these opposing ideologies. The magazines emphasized production of women's self-image through the adoption of the right consumer goods and the new consumer ethos that glorified shopping as a duty and painted purchases as legitimate and moral. Though Americans still had lingering concerns regarding Victorian morality and questions loomed large about the place women should take in society in the face of the idealized image.

Film fan magazines of the 1930s were also an attractive forum for readers and producers of the magazines to debate the upsides and downsides of the transition of the United States from a producer to a consumer nation. The film fan magazines provided a nationwide community in the face of ideological and economic uncertainties. The personal responsibility individuals felt for their failures and their struggles to survive and get ahead were assuaged, if only temporarily, by the unity and group cohesion of the film fan community. With their emphasis on attainable success, film fan magazines provided readers both an ideal fantasy world and a space to test and debate conflicting messages regarding women's place as wage earners, consumers, and housewives. Women film fan magazine readers gained a sense that they were not alone amidst the confusion, as both they and the women behind the production of the magazines struggled to locate themselves within a culture and economy that encouraged them to extend themselves beyond the domestic realm while maintaining ties to the very place they were instructed to leave behind.

## EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP

Mass media's emergence and its role in the creation of a new national and modern consciousness during the interwar period are adequately examined in *Mass Media Between the Wars: Perceptions of Cultural Tension, 1918-1941*, edited by Catherine L. Covert and John D. Stevens. Mass produced publications with high popular appeal are taken into consideration in the book, with Michelle Herwald's article taking a look at the science fiction publication *Amazing Stories* and James E. Murphy exploring the role of tabloids in the fulfilling the needs of urban populaces.

Present literature regarding magazines and magazines within greater American culture neglects to fully examine the role film fan magazines played as representatives and arbiters of American culture and identity in the 1930s. Much has been written on magazines in general, but less attention has been given to an analysis of film fan magazines and their place in American culture and history. Little space is dedicated to covering magazines beyond mainstream glossies such as *LIFE* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Mary Ellen Zuckerman's *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States* tackles the gender dimension of popular glossy print, but Zuckerman does not include film fan magazines in her work despite women's place as the primary intended audience of fan magazines. Film fan magazines receive little notice in Alan and Barbara Nourie's volume on *American Mass-Market Magazines*, and Amy Janello and Brennon Jones' *The American Magazine,* a largely pictorial look at the history of magazines. Books dedicated solely to film fan magazines, such as Martin Levin's *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* and Richard Griffith's *The Talkies: Articles and Illustrations from a Great Fan Magazine, 1928-1940*, both published in the 1970s, provide access to a

sampling of film fan magazine articles and photographs, but they are primarily galleries of magazine features and do not offer much by way of a level of analysis. Although these works do not offer a cultural and historical analysis of film fan magazines, they do provide valuable information about the climate of publishing in the 1930s and a method for the study of magazines.

There is a large body of film studies literature and many volumes dedicated to the study of audience reception. Anthony Slide has written numerous volumes on Hollywood film culture and figures and has briefly touched on fan magazines with *They Also Wrote for the Fan Magazines: Film Articles by Literary Giants from e.e. cummings to Eleanor Roosevelt, 1920-1939,* his entry on film fan magazines in the guide to *International Film, Radio, and Television Journals* and two interviews with former editors and writers of fan magazines he conducted in the 1970s for *Film Fan Monthly* magazine. His work, although valuable, does not offer much historic context.

General fan culture and audience reception outside of film studies are given deserved attention by scholars. Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* and Margaret McFadden's article, "America's Boy Friend Who Can't Get a Date: Gender, Race, and the Cultural Work of the Jack Benny Program, 1932-1946" present a methodology for studying and interpreting cultural texts. Literature on general 1930s popular culture spends significant time examining youth culture and women within the context of culture, as with Kelly Schrum's *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* and Kathy Peiss' look at beauty culture in *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture.*

Robert Sklar's work, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies,* places movies within a larger historical and cultural frame than most other approaches to the study of film in history, but does he not take time to examine fan magazines. His work is still valuable in evaluating film in the face of general culture and unites an evaluation of culture, film, and history. It is frequently cited as a source of information in other works that examine the 1930s and film culture. For example, in David Kyvig's chapter "Cinema and the Extension of Experience" in his book *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940: How Americans Lived Through the "Roaring Twenties" and the Great Depression,* the information he provides is based primarily on Sklar's scholarship. This speaks to the importance of Sklar's work, but it also highlights the lack of secondary works on 1930s film culture. Lary May's *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture* gives more specific consideration to the culture of film fans, as does his work in *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way.* Katherine H. Fuller's *At the Picture Show: Small-town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* and articles such as Marsha Orgeron's "Making 'It' in Hollywood: Clara Bow, Fandom, and Consumer Culture" and Adrienne L. McLean's "New Films in Story Form: Movie Story Magazines and Spectatorship" offer insight into fan cultures prior to the 1930s, setting the backdrop for the institution of fan culture and the purposes it would serve for Depression era audiences.

## WORKING WOES

Through examining the portrayal of women in film fan magazines and the responses of the female fan community, it is possible to gain insight into the ways that Americans coped with social change and Depression induced anxieties. The realm of female fandom during the 1930s provides a space within which to examine society's questioning and restructuring of established gender ideologies, and the way in which the boundaries between domestic and public spheres became less clear in response to the needs of people in the 1930s. Changes in workforce demographics that altered family support structures and emerging attitudes regarding consumption's role led many Americans to question where women fit into the new picture and how womanhood should be defined.

Magazines served as a good outlet and discussion space for the anxieties that came out of the events and ideology of the period and the years that preceded it. The economic conditions, in some cases, rendered men and women unable to fulfill expected gender roles. High unemployment rates and a lack of available jobs stunted the male head of the family's ability to provide financial security for his family. The inability to fulfill the expected role as chief family supporter became even more difficult in cases where the wife brought home the bulk, or all, of the bacon. During this period a greater number of married women were employed than ever before.[4]

There was an outcry against married women working, though it was not only because it was a deviation from women's accepted domestic responsibilities. The right to work was not simply a question of gender, but also a question of need. There existed

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[4] Margaret McFadden. "America's Boy Friend Who Can't Get a Date: Gender, Race, and the Cultural Work of the Jack Benny Program, 1932-1946." *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (Jun 1993): 113-34, 119.

the belief that jobs belonged to providers, who were typically married men, but were also acceptably widows, single women, and married women with unemployed or disabled husbands.[5] The federal government passed section 232 of the National Economy Act, which allowed only one partner in a marriage to take a federal salary.[6] Wages were the glue that held together the family, and the maintenance of family took precedence over the maintenance of gender ideologies. In light of the poor economic climate, gender was superseded by need, although the discussion over the right to work was not completely free of gender bias. The 1939 book *The Family Meets the Depression* claimed 75 percent of women believed wives with employed husbands should not work in order to free up jobs for men.[7] Women without a male provider were not discouraged from maintaining employment, but it is clear that married women were not intended to be the providers and men were viewed as the default breadwinners.

The challenge to traditional gender roles presented by economic necessity offered space for a new victor to triumph over older ideologies. Film fan magazines, as part of a larger popular culture offered a space onto which audiences could project themselves, and a stage upon which they could test and examine both established and fresh ideologies. Lawrence W. Levine in "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences" claims that popular culture provided a folklore intrinsically linked to those in urban industrial societies.[8] This folklore built by popular culture offered audiences a platform on which to assess and create their identities. Fan magazines

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[5] Alice Kessler-Harris. "Providers: Gender Ideology in the 1930s." Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart. *Women's America : Refocusing the Past.* 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 422.
[6] Ibid., 420.
[7] William H. Young and Nancy K. Young. *The 1930s*, American Popular Culture through History. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), 11.
[8] Lawrence Levine. "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences." *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (Dec 1992): 1369-99.

allowed readers to project themselves into the folklore of popular culture through their active participation via magazine offers, advertised social networks, and use of the prompts and photos of the magazines to extend ideas beyond the provided text. This use of the magazine as a starting point for further discussion among other fans, along with the virtual space of the film fan magazine community, provided a secure replacement for unstable social structures. They were an easily accessible media due to low newsstand prices and the conversational, relatable tone of the magazine features. Like tabloids of the period, the film fan magazine functioned as a useful repository for "a relevant contemporary folklore for the urban masses."[9] Where the microcosm of family could be disrupted by Depression pressures, popular culture offered an alternative community of like interests rather than blood. This community was one that offered audiences a greater sense of control; control that they were unable to grasp on a traditional level.

Control could also be found in consumption, and the act of buying had taken on a new importance in light of the Depression. *Ladies Home Journal* proclaimed that "It's Up to the Women!" to get out and spend money in order to buy the nation back into health.[10] Rather than view consumption as a hedonistic evil, the nation began to see consumption as a necessary function of everyday life. The encouragement to shop is strongly present throughout film fan magazines like *Photoplay*, which offered not only a retail store directory, but shopping guides for holidays and personal beautification.[11] The January 1935 issue offered a full page directory for "Hollywood Cinema Fashions by

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[9] James E. Murphy. "Tabloids as an Urban Response." Catherine L. Covert and John D. Stevens. *Mass Media Between the Wars: Perceptions of Cultural Tensions 1918-1941* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 62.
[10] Charles F. McGovern. *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 233.
[11] *Photoplay* (Jan 1935), 79.

Seymour." The list is broken down by state from Alabama to Wisconsin. The directory informs readers, "Whenever you go shopping consult this list of reliable stores, offering faithful copies of Hollywood Cinema Fashions and National Known Merchandise, such as advertised in this issue of *Photoplay*."[12] While these pseudo advertisements sold the image of Hollywood, they also supported the new image of shopping as not only perfectly sensible, but as a duty to the well being of the reader and the nation.

Women were given new prominence as chief household goods buyers. The civic importance linked to consumption and the new importance that women gained because of this did not surface without a cry of protest from critics. An article from 1931 in the *Outlook and Independent* titled, "What More Do Women Want?" bemoaned the increased influence of women on the formation of popular culture. The author Creighton Peet complained that, "Never before has the male point of view been so conspicuously unimportant. Nobody cares what music or books or magazines or movies or food or decorations men prefer." He continued, "Since women have charge of spending most of our money, our billboards, advertisements, department stores and the wrappers in which things are enclosed are designed especially to appeal to the ladies."[13] Peet was concerned with the increased influence and power of women in facets of American culture. This new emphasis on women as cultural barometers was met with further distaste by Walter Pitkin, a popular self-help author and radio personality, who labeled woman "economic imbecile," declaring in his 1932 book *The Consumer*, that women were too influenced by

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[12] "Hollywood Cinema Fashions by Seymour." *Photoplay* (Jan 1935), 124.
[13] Creighton Peet, "What More Do Women Want?" Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, *Antifeminism in America: Redefining the New Woman, 1920-1963* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1997), 137-138.

their passions to make the right purchases.[14] Although women's role as household shopper had been given increased gravity with the rise in opinion of consumption as a moral duty, old concerns regarding the stability of women's emotions still lingered. Women's self control and actions were still viewed as at the mercy of their emotions. Dr. Eleanora B. Saunders wrote on the topic in a 1929 issue of *Mental Hygiene*, stating that, "Belief in woman's capacity has varied from the point of view that relegates her to the field of household cares with adequate protection to that which places her on an equal footing with man on a high plane of economic efficiency. But her biological cravings remain constant."[15] A letter sent to President Roosevelt from A.H. Davenport of Tampa, Florida in May 1933 commented on women's spending impulses, noting that when a boy gets a job, "he marries, buys a home, a car, a radio, etc. But a girl – it's cosmetics and finery, the loss often of modesty and refinement, drifting father and farther from matrimony in most cases."[16] There was the sense that women must be taught how to handle the power of consumption and how to responsibly navigate their role as household budgeter.

## MAKING MOVIEGOERS

The experience of moviegoing was valuable to audiences on a level beyond simply going to the cinema to watch a film. The viewing of a film served as an impetus for community formation based off of viewers' common interests in film and the issues it presented. Kelly Schrum notes in *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage*

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[14] McGovern, 237.
[15] Eleanora B. Saunders. "Emotional Handicaps of the Professional Woman." Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, *Antifeminism in America: Redefining the New Woman, 1920-1963* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1997), 123.
[16] Kessler-Harris, 424.

*Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* that movies were appealing not only for the actual films, but also for the aspect of community they offered that extended the movie experience.[17] Film fan magazines provided the glue and forum space for these film fan communities. They helped movies to transcend the limited hour or two during which they held the audience's attention and enabled them to connect film to the greater context of American culture. Fan magazines were integral in the creation of a greater film experience that extended beyond the theater and brought together individuals seeking the community that traditional families and institutions could not provide during the Depression.

In the 1910s civic minded individuals and cultural elites were concerned with the potentially detrimental power of film on the moral sanctity of greater American culture. Theater owners believed that attracting a greater number of middle-class women to theaters would help legitimize and give an air of refinement to this new and often controversial industry. To attempt to lure women into film audiences they utilized advertisements that targeted women by capitalizing on women's domestic interests. [18] The ways in which theater managers attempted to draw a female audience also played upon accepted conventions. Advertising often targeted women in their homes. The techniques of the targeted marketing created a bridge between the public commercial sphere and women's domestic realm. Theaters promoted films through invitations and coupons sent to potential female moviegoer's homes. Advertisements were sent directly to the space women were most likely to control and promotional items were often household items. Spoons embossed with pictures of movie players were one popular

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[17] Kelly Schrum. *Some Wore Bobby Sox : The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945*, Girls' History & Culture Book Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 148.
[18] Shelley Stamp. *Movie-Struck Girls : Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11.

item of advertisement that women sought to collect.[19] Although by going to movie theaters women were encouraged to branch out from the domestic space Victorian ideologies placed them within, they were still expected to respond favorably to domestically targeted advertisements and to bring home based values with them into the public space of the movie house.

The target demographic audience of both fan magazines and the films they covered was not necessarily the audience that engaged with the products presented. Women were the target group, but how did they respond to the push for their attendance in greater numbers? Film makers must have been doing something right, as women presented an increasingly strong showing in theaters. An article in *Photoplay* in 1924 declared women made up 75 per cent of the movie audience. Just three years later *Moving Picture World* estimated cinema audiences to be 83 percent women.[20] By the second half of the 1930s, the audience had shifted so much that in 1937, Gilbert Seldes in *The Movies Come from America* suggested that studios begin to tailor their pictures intentionally towards men due to the proportional decrease in men's attendance.[21] Women had become a significant and dominant portion of cinema audiences.

The success of theater owners' efforts to present moviegoing as an enticing and worthwhile leisure activity to women is also evident in the pages of film fan magazines. The content of film interest magazines began to change with the shifting gender ratio of film audiences. Beginning in the 1910s motion picture magazines began to tailor their content towards women. Technical coverage of moviemaking was largely replaced by

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[19] Ibid., 22.
[20] Melvyn Stokes. "Female Audiences of the 1920s and early 1930s." Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby. *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: bfi Publishing, 1999), 43.
[21] Robert Sklar. *Movie-Made America : A Cultural History of American Movies*. Rev. and updated ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 178.

articles concerning fashion, beauty, and the lives of the actors.[22] The content was designed to attract the attention of potential female moviegoers and fans by presenting information and articles on topics that were associated with women's interests.

Women were not only seen as important for the preservation of the cinema's image as morally sound, but they were also viewed as essential to the industry's financial survival. At the heart of the push for women's increased movie attendance were the financial concerns of film producers. Although the film industry was dominated by men, industry big wigs assumed that the profitability of film was dependent upon the degree of appeal films held to women.[23] The desire to attract women to films and their increased presence in movie theaters were both reflected in film fan magazine's shift towards courting a female audience. The magazines provided an extension of the targeted film marketing that began earlier in the twentieth century. *Photoplay* editor James Quirk purchased complete control of the film fan magazine in 1930, and then two years later purchased *McClure's Magazine* and *Smart Set*. He stated that *Smart Set* would be edited "directly for young women and their interests."[24] In the publishing industry and the film industry, women were good business and their importance in the role of consumer and household budgeter is evident in the efforts made to capture their attention and their dollars.

The importance of women as fans is also noted by general manager Joe Brandt of the film production company Universal. When interviewed about the "movie-struck" girl, he notes that, "She is at the same time the biggest asset and the biggest annoyance of the moving picture industry." Brandt saw movie-struck girls as annoyances due to their

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[22] Ibid., 142.
[23] Stokes, *Female Audiences*, 44.
[24] "J.R. Quirk, Editor and Publisher, Dies." *New York Times* (2 Aug 1932), 17.

ambitions to become a part of the industry, overshadowing the role Brandt preferred them in – as film patrons.[25] This suggests the idea that there are boundaries for female film fans to stay within. Although magazines offered chances to creatively interpret film and to participate in the creation of a film folklore, they were expected to remain in the area designated to them, where they would be most financially beneficial to the studios and all involved in the production, distribution, and exhibition of films.

Women's role as consumer did not supersede their role as homemaker. *Woman's Home Companion* suggests that "Little Miss Movie-Struck" ought to be made to understand, "the best moving picture in which she can play a leading role is one entitled 'Home.'"[26] As wives and mothers women directed the consumption patterns not only of their personal selves, but also of the family home. As a result of this, their value as consumers was multiplied, and the desire to appeal to them increased. Magazines of both film fandom and of other focuses provided targeted advertising and content that producers intended to shape opinion and purchasing habits. Magazines also taught women readers how to deal with the new media and resulting challenges presented to them. General women's magazines, such as *Ladies' World* and *Woman's Home Companion*, taught readers to, "oversee neighborhood screening venues, reminding them of the strength they wielded as the family's chief entertainment purveyor." The mission presented to readers as moral guardians was a continuation of past ideology. The moral element was highlighted by the discussions' care in defining class and age distinctions to place the readers of the magazine above the average and supposedly ill-informed

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[25] Stamp, 39.
[26] Ibid.

cinemagoer.[27] Film fan magazines allowed women to take a privileged position over the film uninformed. They also gave women an opportunity to assume a position of control and a secure definition of identity in a period when conflicting messages encouraged women to be simultaneously queens of the domestic realm and morally upstanding public examples.

The examination of the interaction between audiences and producers allows for a glimpse at the questions surrounding women's place in society in light of the encouragement for her increased presence in a public domain. The initial push to bring women into movie theaters was primarily an economic concern, rather than a push to alter women's place in American culture. Although women were seen as desirable audience members integral to the creation of a reformed image of moviegoing and theaters as a morally decent space, at the heart of the effort to rework cinema's image was a desire to court a larger audience and their multitudinous pocketbooks. Whatever the motive, women did indeed increase their numbers at the cinema, likely due at least in part to the work done to grab their attention and attendance through theater owners' domestically target marketing. Though it was an economically driven push that was based off of existing ideologies, it resulted in the creation of a space in which those very accepted and utilized ideologies would be brought into question.

## MOVIES IN PRINT

Film fan magazines were valued by the film industry, with reader responses in film fan magazines seen as important in gauging audience responses and audience preferences. The opinions of movie fans sent to both studios and to film fan magazines

[27] Ibid., 13.

were used to measure audience response to films. It was not until George Gallup founded the Audience Research Institute in 1939 that a central institutionalized form of gauging audience opinion was available. Before this time producers relied on sources Gallup deemed "haphazard" and "inaccurate," such as exhibitor reports, fan mail and columns in the trade papers.[28] Though not believed to be completely accurate barometers of film audience preferences, film fan magazines still played an integral role in connecting film fans with studios and vice versa.

Reader responses are helpful in determining the demographics of film fan magazine readers. Although there were many more readers of the magazines than there were those who took the time to compose a letter or enter a contest, looking at the reader contributions to film fan magazines is a way of examining a portion of the moviegoing audience that was dedicated enough to actively engage with what was presented to them. Nearly 90 percent of the fan mail studios received came from girls under 21.[29] Fan mail was considered an important department by film studios. They spent nearly $2 million on postage, photographs, and salaries for fan mail department workers to handle the arrival of 32,250,000 fan letters in 1928 alone.[30] Studios were dedicated to fan responses as a means of gauging audience opinion. While the primarily female fan letter writing crowd posed a challenge for film exhibitors who wished to have access to demographically broader opinions of films shown, it provided a way of tapping into the psyche of the young female movie fan.

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[28] Susan Ohmer. "The Science of Pleasure: George Gallup and audience research in Hollywood." Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby. *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: bfi Publishing, 1999), 67.
[29] Ibid., 67.
[30] Samantha Barbas. *Movie Crazy* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 138.

As with fan letter writers, film fan magazine readers were also primarily women, especially "young metropolitan women aspiring to the condition of Clara Bow or Alice White."[31] Market research conducted in the late 1930s revealed the typical film fan magazine reader to be akin to a twenty-six year old housewife married to a Detroit assembly line worker.[32] This proved attractive to advertisers and film studios who wished to court female audiences as fan magazines provided a form of free advertising with none of the financial burden that was tied to film studio fan mail departments. Publications on film wielded influential power over trends and tied consumer culture to film and home culture. *Ladies' World* editor Gardner Woods called monthly women's magazines "the last link in the sales system that connects the producer with the theatergoer."[33]

Film fan magazines were also a medium that linked fans, rather than technical buffs, together and provided space to discuss all elements of film. The first such magazine, *Motion Picture Story Magazine (MPSM)*, published in 1911, initially promoted the General Film Company group, but expanded into a promotion vehicle for other companies when the General Film Company lost its prominence in the early 1910s.[34] Other film industry magazines examined the more technical side of film, but these magazines did not provide a movie companion in that way that *MPSM* did. *MPSM* was innovative in its time for its dedication to the movie fan. It offered synopses of film story lines in the hopes of bringing in curious non-moviegoers to the cinema, but

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[31] Richard Maltby. "Sticks, Hicks and Flaps: Classical Hollywood's generic conception of its audiences." Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: bfi Publishing, 1999), 34.
[32] Richard Griffith. *The Talkies: Articles and Illustrations from a Great Fan Magazine, 1928-1940* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), xxi.
[33] Stamp, 105.
[34] Anthony Slide. *International Film, Radio, and Television Journals*, Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 1-2.

eventually included photo features and articles such as interviews with actors and articles on film production.[35] Technical aspects of film were pushed aside in favor of an increased focus on the players in the films. As Richard Griffith notes in *The Talkies*, the "drama of Hollywood had supplanted the drama of the screen."[36]

Another film fan magazine, *Photoplay*, also founded in 1911, gained prominence after James Quirk took over editorial control in 1920. *Photoplay's* circulation numbers grew from 12,000 to more than 500,000 after Quirk revamped the magazine.[37] He gave the magazine a singular voice that was both irreverent and intellectual, giving film fan magazine readers a chance to take part in poking fun of establishment, while also placing them in a privileged position through the acquisition of knowledge about the goings-on of filmland. Quirk would often take a stab at fans' revered favorite stars in order to solicit letters of disagreement from them, claiming that, "If a magazine doesn't make its readers mad, it has no vitality."[38] Quirk's obituary, printed in the Los Angeles Times August 2, 1932, recognizes his heavy influence on the magazine, noting that, "His Photoplay Magazine was so closely associated with his own personality that it was virtually a one-man affair during its earlier years and remained always a reflection of the individuality of the man at its helm."[39] A short article on a eulogy given for Quirk hails him as, "a pioneer in the film fan magazine field."[40] *Photoplay* editor James R. Quirk presented himself an everyman, and someone who had suffered through hardship. In his obituary it

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[35] Kathryn H. Fuller. *At the Picture Show : Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 133-137.
[36] Griffith, xvii.
[37] "J.R. Quirk." *New York Times* (2 Aug 1932), 17.
[38] Lawrence J. Quirk "Foreword." Richard Griffith, *The Talkies: Articles and Illustrations from a Great Fan Magazine, 1928-1940* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), ix.
[39] "Quirk Funeral Rites Set: Services Here Tomorrow for Well-Known Publisher; Interment to Be in New York." *Los Angeles Times* (2 Aug 1932), A1.
[40] "Film Leaders Honor Quirk: Rupert Hughes Gives Eulogy at Rites for Editor of Photoplay Magazine." *Los Angeles Times* (4 Aug 1932), A1.

is noted that, "Quirk often told friends how he suffered in the panic of 1907 after losing a newspaper job, and of how he stood in bread lines and slept in the park." This is contrasted with his place in life at death, when "He was rated several times a millionaire."[41] Although Quirk ended life a rich man, his poor background and his popular personality mirror the life stories of many stars as chronicled in the pages of *Photoplay*.

As theater owners strove to shape up the image of movie theaters, Quirk worked to shape up the respectability and authority of *Photoplay*. By hiring scholarly authors such as Terry Ramsaye, who had previously written a history of the film industry, Quirk added a level of substance to the magazine.[42] The magazines were originally published under the Photoplay Publishing Company, but during the mid-1930s were taken over by Bernarr Macfadden's Macfadden Publications company. After Macfadden Publication's acquisition of the magazine, it went through a transition period during which the intellectual comedian voice of Quirk was replaced by a more commercial voice focused on beauty and advice articles. Editorial control was handed over to Kathryn Dougherty after Quirk's death. Her place on the editorial throne was brief, and the role of editor was soon passed between several different individuals before it finally landed in the hands of Ruth Waterbury in 1935, who maintained control until 1940.[43] Despite the shifts in editorial control and the magazine's purchase by a large magazine publications company, the readership continued to grow, rising through the 1930s to reach just under one million

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[41] "Quirk Funeral Rites." *Los Angeles Times* (2 Aug 1932), A1.
[42] Quirk in Griffith, vi.
[43] Slide, 3.

copies in circulation at the close of the decade.[44] A yearly subscription cost $2.50 in the United States, and a single issue cost 25 cents.

The cover of *Photoplay* billed it at the start of the 1930s as "The NEWS and FASHION MAGAZINE OF the SCREEN," then "The NEWS MAGAZINE of the SCREEN" beginning in 1933. The tagline on the cover was entirely dropped in April of 1933, presumably because the contents of the magazines were by then sufficiently well-known. A typical issue contained feature articles, along with an established group of departments. One such department titled "The Audience Speaks Up" and subtitled "With Brickbats and Bouquets PHOTOPLAY Readers Voice Their Opinions of Pictures and Personalities," allowed readers to write into the magazine with their opinions. Letters most commonly commented on films and fandom rather than the features of previous issues of the magazine. The magazine offered three prizes for the best letters of the month, with the prize money set at 25, 10, and 5 dollars for the three top letters of up to 200 words.[45] Other features included "Photoplay's Famous Reviews" and Quirk's editorial section "Close-Ups and Long-Shots." Quirk's editorial bit included short accounts of actors' exploits and humorously written commentary on movie related topics from outside the film world. In the January 1932 issue of *Photoplay*, Quirk made fun of an economist who listed, "the slim picture stars as one of the causes of the low price of wheat." He noted that comments like this are ridiculous and "more than we can stand for" as, "You can still walk the streets of Hollywood without danger of being hit by discarded waffle irons, thrown out the windows of the Hollywood elect."[46] This light, satirical tone was prevalent throughout most of the magazine. It was open season on

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[44] Griffith, xxi.
[45] *Photoplay* (Jan 1932), 8.
[46] Ibid., 25-26.

anything and everything, including the rumor mill and the institution of fandom. A full page comic in the same issue showed a man and woman embracing on a chaise lounge, with a photographer and reporter at the door. The man on the lounge remarks, "Engaged! Of course not – eh, - we're just pals. How do these rumors get around, anyway?"[47] The irreverent humor made light of ambiguous morality and positioned readers above issues lacking definite parameters.

*Photoplay* was not the only film fan magazine on the market, with publications like *Movie Mirror* and *Modern Screen* offering a cheaper alternative at $1.20 for a yearly subscription or 10 cents per copy. Regardless of price, the magazines positioned themselves as confidants and companions to readers. Another popular film fan magazine priced the same as *Photoplay* was Street & Smith's *Picture Play* publication. Like *Photoplay*, *Picture Play* had a slew of regular departments, including a section titled "What the Fans Think" that offered a platform for readers to "have their say to an extent permitted by no other magazine." A question and answer department titled, "Information, Please" provided additional opportunities for fan involvement and claimed to offer "Authoritative answers to readers' questions." *Picture Play* also included "The Screen in Review: Critical discussion of new films." The magazine regularly offered a commentary article on star happenings titled "Over the Teacups," written and run by a character named Fanny the Fan.[48] *Picture Play* positioned itself as a magazine devoted to the fans with its array of interactive features and its use of the pen name "Fanny the Fan" for "Over the Teacups."

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[47] Ibid., 75.
[48] *Picture Play* (Jan 1931), 3.

## WOMEN BEHIND THE MAGAZINES

Women were not only the target audience of the film fan magazines, but they were also important players in the production of the magazines. Women writers and editors of film fan magazines gave women readers a point of identification, especially as both experienced the same societal pressures and faced the same conflicting messages. It is important to examine both consumers and producers of films and film fan magazines as equally susceptible to the concerns of the time. As Andrew Bergman notes about moviemakers, producers were not only interpreting the "yearnings of a national unconscious," they were also affected by the pressures their audiences experienced.[49] Their interpretations of women's place in society and their own experiences as women were just as important as the experiences and impressions of readers.

*Photoplay* passed through many hands before coming under the editorial control of Ruth Waterbury. Kathryn Dougherty, who previously worked as general book-keeper of the *Photoplay* operation, took over editorial control immediately following Quirk's death. For a brief period Frederick James Smith held the spot as editor before Ruth Waterbury took the position. Waterbury wrote articles for *Photoplay* during the Quirk editing era. She came to the magazine after Quirk offered her the lucrative sum of $125 a week to work for *Photoplay*. Waterbury impressed Quirk with the rapport she built with Rudolph Valentino and Valentino's lawyer in order to get a supposedly impossible interview with the star.[50]

In her days as a reporter at *Photoplay*, Quirk often called Waterbury into the office in the middle of the night to problem solve with him. In an interview conducted by

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[49] Andrew Bergman. *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), xiv.
[50] Anthony Slide. "FFM Interviews Ruth Waterbury." *Film Fan Monthly*, no. 141 (1973): 21-28, 22.

Anthony Slide in the 1970s, she recounts one of the instances she was woken at four o'clock in the morning by Quirk, who told Waterbury, or Snip as he called her, "we're in trouble. For God sakes get up here." Quirk had placed the phrase "Going Hollywood" in an issue that he sent off to the printers, but he was unable to pair a story to send along with the title phrase. Waterbury came up with an article to pair with the phrase, and they were able to phone the information into the printers in time.[51]

Waterbury placed her career first, but not without encountering opposition very close to home. Waterbury was not a single career woman, but a wife whose husband did not understand the need for her to go to work at unconventional hours of the night. Getting from home to the office at four in the morning was not possible without, as Waterbury says, stopping to "have the quarrel with my husband first." It was not a quarrel, but *the* quarrel. Waterbury bucked convention and had to face an expected and repeated protest from her husband for being "fixated" with her career.[52] Her role as instrumental in the creation of *Photoplay* was ultimately overshadowed by her role as wife.

Quirk owned the magazine during his editorship, but after his death it was acquired by publishing giant Bernarr Macfadden. Macfadden Publications served as home to Bernarr Macfadden's long running magazine *Physical Culture* and the *True Story* empire. *True Story*, founded in 1919, was the first of the confessional magazines, featuring tales purportedly straight from life and intended to impart a moral lesson.[53] The magazine spawned many spin-offs, such as *True Romance*, with these types of magazines

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[51] Ibid., 24.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Amy Janello and Brennon Jones. *The American Magazine* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 57.

reaching the height of their popularity in the 1930s.[54] Macfadden's acquisition of the magazine brought on a new era. *Photoplay*'s publication association with sensational story magazines is telling of a shift in the level of sophistication presented by the magazine. Waterbury struggled to maintain the tone established for the magazine by Quirk, and faced the challenge of dealing with a parent publishing company interested in revenue over the maintenance of *Photoplay* as a magazine dedicated to the discussion and community of film fans. Waterbury notes Macfadden "hated girls to wear lipstick, so when I had to see him, I'd put on more lipstick than you ever saw."[55] Waterbury flaunted a newly popularized cultural norm in order to give Macfadden a dose of her frustrations.

Adele Whitely Fletcher was another female film fan magazine editor, but her case shows a variation of attitude toward working women. She became editor of *Motion Picture Magazine* in 1920 and later took on the editorship of *Photoplay*. Like Waterbury, Fletcher was not only an editor, but also a contributor to the contents of film fan magazines, writing pieces not only for *Photoplay*, but also *Movie Weekly* and *Modern Screen*, among other publications. Fletcher, once again like Waterbury, also worked in addition to playing the role of wife. Her husband worked in the wholesale furniture business. Fletcher paints a more complacent image of her husband than Waterbury, saying that "He was very sympathetic to my work, very sympathetic."[56]

Female staff heavily influenced the machinery behind film fan magazines' production, but the industry was by no means dominated by women. The February and March issues of *Picture Play* each feature an article highlighting the pens behind the print of the magazine. Samuel Richard Mook's articles offer short vignettes on nine men and

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[54] Young, 158.
[55] Slide, *Ruth Waterbury*, 25.
[56] Anthony Slide. "FFM Interviews Adele Whitely Fletcher." *Film Fan Monthly*, no. 152 (1974): 21-26, 22.

six women of *Picture Play*. The conversational friend to friend tone prevalent throughout the magazine is very present in the article. Mook provides portraits of the writers who for the most part readers could relate to. Mook notes in the introduction to the first article, that for the photo accompaniment that was taken "one girl had to wait three weeks…because she hadn't any clothes to wear."[57] Depression money troubles affected writers of the magazines as much as they affected magazine reading film fans. Mook portrays the film fan magazine writers as fans themselves, as with Norbert Lusk, who "understands the 'crushes' of the fans, because he began early to have them himself."[58] Film fan magazine writers were portrayed for the most part as relatable individuals, enhancing the accessibility of the magazines for Depression era readers.

The writers were portrayed as hard working individuals. Myrtle Gebhart, "Filled with dreams and hopes…worked and saved."[59] She bounced from one writing job to another due to the businesses closing. Before she became involved with fan magazine writing she became ill and worked addressing envelopes at $3 for every thousand she addressed. Mook notes her diet at that point "consisted chiefly of peanut butter bought in bulk and spread thinly on crackers."[60] Gebhart was portrayed as hard working, even in the face of adversity. As Mook wrote, "She takes her work in deadly earnest…and there is something splendid about a girl who has been through the mill as Myrtle has."[61] When a female worker took jobs in order to support herself it was seen as a commendable ideal. Women writers were just as admirable as men writers.

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[57] Samuel Richard Mook. "Introducing An All-star Cast." *Picture Play* (February 1930), 60
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 62.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 92.

Despite Mook's insistence on highlighting facts that make it possible for financially struggling readers to relate to the writers, not all of them are money troubled, down and out common folks. Helen Louise Walker was a self-described "fluttery ingénue debutante" who landed a job not because she knew anything about writing, but because she "knew everybody of importance in town."[62] Mook does not admire or praise Walker the way he lauds Gebhart and he shows distaste for her inherited affluence and connections. In fact, he cuts his portrait of Walker short, claiming that once the ginger ale served to him was gone he left the house Walker shared with her parents, and "oozed out into the California sunshine."[63] Walker, unlike Gebhart, was not an individual who worked out of necessity. She was not a deserving female worker as she was provided for by her parents, who appeared to be living comfortably, and thus did not have the need for work that Gebhart did. For this reason Walker is not portrayed in the flattering light that her needier contemporary is.

It was okay for a woman to possess money and a comfortable life if she attained that position through hard work necessary to support herself. Alma Talley is another female film fan magazine writer who had no great need to for money, but unlike Walker, Talley earned her money through hard work. Talley wrote from the age of eleven and went to college for two years on a scholarship. She was not born into money, she had writing talent, and she worked hard to write "first-rate" stories "ready at the moment promised, with nary a comma out of place, let alone a fact." Mook writes that, "If she's rich, there's a reason."[64]

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[62] Ibid., 62.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Samuel Richard Mook. "Introducing An All-star Cast." *Picture Play* (March 1930), 54.

The second installment of Mook's foray into the lives of fellow film fan magazine writers opened with a look at a husband and wife writing team, Edwin and Elza Schallert. Unlike the photographs of the other writers included in the articles, the photo of the Schallerts is a family portrait, featuring Mr. and Mrs. Schallert and their three sons, who Mook notes are "three of the swellest kids I've ever seen."[65] Elza Schallert working while her husband had a steady job might have been viewed negatively, but with the publication of the article not even a full year into the Depression, a wife in the workforce along with her husband was less alarming than it would become further into the Depression. Her portion of the written portrait also emphasizes her role as a mother over her prowess as a writer. Mook agrees with Edwin when he calls Elza "the finest living specimen of the modern American wife."[66] That is the final word on Elza and the last impression the reader is left with. Elza's work as a writer clearly does not interfere with her work as a wife and mother.

The final woman writer Mook detailed was a liberal female writer, "Mike," or Margaret Reid. Mook was unable to seriously profile a female flapper career woman who did not work as a necessity to support herself or a family. Mook's tone is mocking, as he details "*Picture Play's* contribution to the cause of art, careers for women, Greenwich Village, and Heaven knows what else." Reid came to California with her mother, and "finding it necessary to do something…began working as an extra." Reid did not work to support herself or her mother, but because she needed something to keep her occupied. Mook did not hold back the ridicule for this woman who did not let men pay for her on dates, went to bed no earlier than two or three a.m., and dared to steer

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[65] Mook, *Picture Play February 1930*, 52.
[66] Ibid., 53.

"conversation into deep, philosophical and theoretical waters." Her foray into activities that were traditionally associated with masculinity and her use of the nickname Mike caused Mook to dismiss the legitimacy of Reid's writing career. Mook concluded with the comment that Reid "has promised, when I introduce Buddy [Rogers] to her, to meet him with an open mind, whatever that is."[67] Women behind the creation of film fan magazines who worked out of necessity avoided the criticism of those, like Reid, who took on masculine jobs.

## "OKEH" GALS AND DOWNHOME DIVAS

Within the pages of film fan magazines, women were taught not only how to approach and analyze film, but also how to construct themselves physically and morally. The knowledge of film offered by the magazines allowed enlightened filmgoers to more successfully navigate film and to tailor the culture and message they were exposed to in order to better meet their needs. Readers could receive guidance in how to construct themselves through viewing the construction of stars. Film fan magazines completed the image of the "star." As John Ellis notes, "Stars are incompletely images outside the cinema: the performance of the film is the moment of completion of images in subsidiary circulation in newspapers, fanzines, etc."[68] The private and public lives of stars were symbiotic, and the fan magazine provided a place for the unification of their presented images, and a means of disseminating the star persona to film fans. The stage that the magazines set allowed for an extended performance by the stars through which they

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[67] Ibid., 104.
[68] Amelie Hastie. *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 109.

further constructed and represented their images, which were then in turn affirmed by the receivership of the audience.

While the magazines allowed for the completion of star images, they also provided the knowledge and advice for readers to construct and complete their own images. The images of stars presented in fan magazines provided a carefully constructed model image prepared for imitation. The messages presented by these images were not always congruous. As with the conflicting attitudes female editors and writers faced, articles in the fan magazines provided conflicting messages on what it meant to be a woman, celebrating both the independent crusading spirit of female film stars and encouraging women to dedicate themselves to the home. A look at film star Joan Blondell in the April 1932 issue of *Movie Mirror* illustrates this conflict. Blondell is called the "hardest-boiled, wisest-cracking, blonde dame." Dame is not used as a derogatory term, and Arthur Williams, the author of the article, seems to be championing the spark of life that Blondell possessed as a tough, clever dame. The article, "A Hard Boiled Gal Gets Soft Hearted," however, does not champion Blondell's grit, and is primarily a discussion of her love life. The article states that love had transformed her from a blonde dame into a woman, "as hard-boiled as a one-minute egg, as wisecracking as a bowl of mush." Blondell talks of her excitement to be at home and of the possibility of having a baby. The author regards this as a positive move in the actress's life, and asserts that Blondell, "is a very okeh sort of gal, believe you me."[69] The article sends the message that it was not possible to have it all – the career and the family. Blondell's earlier tough persona was put forward as a stepping stone to what she was in the process of becoming, rather than serving as an ultimate end in itself.

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[69] Arthur Williams. "A Hard Boiled Gal Goes Soft Hearted." *Movie Mirror* (Apr 1932), 14, 96.

The same issue features an interview with star Norma Shearer, a woman that the editor notes "combines, marvelously, a home and a career."[70] Unlike Blondell, who seemed capable of putting on only one pair of shoes at a time, Shearer is portrayed as a woman who can indeed, have it all. However the premise of the article is framed in terms of black or white, as in the case of Blondell. The interview sought to determine whether "she thought girls should be demure and clinging, or brave and dashing."[71] Although the argument is presented as a choice between one or the other, the assertion that Shearer has bits of both increased the sense of ultimate authority that the actress held. Shearer waxes on the state of the modern girl and woman. Her advice is very typical of the 1930s, as she advises women to wait for marriage until they were between 25 and 30 years of age, as the marriage will then be a greater success, and it will be possible for the woman to be a better wife. Many Depression-era individuals did postpone marriage and family in the face of economic uncertainty. Shearer's support for this decision offers reassurance to readers who may have questioned their decisions. Shearer, or more likely the article's author, terms women who take time to themselves before starting a family as women with "pasts." The events of a woman's past were no longer only about "love affairs," but about the life "adventures" she would have. The modern woman that Shearer champions and encourages is one who is "not reckless of consequences. She is aware of them…She dares to be herself." The tone of the article is very empowering and champions women who are in complete control and take responsibility for themselves. The article provided an encouraging voice in support of women who were forced by circumstance to step outside of traditional expectations.

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[70] Gladys Hall. "No Woman Without a Past is Interesting." *Movie Mirror* (Apr 1932), 58, 83.
[71] Ibid., 58.

Actress Ann Harding, like Shearer, is a star who is portrayed as having both career and family. The March 1931 issue of *Picture Play* states that Harding bases her contentment on, "marriage, child, and home." But in addition to this tripartite of domestic bliss, the article notes, she adds to "these essentials…an active and successful career." The author portrays this double whammy of responsibility in a very positive light. He celebrates Harding's habitation of duel spheres, as she tackles her life responsibilities, "without excitement or confusion."[72] It seems to be possible for women to do it all simultaneously, though there is the sense that as a star Harding somehow transcended the regular everyday roles of womanhood. It is as if stars were expected to play dual roles. Amelie Hastie notes in *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History* that film star Colleen Moore was expected to both perform "ordinary life," and to perform her role as a glamorous star.[73] The position of inhabiting multiple roles can then be seen as something not expected of everyday women, though the reality of the Depression often forced women into positions requiring them to take on multiple roles. The separation between star and fan added authority and weight to the words of stars printed in the magazines. As Shearer was placed in a position of sage authority to women readers of *Movie Mirror*, Harding was also placed in a privileged position to give advice. While Shearer advised women to live for themselves before they lived for a family, Harding claimed her success to be based not on serving humanity, but on pleasing herself, as she views the most important determinate on whether she fails or succeeds in life on "whether or not I had achieved personal happiness."[74] At first glance this appears almost hedonistic to toss aside the concerns of others in order to pursue personal bliss,

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[72] *Picture Play* (Mar 1931), 24-25.
[73] Hastie, 21.
[74] *Picture Play* (Mar 1931), 24.

but it also speaks to the importance of individual responsibility and individual worth. The responsibility of the individual to do right by themselves would then result in the improvement of society as a whole. Andrew Bergman notes in his book on Depression era film that female characters in movies that were headed on a downward path were usually entwined with the downward path of society.[75] Films also had an insistence on "searching out personal evil as a source of social ills."[76] By contrast, individual success would promote society's success, as the two were intertwined with one another. Career and family together were what success looked like to Harding, and she took it upon herself to maintain the effort necessary to succeed in both cases.

Being a career woman appeared to be a valid, legitimate option for women to pursue, as long as the ultimate goal lay within achieving domestic bliss. Although the portrayal of Joan Blondell's personal character was written in terms that allowed her to take on only role at a time, she was presented as an approved figure to idolize. *Movie Mirror*, in a 1932 fashion spread, provided suggestions of, "Frocks for Rising Young Executives."[77] The approval and support for women as young executives is likely largely due to the necessity for women to postpone families. Joining the workforce had become a practical option. Of course this meant that women were being encouraged to join an already strained workforce, with men's ability to fulfill their traditional role as breadwinners threatened. The threat to men's traditional roles is hard to discern in the magazines. The encouragement of women's eventual departure from the working world would calm anxieties that women would replace or emasculate men. The lack of opposition to women in the workforce was also likely due to the demographic of film fan

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[75] Bergman, 52.
[76] Bergman, 97.
[77] *Movie Mirror* (Apr 1932), 70-71.

magazine readers. Women comprised the bulk of the fan magazine reading audience, so engaging conversation on the fears of men's shifting gender roles was likely less topical and pressing.

## CONSUMER HOW-TO

In addition to addressing women's place as providers and family caretakers, film fan magazines offered advice to women on how to improve their lives through acquiring the right products and adopting a moral code that balanced Victorian domestic standards with the new necessities of the Depression years and ideologies of leisure. This information was often delivered as if it had come directly from the stars, and when that was not the case, information was given as an inspiration from the stars. The appealing glamour of film stars was used to entice readers to purchase products and view leisure as a right rather than a privilege. The examples of stars enjoying lives of leisure and exhibiting their homes and hobbies encouraged film fan magazine readers to seek the individualism of land ownership and production from within the realm of leisure, legitimizing the consumption economy in the process.[78]

It was by no means a novel concept to have women receive advice from a print source. The advice articles in film fan magazines that directed women to, "Look in the Mirror!" and ask themselves questions like, "Are you Successful?" were following in the tradition of Victorian code of conduct manuals, even if the advice given presented an increased emphasis on image maintenance rather than moral preservation.[79] It was a familiar format that had also been present in earlier women's magazines, as in the March

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[78] May, *Screening out the Past*, 237.
[79] *Photoplay* (Feb 1932), 70.

1914 *Ladies' Home Journal* article that advised women, "How You Can Furnish a Five-Room Apartment for $300."[80] Jennifer Scanlon notes in her book, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* that the *Ladies' Home Journal*'s "recipe for defining womanhood" was advice.[81] Advice in print allowed women to consume at home, continuing conventions of Victorian private life, although the Victorian packaging was usually filled with modern insides.

In addition to advice articles, film fan magazines also promoted advice books purportedly written by the stars themselves. Advice books contributed to the construction of star personas and added a further dimension to the fantasy of Hollywood. A February 1935 *Photoplay* article detailing actress Mary Pickford's quest for self-improvement, "Mary Pickford's Search for Happiness" applauded Pickford's first book, "a slim little volume" entitled *Why Not Try God?* The article's author passionately comments on the power the book had on her as she read it, sensing "between each line of it, the direction in which Mary Pickford's search for happiness has carried her."[82] In fact, *Why Not Try God?* was actually written by author and occasional film fan magazine contributor Adela Rogers St. Johns.[83] The authenticity of the work mattered less than the image it presented and the authority it awarded the alleged author.

The stars were authorities by virtue of being such highly admired public figures. While the book associated with Pickford approached self-improvement from a moral angle, other star tomes dealt with more practical day to day elements. *Marlene Dietrich's ABCs* combined the perspective of a glamorous star with practical housewife

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[80] Scanlon, 21.
[81] Scanlon, 48.
[82] "Mary Pickford's Search for Happiness," *Photoplay* (Feb 1935), 35, 119, 119.
[83] Hastie, 162.

knowledge.[84] The connection between Hollywood glamour and everyday life supported the idea that the two elements were not completely exclusive. Daily life could meet Hollywood through consumption.

Early film super celebrities such as Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks heralded new attitudes toward consumption. Leisure had replaced the Western frontier as the new outlet for frustrations with the restrictions of industrial society.[85] Features in fan magazines highlighted the extravagant homes and lives of Hollywood players as markers of their success. Rather than tout this as the sign of an elite class, film fan magazines portrayed the acquisition of goods as the reward for hard work. Biographies of stars in film fan magazines emphasized the rags to riches element of their lives, suggesting to readers that they too could attain the personal satisfaction stars reportedly possessed.[86] The key element in this new success ideology was attaining self-fulfillment through leisure and consumption. The accumulation of goods was shown in film fan magazines to be linked to "the tradition of open opportunity."[87] Since the stars were portrayed as ordinary folks who came from backgrounds similar to magazine readers and were shown to have reached success through their individual hard work, the lavish lifestyles of stars could be accepted as idealized models rather than enemies of the average American.[88] Leisure was a right for every hardworking American, and consumption provided a path between the fantasy of film and the reality of daily life.

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[84] Hastie, 166.
[85] May, *Screening out the Past,* 116, 167.
[86] David Kyvig. *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1939: Decades of Promise and Pain* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), 188.
[87] May, *Screening out the Past,* 233.
[88] Ibid.

Stars were not the elevated elite. They came to represent the American and the American dream through the constructed believability of their personas. In 1927, Irving Thalberg, Production Chief of Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studios, commented on the changing tastes of American movie audiences. He remarks that director "D.W. Griffith is an idealist and his love scenes on the screen were idealistic things of beauty…but his pictures are not successful today because modern ideas are changing." What had once been accepted had changed as, "The idealistic love of a decade ago is not true today. We cannot sit in a theater and see a noble hero and actually picture ourselves as him…"[89] Audiences at the birth of the sound era were craving an element of reality in their dose of love and romance on the screen. The exotic heroes of the East portrayed by Rudolph Valentino and the high fantasy swashbuckling adventures of Douglas Fairbanks were no longer the preferred images of the screen. This is not to say that there was not a craving for escapism in film, but that the form of escape that audiences desired had changed. Audiences wanted to be able to relate to what they saw flickering on the screen, and wanted heroes and heroines that they could identify with in some way.

In the pages of film fan magazines movie fans wished for a fantasy that appeared attainable. Rather than the exoticism of Valentino, they craved a tangible reality that was believable enough for them to feel within the reach of their grasp. The ideal was a homespun existence, although not without some sparkle to lift the ordinary onto at least a somewhat elevated plane. One poem printed in an April 1931 *Picture Play* magazine as a contribution from a fan, connected necessary household duties with film and film stars. Rather than portray film as an escape, the title, "Household Helps," suggested that film is an assistant in making household chores bearable. The author Dorothy Garbutt writes of

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[89] Ibid., 200.

"Making beds and washing dishes/On memories of Gilbert's kisses," and "Sweeping, dusting, mending dresses/Envying Nancy's ruddy tresses." It was the image of film that allowed the fan to continue her daily existence. After chores are done, but only after their completion, the author heads off to the theater, "Tired at last, but glad to go/Off to see a picture show."[90] In this way, movie fandom functioned as a way of injecting something more into life, without presenting too much of a deviation from the established, expected female role.

As with Schrum's notation that film fan magazines taught girls how to interact with film, women at the time were aware of the influential power of movies on the young. In *Movie Mirror*'s "Speak for Yourself" segment, Marian E. Bates of Albany, New York comments on how her 15 year old daughter and her friends are spared the "painful experience of the awkward age…Some of this is due to training, some to advertising, but I am convinced that a great deal of it is due to their imitation of the 'movie' favorites; girls like Norma Shearer, whose chief claim to beauty is her exquisite grooming."[91] Bates cites Shearer's claim to beauty as a matter of upkeep rather than a matter of natural beauty. This gives the impression that she feels anyone may also have what Shearer has, if only they put forth a little bit of effort and possess the right knowledge and products. For female readers to acquire the necessities for becoming an admired woman, they could turn to the consumer marketplace for assistance, with film fan magazines as their map for navigation.[92]

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[90] "The Poet's Corner." *Picture Play* (Apr 1931), 91.
[91] "Speak for Yourself." *Movie Mirror* (May 1932), 74.
[92] Joan Jacobs Brumberg. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 41.

There was a great appeal in the ordinariness of some stars. One particularly popular star at the time was Marie Dressler. Unlike the svelte platinum blonde Jean Harlow or the standoffish and mysterious Greta Garbo, Marie Dressler was an older overweight actress of unremarkable appearance who made her mark playing strong roles in films. Despite her deviation from standard beauty ideals, her physical and acting persona had a dimension of reality that audiences found easy to identify and sympathize with. In a 1931 *Picture Play*, a poem is printed, attributed to a L.B. Birdsall, that sings praises of Dressler, who "tones the joy valves of the heart," unlike "the frail/And star-eyed maidens who reveal/Their lauded talents through a veil/Of cinematic sex appeal."[93] In another *Picture Play* article from the same year titled, "A Greater Gift Than Beauty," it is noted that Dressler's, "humor and gusto for living make her a real favorite."[94] Between advertisements and advice articles, there is no doubt an emphasis on appearance, beauty, and grooming in film magazines. Despite the push for perfection through the stars, the far from perfect image Dressler projects holds just as much appeal as the more conventional beauties of celluloid. Fans value more than simply looks in women. A series on the life of Marie Dressler in the May 1932 issue of *Movie Mirror* turns Dressler's life into an example to follow, asking, "Do You Know How to Make Friends?...Chapter II of Marie Dressler's life is a lesson to the lonely."[95] Margaret Thorp in her 1939 study of movies in American Culture, *America at the Movies*, noted "the most important thing for a glamorous star to have today is personality." Thorp believed fans wanted "an ideal that they can emulate…one whose heights they might actually scale themselves." She advises that "Glamour should never be so bright that it dims

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[93] "The Poet's Corner." *Picture Play* (Apr 1931), 91.
[94] "A Greater Gift Than Beauty." *Picture Play* (Jan 1931), 28.
[95] Muriel Babcock. "Do You Know How to Make Friends." *Movie Mirror* (May 1932), 72-73, 96.

hope."[96] Stars like Marie Dressler offered a grounded figure to admire that did not seem too out of reach for the aspirations of readers.

In a Jan 1931 Picture Play article on "Clara – as She Is" it is noted that the actress Clara Bow was, "Born into a joyless, poverty-stricken home" with her childhood as "a succession of scrimpings, uncertainties, and denials."[97] Clara was not born into movie royalty, she had to work to get to where she was at the height of popularity. This is not an unusual characterization of a star's background as portrayed in the film fan magazines. Prominent stars are portrayed as having modest beginnings from which they had to pull themselves up. This emphasis on the self-motivation and individual drive of the stars appealed to Depression readers not only for the aspect of individual responsibility, but also for the drive for achievement that the stars are portrayed as having. Stories of the star's lives as ordinary ones turned into extraordinary ones by their own hands have a sense of reality and possibility that would appeal to those in need of something real to believe in.

Rags to riches stories were not the only points of admiration in the fan magazines. There was also an emphasis on the ordinary average Joe type of star and an appreciation for what seemed akin to the everyday. In the article, "This Boy Has Been Places" from the January 1931 issue of *Picture Play*, the writer notes that they, "like Walter Byron; he's awfully regular."[98] In another instance, this time in the January 1932 issue of *Photoplay*, fan Marge Bickley of Sandusky, Ohio writes that, "Most girls of today, in my opinion, do not care for this harsh, cold type of Gable, so let's see more of Lew [Ayres]

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[96] Margaret Thorp. *America at the Movies*. Reprint. (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1970), 70-71.
[97] "Clara – as She Is." *Picture Play* (Jan 1931), 43.
[98] Ibid., 45.

and Joel [McCrea]."[99] Clark Gable was a generally popular figure, but this instance of shunning the more glamorous figure in favor of a more down to earth star image is not an isolated one. In a readers' letters section in *Movie Mirror*'s March 1932 issue Ida Kaech of New Clarus, WI writes that she could like "more wholesome, normal, and natural heroes and heroines." She criticizes tall, dark screen heroes "whose love-making is somewhat profane" and platinum blonde heroines with "an expression such as Pussy has when she is ready to pounce upon a poor little mouse."[100] Movie stars that were difficult for readers to connect with made it hard to connect with the messages in the films and film fan magazines.

Andrew Bergman in *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films* notes that popular heroes in films of the 1930s were relatable figures that audiences could identify with. Heroes functioned as models of the achievable ideal and an escape that appeared attainable. As Bergman writes, "People do not escape into something they cannot relate to. The movies were meaningful because they depicted things lost or things desired. What is 'fantastic' in fantasy is an extension of something real."[101] This view of the stars presented by the magazines may have been appealing at a time when the nation was economically unstable and world politics were uncertain.

## COMMUNITY OF DOMESTIC STARGAZERS

In addition to providing models to learn from, film fan magazines also offered the appealing unity of community. The activity of sitting in a darkened theater and processing images and sounds that are set and predetermined may not have been an

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[99] "This Boy Has Been Places." *Photoplay* (Jan 1932), 45.
[100] "Speak for Yourself." *Movie Mirror* (March 1932), 104.
[101] Bergman, xii.

interactive experience, but film fan magazines did offer readers a chance to interact with other filmgoers. The magazines offered many opportunities for film fans to contribute to and participate in the fan community. As Schrum notes, "a movie experience rarely began or ended with the actual movie."[102] Film fan magazines were one way in which film was taken beyond the initial viewing experience. Part of what defined film fan magazine readers as a particular fan group were the social aspects of the ways they interpreted what was presented to them.[103] Though what is printed is ultimately controlled by magazine producers, audiences play an important role in moderating the cultural climate through their opinions and contributions.

Film fan magazines allowed for an enhanced awareness of the opinions of Americans across the nation and offered a way to become a part of an aspect of overarching nationwide culture.[104] They provided a literature for a medium that essentially did not require literacy to be enjoyed. That was an element of film that heightened its accessibility. The novelty of movies "over and above their actual or potential capacity for creating new forms of visual experience," Robert Sklar notes in *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies,* was that "their success in providing entertainment and information to an audience that did not need English or even literacy to gain access to urban popular culture for the first time."[105] One $25 prize-winning letter sent in to *Photoplay* noted the entertainment value of film to those who were unable to understand English, and even praised its usefulness as a teaching tool.

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[102] Schrum, 150.
[103] Annette Kuhn. "'That day *did* last me all my life': Cinema memory and enduring fandom." Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby. *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: bfi Publishing, 1999), 142.
[104] Kyvig, 187.
[105] Sklar, 30.

Magdalena Hansen of New York City wrote in about her sister who came to visit the U.S. from Norway and did not speak any English. In addition to being a democratic entertainment, film also provided a means for assimilation. Magdalena writes that, "It was surprising to see the work of talking pictures as an English teacher to a foreigner. At the same time they were entertaining. By seeing the actions of the players and hearing them speak at the same time, my sister picked up the languages very quickly."[106] Movies and film fan magazines gave immigrants and other marginal groups of society a chance to be included in an aspect of greater American culture.

While cinema did appear to be an inclusive and democratic entertainment, fan magazines allowed for the creation of a distinction between the masses of casual moviegoers and the informed spectator. They allowed fans to create an elevated sense of superiority over the average filmgoer. Thorp advises that "no one unaccustomed to fan literature should enter upon a course of it without a doctor's certificate." Though it is difficult for those not familiar with fan magazines to understand the contents, "The trained reader loves it. It can jar him, or more often her, out of the most sodden of weekend lethargies." Fans occupy a privileged position, as "not every moviegoer can be a fan, to be a fan is almost a profession."[107] The power of knowledge created an appealing artificial hierarchy that could be scaled by anyone willing to invest the time it took to read the magazines. Michelle Herwald's article, "Anticipating the Unexpected: *Amazing Stories* in the Interwar Years" discusses the power of magazines to create a privileged knowledge group through her examination of the science fiction story magazine *Amazing Stories*. The editors of *Amazing Stories* assumed that distaste for

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[106] *Photoplay* (Jan 1932), 8.
[107] Thorp, 69-70.

science came from individuals' inability to comprehend it rather than an actual distaste for science. To remedy this "the editors concluded that they must show the average man that science was within his grasp." As the magazine taught readers how to navigate the science of the magazine's stories, a gap was created between those in the know and those without the knowledge. In spite, and partially because of this gap, "Comprehension of the science in the magazine conversely produced pride and great satisfaction" for readers.[108] Fan magazines gave movie fans an identity, and something to hold onto in a time of societal uncertainty. It was particularly appealing to groups such as immigrants and women who found a sense of power and control in film fan magazines that did not exist elsewhere for them.

This is not to say that the magazines placed locked golden gates in front of the national club of fandom. Rather, the understanding of and connection to the content of the magazines was heightened by a pre-existing awareness of the latest news in film culture and motion picture star popularity. Fan magazines offered to teach the reader how to look at the films and how to discuss them. As Schrum notes, "Movie magazines, reviews, and advertisements helped create a language for conceptualizing and discussing films. When teenage girls wrote about movies or discussed them with friends, they imitated this format, focusing on lead actors and movie titles as well as plot, genre, and theater in more elaborate descriptions."[109]

Film fan magazine readers became engaged with a broader community of fans by participating in magazine contests, writing letters to the editor and submitting poems and

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[108] Michelle Herwald. "Anticipating the Unexpected: *Amazing Stories* in the Interwar Years." Catherine L. Covert and John D. Stevens. *Mass Media Between the Wars: Perceptions of Cultural Tension, 1918-1941* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 41-43.
[109] Schrum, 146.

stories. They also sent away for promotional items such as "Photoplay's Famous Cook Book," containing, "150 favorite recipes of the stars." The cook book could be obtained by sending in 25 cents.[110] Readers that sent away for a cook book gained a tangible connection to the stars that they watched on the screen and read about in the magazines. Such physical items served as souvenirs that allowed fans to reconnect to the feelings they had watching the stars in films.[111] Such points of connection allowed for a level of intimacy to be developed, or imagined, between readers and the magazine.

Magazines also offered material for readers to build upon using their own creativity to alter presented information and make it their own. The movies themselves were a fixed product that did not offer room for alteration.[112] Amelie Hastie in *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History*, argues that scrapbooks allowed for a more permanent relationship to be established between film fans and film than other forms of interaction, such as polls and contests. Scrapbook collections, such as the one of actress Colleen Moore, allowed for a space in which new forms and new ideas could be created through the juxtaposition of presented, and often conflicting, ideas.[113] Moore's scrapbook from her days before stardom consisted of a collection of clipping of her favorite film stars, with a spot left blank in which she imagined her own image could be placed someday.[114] In this way, the constructed images presented by film fan magazines took on a second life in the hands of readers and allowed readers to place themselves within the world of film presented to them. The way in which the messages of the magazines were accepted and processed could result in alternative impressions,

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[110] *Photoplay* (Jan 1932), 17.
[111] Hastie, 25.
[112] Schrum, 130.
[113] Hastie, 35.
[114] Hastie, 2.

and in this way film fan magazines served as a jumping off point for the formation of new ideas and the creation of communities of discussion.

Both souvenirs advertised by magazines and those created by readers strengthened the connection between fans and stars, while the other interactive elements of film fan magazines allowed for a greater bond to grow among the fans themselves. The film fan magazine provided space for fans to connect with one another and created a cohesive community in which fans extended the movie experience beyond the doors of their cinemas. Magazines encouraged fan participation by offering money incentives. *Photoplay*, in the January 1932 issue, offered three prizes for the best letters of the month. The prizes were $25, $10, and $5 for the winning reader letters.[115] Money incentives for writing appeared enticing to Depression era readers racked by plagued by financial woes. The section is titled "The Audience Speaks Up" and appears as a soap box, offering space to be heard by voices that may have felt neglected elsewhere. *Picture Play*'s reader letter section is titled "What the Fans Think," and is described in the table of contents with the line, "Brickbats and bouquets are hurled with strictly partisan aim in this open forum."[116] The choice of the word partisan, and the description of the letter reader pages as an "open forum" suggests the democratic aspect of the pages. The magazine offered a chance to participate and be heard, and gave readers' voices a sense of importance and weight.

The first reader letter in the October 1933 issue is an open letter to star Joan Crawford, telling Crawford to "*go back* to Doug [Fairbanks, Jr.]," Crawford's ex-husband. Bayonne Gladson, the author of the letter, continues, "I hope this doesn't mean

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[115] *Photoplay* (Jan 1932), 8.
[116] *Picture Play* (Oct 1933), 6.

you are to become one of those 'married and divorced seventy-five times' persons. That isn't essential to success. Be yourself."[117] Gladson is disappointed in her idol, and sees the fan magazine as just the opportunity to share her disappointment. The tone of the letter is as if Gladson is writing to a close friend of hers to offer advice.

Readers possess the belief that their letters, out in the open forum, were likely to be read by the stars. Bertha Stretcher asks for her letter to be printed "as it is my first one, and I would like [movie star] Jimmy Dunn to read it."[118] Fan magazine encouragement for readers to actively participate in fan culture extended beyond fan to fan letter sending to encompass sending letters to the stars themselves. The sense of connection and accessibility of the stars is further extended with fan magazines' publication of addresses at which stars could be reached. *Photoplay* offered a list of addresses at which the stars could be contacted, as did *Picture Play*.[119] The final page in the October 1933 issue of *Picture Play* is a full page of addresses to write to dozens of stars through their studios, or to their representatives if they were freelance players.[120] The fan magazines allow readers to actively construct and contribute to the fantasy world of movies and stars.

Gladson and Stretcher's published letters conclude with their names and their addresses, "505 West Locust Street, Davenport, Iowa" in the case of Gladson.[121] Nearly all of the letters include the reader's name and address, presumeably to continue the discussion points brought up in the letters on a person to person level. The film fan magazine functioned as something of a classifieds ad, advertising ideas and opportunities

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[117] Ibid., 10.
[118] Ibid.
[119] *Photoplay* (Jan 1932), 109.
[120] Ibid., 74.
[121] *Picture Play* (Oct 1933), 6.

for fans to connect with one another, whether they lived in Sheboygan, Wisconsin or Richmond, California. Location and distance became irrelevant in the new film fan culture, helping to foster a unified nationwide fan culture.

Yet another opportunity for readers to have their moment in the starlight is *Picture Play*'s "Information, Please" feature, offering answers to "puzzling questions about players and pictures…by the man who knows." The "man who knows" is a nameless character, "The Oracle." The answers published over four pages of the magazine are addressed directly to the inquirers. "Thelma Wilson" has her questions answered about Noah Beery, Jr. and Tom Tyler's ages, and "A Fan" is advised on Rafaela Ottiano's birthday, height, weight, and hair and eye color. When space does not permit The Oracle to fully answer an inquiry the reader is advised to send a stamped envelope. All potential inquirers are notified that those "desiring personal replies to questions *must* enclose self-addressed, stamped envelopes."[122] Not only can readers gain access to likeminded fans and the stars, but they can also connect with the guru of film star knowledge.

The questions readers ask mostly regard stars' physical characteristics, their dates of birth, where the place is they call home, and who a particular actor in a film is. These elements help fan construct a clearer image of the star that could not be gleaned from simply watching a film. Black and white film made it difficult to determine whether a particular actor had blue or green eyes, but The Oracle was there to lift the fog of mystery and assist in constructing a more true-life portrait of an actor. Readers also asked about the real names of stars, showing that they recognized the myth-creating aspect of stars. The Oracle's provision of a star's birth name may have broken down the wall of

[122] Ibid., 8.

detachment and fantasy built around the creation of an actor's star character, but the replacement of the star name with an actor's birth name also contributes to the fan built mythology surrounding a star. While readers want to break through the built up image to make stars easier to relate to, they are also participating in the construction of stars. The construction of stars in "Information, Please" shapes an image of the stars as real human beings, while simultaneously supporting the star machine.

Reader letters were not the only opportunity for magazine readers to potentially receive reward for their attention and time. Contests sponsored by the magazines and contests offered in advertisements were another way that readers could become a part of the film fan community, and also a way in which they might be able to prove themselves through completing assigned tasks. Stamp notes the inclusive nature of a contest, which "sanctions and legitimates activities in which fans are often engaged on their own, encouraging them to channel their interest back into the product itself, rather than circulate competing narratives."[123] *Modern Screen* for December 1933 offered an extensive contest, enticing readers to enter by offering prizes ranging from the first prize of, "A free trip to visit Joan Crawford in Hollywood, to go places and see things as their glamorous star's guest" to the seventh place prize of $5 to be awarded to ten lucky entrants. Crawford is photographed with all but the monetary prizes, associating her persona with the Crosley brand Shelvador Refrigerator and Dual Tone Low-Boy Radio. The task presented to readers was to reassemble cut-up photographs of four scenes from Crawford's latest picture *Dancing Lady*, and then to purchase next month's *Modern Screen* to reassemble another group of cut up scenes. The participant, after assembling the scenes, was also required to write a description of Crawford in ten words or less,

[123] Stamp, 121.

which would be judged as part of the criteria in choosing a winner.[124] The contest required readers to return to the magazine the following month, luring readers to become regular fan magazine purchasers, while also promoting Crosley products and Crawford's upcoming picture.

Contests were not the only way readers could connect with film fan culture. *Modern Screen*, more than *Photoplay* or *Picture Play*, provided an integration of film life into everyday life. Numerous advertisements and features sprinkled throughout the magazine offered readers opportunities to connect the fantasy of film with the practicalities of daily life. The December 1933 issue featured a pictorial look at actress Kay Francis' "Style Secrets."[125] The feature is connected to a page further on in the magazine that advertises patterns based on the gowns and fashions worn by Kay Franics. *Modern Screen*'s Pattern Service, offered patterns that readers could purchase for fifteen cents to reproduce Francis' dresses.[126] In this way the magazine provided readers with a viable means of taking the idolized glamour of the star and making it real. Film fan magazines offered glamour at a grasping distance.

*Modern Screen* also offered other means of emulating the stars. In the April 1935 issue, "The Modern Hostess" offers *Modern Screen* Star Recipes to readers who cut out and sent in a coupon to the Home Service Department of *Modern Screen* magazine. The offer is accompanied by an article and several recipes, such as directions for actress Judith Allen's "hunger-provoking Butterscotch Pie."[127] Pie recipes and dress patterns were practical and relatively inexpensive applications of film star glamour. The avenues

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[124] "Joan Crawford Offers you a Thrilling Contest." *Modern Screen* (Dec 1933), 40-43.
[125] "Style Secrets." *Modern Screen* (Dec 1933), 26.
[126] Ibid., 73.
[127] "The Modern Hostess." *Modern Screen* (Apr 1934), 77.

through which readers may connect to the stars through *Modern Screen* are grounded in domesticity. Cooking and sewing are associated with women regardless of whether they were readers or stars. Significantly, *Modern Screen* did not offer activities for readers that deviate from traditional female responsibilities.

## CONCLUSION

The 1930s were a period of heightened anxiety due to the demands pressed upon Americans by the Depression. Women often found it necessary to step outside of traditional expectations in order to support themselves and their families. Conflicting ideologies surrounding women's place in the workforce emerged as a result of the increased number of employed women. This conflict surfaced frequently in film fan magazines through the representation of film stars as wives and as workers. What emerged in print on the pages of the magazines was also an issue behind the scenes, as women editors and magazine writers often found themselves caught between praise for their work and ingenuity and opposition that invalidated the pride they could have for their accomplishments as workers.

In the face of these confusing messages, women found unity and security in the community film fan magazines provided. They were able to create and maintain a community in which they could have a degree of security and control that they lacked outside of fan culture. Through fan magazines women were able to physically possess a connection to others and to the attractive glamour of film. The features, contests, and connections magazines offered gave women a chance to create their own meanings from the provided ideas. As a reading audience women's interaction with the magazines and

other readers allowed them to draw their own conclusions from conflicting messages and project the meanings they found back onto the text.[128] In this way meaning could be derived and a greater sense of security obtained despite the presence of conflicting arguments.

The consumption that film fan magazines promoted also rewarded women with a sense of security in the power of choice and the power they possessed in the creation of their own images. The encouragement to purchase goods that would help women to produce their own personal images also provided a link between older reverence for production and the new encouragement to embrace consumption. Production of self via the guidance of the magazines located production within a consumer based leisure frontier in which women were in control as arbiters of the consumption of popular culture.

New themes of women as workers and leading consumers repeatedly came up against women's association with the domestic sphere. Women were encouraged to go out and shop, to support families if necessary, to attend movie theaters, and to engage with strangers through film fan magazines. Yet shot through these encouragements to deviate from older traditions was the constant presence of the idea that women were at heart always denizens of the domestic realm. There was the sense that the domestic was so integral a part of what defined womanhood that the achievement of a shift in ideologies was dependent upon the utilization and continued promotion of women's connection to the domestic sphere. The investment in the domestic in elements such as the advertisements that theater owners used to target potential women moviegoers and the film fan magazine offers for items geared toward domestic use demonstrate that despite

[128] Levine, "Folklore," 1386.

an increased presence of women in the workforce and their increased importance in consumption and life outside the home, a significant number of women remained immersed in the domestic realm. This ambiguous cultural space women existed within during the Depression heightened the appeal of the film fan magazines and extended their meaning and value.

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