

**Destructive Women and Little Men:
*Masculinity, the New Woman, and Power in
1910s Popular Media***

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ABSTRACT: During the 1910s, the final decade of the suffrage drive, women's social, economic, and professional opportunities seemed to broaden dramatically at the same time that political leaders and psychologists decried the "feminization" of manhood. The spectre of a world in which domineering women emasculated powerless men inspired a visual motif that ran throughout popular culture: the pairing of large women and tiny men. Through humor, explosive notions were discussed but then dismissed. This rhetorical analysis, which draws on hegemony theory, explores the symbolic cultural work of such imagery in mass media, especially magazines, at a pivotal moment in American gender relations.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, American women's social, political, and economic opportunities seemed to broaden dramatically. More and more young women entered higher education and the professions [\(1\)](#), while Progressive-era reform work and the women's-club movement offered a chance for married women also to enter the public sphere.

At no time did lasting change in gender roles seem more likely than in the 1910s, the final decade of the suffrage drive. The vote was not the only potential gain for women during this era: radicals who called themselves "feminists" pushed for reforms in the institution of marriage, the American popularity of the works of Freud prompted a public acknowledgement of women's sexuality, and a new birth-control movement enabled women to express that sexuality more freely and safely.

The same period saw extensive public discourse on the role of men in American society as well. This national preoccupation with masculinity--what historian John Higham called "a muscular spirit" in America [\(2\)](#)--was a response partly to women's advances and partly to racial and ethnic population changes due to massive waves of immigration. New organizations such as the Boy Scouts embraced President Theodore Roosevelt's

vision of the "strenuous life" to help boys and men avoid becoming "over-civilized." Experts in the new social science of psychology believed that athletics and outdoor adventure would help to remove young men from the "feminizing" influence of overbearing mothers and female schoolteachers. [\(3\)](#)

During the 1910s, Americans' hopes for, and anxieties about, changing gender roles were frequently debated in magazine and newspaper articles. These concerns also provided a recurrent theme for visual communication. The spectre of a world in which domineering and destructive women emasculated weak and powerless men inspired a distinctive motif that ran through various forms of popular culture: the pairing of large (though usually beautiful) women and little, often tiny, men. While this motif was always presented as a joke, it never was only a joke.

Literature, Methodology, and Theory

There is a rich and interdisciplinary body of scholarship on gender imagery in the mass media throughout the twentieth century, though more attention has been paid to late-twentieth-century media. With regard to major historical works that have included visual media culture, historian Lois Banner and film scholars Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen have taken a long view of the century, while literary scholar Martha Banta, film scholar Sumiko Higashi, and suffrage historian Alice Sheppard have focused on imagery of its early decades. [\(4\)](#) Banner and Banta, the only authors to have considered imagery across cultural forms and themes, take all of American culture as their landscape. This article concentrates its analysis on mass-distributed visual culture during a single decade, the 1910s, the peak of suffrage agitation and the peak of the big woman-little man theme, exploring the symbolic work of this motif at a pivotal moment.

Indeed, the time period is crucial to understanding the meaning of this image. In terms of the "methodology" of this research, the period was not the lens through which the imagery was found; instead, the imagery itself revealed the cultural importance of one decade. This article grew out of a separate project on gender imagery over a 35-year period. Its subject is less the outcome of a purposeful hunt than the striking surprise that surfaced, over and over again, in one temporal slice of a broader survey of media.

The discussion offered here attempts to make sense of this discovery through a process of rhetorical analysis, which embraces the notion that media texts (including visual communication) can be "read" as a system of signs. It builds on the theoretical work of W. J. T. Mitchell and E. H. Gombrich, who found meaning not in isolated images, but rather in "iconology," an understanding of how visual symbols make meaning in patterns. ⁽⁵⁾ Yet this analysis also considers the imagery against its historical backdrop (a process journalism historian Marion Marzolf called a "content assessment," in contrast to a quantitative content analysis limited to the artwork itself). ⁽⁶⁾ That aspect of the study draws on the work of historians who have focused on the visual-media representation of either femininity or masculinity, as well as historians of gender in this era. ⁽⁷⁾

The study further draws on the theoretical groundwork of Antonio Gramsci, whose notion of hegemony has become a popular scholarly lens through which to view mass-media texts--and is particularly useful in explaining the mixed messages in American media about gender roles and relations during the 1910s. Gramsci refined Marxist theory by contending that the consent of a populace is not enforced by some monolithic power; rather, the widespread acceptance of certain ideas and conditions seems to be a choice freely made by the majority of people in a society. In the hegemonic process, controversial or troubling opinions are not suppressed, but are aired in ways that weaken their message. ⁽⁸⁾

Inscribed in the motif discussed here were serious political issues. Yet because they were cast as comedic, these images, and the messages they contained, were meant to be read as absurd. Through humor, explosive notions were discussed but then diffused. The big woman-little man pairing motif was a way of both acknowledging and dismissing the New Woman at the height of her cultural strength, during the culmination of the "first wave" of the American women's rights movement. This article contends that what seems to modern eyes to be a funny historical curiosity was in fact a patterned and pointed commentary on gender relations, as well as broader tensions, in early-twentieth-century America.

New National Media and the Emergence of the Motif

The era of the "New Woman"--roughly the 1890s

through the 1920s--coincided with the emergence of several mass media in America. Advances in printing technology enabled magazine publishers to use two-, and then four-color art on their covers at the same time that a new revenue base from national advertising enabled them to afford to print and distribute their products to a truly mass audience. The same printing process affected another medium of this era, sheet music: the notes and lyrics to songs were printed with illustrated covers, and hit tunes--churned out by Tin Pan Alley songwriters and popularized through nationwide chains of vaudeville theaters--sold millions of copies apiece. By the first decade of the new century, Americans nationwide were able to see movie "shorts" in nickelodeons and, beginning in the early 1910s, feature-length films in movie theaters. The fourth influential medium of this era, poster art, also became a form of mass communication with America's entry into World War I.

In all of these media, the figures and faces of women were never merely about womanhood itself; they were also about broader social or political concerns. The specific motif of large women and little men emerged from the pen of America's most famous magazine illustrator as soon as the construct of a New Woman was first articulated in the popular press, during the 1890s. Charles Dana Gibson, whose work appeared in *Life* [\(9\)](#) and *Collier's*, envisioned the New Woman as beautiful, upper class, and extremely haughty, someone who cowed and frightened men.

Though the Gibson Girl is often hailed by historians as one of the first representations of the independent woman, her independence was frequently presented in the form of cold and cruel power over men. Gibson's beauties quite literally played with men. In a drawing published just after the turn of the century and titled "Summer Sports" ([Figure 1](#)), three young women flew what first appeared to be kites, but actually were figures of tiny men, suspended on strings high in the air. In a 1903 illustration ironically titled "The Weaker Sex" ([Figure 2](#)), a tiny, pleading man was examined, under glass, by four beauties who poked at him with a knitting needle. Gibson's cover for the Valentine's Day issue of *Life* that year ([Figure 3](#)) featured a statuesque woman juggling small male escorts, whose airborne poses formed the magazine's title.

Other Gibson illustrations showed men being physically threatened or otherwise bullied by their wives; a young

woman not even noticing that she had stepped on, and flattened, a man on a walking path; and a little girl who had gleefully harnessed her little brother as one would a horse.⁽¹⁰⁾ Such scenarios referenced turn-of-the-century men's anxieties about women's economic as well as sexual power. At the same time, they made fun of strong women, and of men who would tolerate them.

Of the various threats the New Woman posed to the American status quo, the prospect of sex-role reversal--masculinized women and feminized/emasculated men--was the easiest and funniest to handle through visual communication. By 1910, this possibility was delineated in a New York Evening World cartoon ([Figure 4](#)) that showed a woman and a man "as they were," "as they are," and "as they will be": through these three stages, they reversed body types and clothing, culminating in a brawny, cigar-smoking woman and a thin-waisted, fan-holding man saying, "Oh, Piffle!" ⁽¹¹⁾

Emasculated Men in Film

The little man in the middle frame of the New York Evening World cartoon bore a striking resemblance, in dress and pose, to the film persona of actor Charlie Chaplin (even though this illustration preceded Chaplin's arrival in American film). Though Chaplin was British, the character through which he gained almost instant fame in America expressed American as well as European fears. Beginning in the early 1910s, the actor played a "little tramp" and assorted other powerless men who blundered his way through modern life and pined away for women who seemed out of his grasp.

Chaplin gave human form to what historian Virginia Smith calls the "Funny Little Man" in graphic design, who was "distinctively an early twentieth-century creation, resulting from its economic system and functioning in its devastated, fragmented, and fluctuating society." ⁽¹²⁾ Other historians have similarly explained the appearance of this character type in popular culture in terms of larger societal concerns, and as having to do primarily with modernity. Film scholar Sumiko Higashi argues that during this era "'[t]he little man' became a familiar figure in a mechanized and standardized society which signalled the end of the era of rugged individualism." ⁽¹³⁾ Writing about literature of the era, C. Wright Mills saw the little man as a symbol of the loss of individualism in the face

of corporatization:

The nineteenth-century farmer and businessman were generally thought to be stalwart individuals—their own men, men who could quickly grow to be almost as big as anyone else. The twentieth-century white-collar man . . . [was] the small creature who is acted upon but who does not act, who works along unnoticed in somebody's office or store, never talking loud, never talking back, never taking a stand. [\(14\)](#)

Even so, the Funny Little Man was also a comment on the New Woman. In her examination of the portrayal of suffragists in silent films, Kay Sloan argues that their plots "capitalized on sexual politics in America" at a time when "[t]he suffrage debate set loose sexual apprehensions that extended far beyond the ballot and shook the roots of masculine and feminine identity." In early movies, "[a]udiences saw rebellious wives hurling food at their cowering husbands, women slugging each other over election returns, suffragists forcibly dressing men in diapers, and female sheriffs pretending to hang their terrified husbands." [\(15\)](#)

Even the more endearing characters created by Chaplin were unflattering references to women. Writing about big woman–little man pairings in films of this era, Molly Haskell contends that this imagery from male creators suggested their "[a]mbivalence toward women, if not misogyny." She cites the characters of Chaplin and Buster Keaton, for whom a love interest "was never a 'realistic' partner, with defects like their own, but the most beautiful and exquisite of creatures . . . they created a situation which could only lead to disappointment, and a woman who . . . could only reflect the shallowness and vanity of all women." [\(16\)](#) The befuddled romantics of early American film were updated versions of Charles Dana Gibson's pin-pricked man under the magnifying glass.

Pleading Suitors on Sheet–Music Covers

Men's desperate hopes to win the favor of women superior to them were a comic theme in music as well as film of the day. Popular-song lyrics told the tales of hopeless suitors who lost their money and their

manhood to women, and the illustrations on their sheet-music covers featured a parade of tiny men.

On the cover of a song titled "We All Fall" ([Figure 5](#)), little men who represented a woman's marriage choices (from the old rhyme: rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, doctor, lawyer, Indian chief) sought the favor of a well-dressed woman whose attention seemed to be elsewhere.⁽¹⁷⁾ Similarly, tuxedoed gents on their knees appealed to a larger woman, perched above them on a pile of coins, on "The High Cost of Loving" ([Figure 6](#)).⁽¹⁸⁾

Such drawings represented the New Woman as mercenary. Though she appeared pretty and even sweet, the "girlie" on the sheet-music cover shown in [Figure 7](#) kept her miniature, gift-bearing suitors on strings (like Gibson's kite-flyers), and the lyrics made the point perfectly clear: "One little girl makes your bankbook a sight,/And though your rent's overdue,/Still you buy diamond rings,/Oh, what wonderful things/One little girlie can do." ⁽¹⁹⁾

Historian James McGovern characterized the popular-culture "girl" of the American 1910s as "a determined pleasure-seeker,"⁽²⁰⁾ and these songs reinforced that notion. What's more, they suggested that what this gold digger offered in return for money was pleasure for men, in the form of sex. One song title--the cover of which showed a woman dropping one little man while stepping on another ([Figure 8](#))--more than suggested this bargain: the man who failed to please the modern woman knew that "Somebody Else Is Getting It." ⁽²¹⁾

Big Women and Tiny Men in Magazine Illustration

Men's perception of a shift in the balance of sexual power emerged even in the art of magazines that claimed to be "feminist," such as the Socialist magazine *The Masses*, which existed for six years during the 1910s. In an issue of that magazine published in 1913 (the same year that the works of Freud were popularized in America) the artist John Sloan retold the story of creation through a series of sketches, shown in [Figure 9](#), that portrayed a giant Eve who alternately protected and endangered (offering the dangerous apple to) a tiny Adam. In her psychoanalytical study of Sloan's images of women, Janice Coco notes that "the artist's identification with his female subjects consisted of both admiration and

fear."⁽²²⁾ Yet these images, like those in mainstream magazines, also made women's sexual power ridiculous. Sloan's Eve was not only large, but unkempt and overweight; his Adam was not only small, but frazzled and pathetically childlike.

In the more mainstream *Life*, the graphic device begun by Charles Dana Gibson at the turn of the century continued to make regular appearances in the art of other illustrators during the 1910s. Indeed, due in large part to this brand of humor, these years were the peak period for the weekly magazine's circulation, around 100,000 at the start of the decade and at nearly half a million at the decade's end.⁽²³⁾ On the 1912 cover shown in [Figure 10](#), a well-dressed woman again played with little men, quite literally: they were wooden toys, game pieces she could move around at will. Another cover published that year, drawn by James Montgomery Flagg ([Figure 11](#)), depicted man as a trained monkey on rope, asking readers in its title, "Has This Ever Happened to You?"

One illustrator actually specialized in drawing big women–tiny men scenarios for *Life* covers. The cover girl of Coles Phillips was a heartbreaker, often a golddigger as well, who emasculated men.⁽²⁴⁾ She was having, as the title ⁽²⁵⁾ of the cover drawing shown in [Figure 12](#) revealed, "The Time of Her Life": on an alarm clock, a woman could pick and choose among two dozen little suitors who represented aspects of manhood (the scholar, the soldier, the dapper gentleman).

Similar Phillips covers showed a young woman trying to choose among suitors, who were symbolized by playing cards ("Discarding from Strength," [Figure 13](#)); faces on a wall calendar ("Dates," [Figure 14](#)); checkerboard spaces representing strategic options of money, love, royalty, and religion ("Her Move," [Figure 15](#)); and the gifts her various boyfriends had given her ("Know All Men by These Presents," [Figure 16](#)). Others pictured the woman as a coldly elegant butterfly pursued by tiny men with nets ("The Butterfly Chase," [Figure 17](#)) or a pretty girl–spider in whose web little men had become entangled ("Net Results," [Figure 18](#)).⁽²⁶⁾ As lovely as Phillips' cover girls appeared, each of them was, in her own way, destructive: at best, her elusiveness or greed was emasculating; at worst, she entrapped and then consumed, destroyed, or disposed of men.

War's Reversal of the Meaning of the Motif

The big woman–little man motif would survive in American media for another decade, but the messages inscribed in this symbol changed dramatically during World War I. As the radical sentiments (Socialism and feminism) that had briefly caught the public imagination in the early 1910s were replaced by patriotism, the spectre of the powerful woman faded and a rugged masculinity emerged in popular culture.

In magazine illustration, more and more men appeared: the covers of the era's widest-circulation magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, featured the work of both J. C. Leyendecker (best known as the creator of an advertising image, the "Arrow Collar Man"), who drew the fashionable man of the new century, and a young Norman Rockwell, who created a new kind of American family ruled by athletic boys and businessman–fathers. In film, plots turned to war themes in which strong American men rescued helpless women threatened by "Huns." Song titles, too, referred to war and wistful romance: between 1917 and 1918, Irving Berlin's subject matter swung from "Whose Little Heart Are You Breaking Now?" to "I'm Gonna Pin a Medal on the Girl I Left Behind." ⁽²⁷⁾ The lyrics of "Oh, What Wonderful Things One Little Girlie Can Do" were rewritten to praise the American Girl who "gladly gives ev'rything For the old Red, White and Blue." ⁽²⁸⁾ American media increasingly included female characters of devoted sweethearts, caring nurses, and sacrificing mothers--women who were the beneficiaries or admirers (thus the objects) of men's courage, rather than the agents of their destruction.

Perhaps nowhere was this symbolic reversal more apparent than on World War I posters, which (ironically) were drawn by the same illustrators who dominated magazine art of the era. ⁽²⁹⁾ Seen by millions of people all across the United States, ⁽³⁰⁾ these posters featured oversized women as emblematic of the strength not of American women, but rather of America itself, along with the American ideals of justice, liberty, and compassion. In this ideological role, large women helped rather than hurt little men. Indeed, despite their size, they were secondary, not primary, characters in visual imagery.

The symbolic meaning of the big female–little male characters in J. C. Leyendecker's "Weapons for Liberty" poster ([Figure 19](#)) was doubled through costuming. In

this allegorical scene, the crowned, flag-wrapped woman was Liberty, while the kneeling little boy protected Liberty through preparation. The smaller figure provided the action of the picture. What's more, dressed as a Boy Scout, he represented an organization that strove to protect future men from "feminizing" influences.

A second example was Alonzo Earl Foringer's "The Greatest Mother in the World" ([Figure 20](#)), one of the most reprinted posters of the war. Depicting a man who was not only tiny, but blinded, helpless in the arms of a woman at least five times his size, this image was one of the most extreme examples of the size-reversal device in American art, yet it was also one of the least threatening to men. This giant woman's power was not sexual; instead, it was altruistic, spiritual (suggested by her upward gaze), and, most of all, maternal.⁽³¹⁾ The New Woman in wartime was recast as a mother, an old role in which a woman's size and power were (temporarily) acceptable.

The Ridiculous New Woman of the 1920s

Around 1920, visual imagery in popular culture began to feature a very different interpretation of the New Woman. A relaxing of tensions about women's potential power was evident in a cover drawn by Coles Phillips for the November 18, 1920 issue of *Life*, marking the first Presidential election in which women nationwide were eligible to vote ([Figure 21](#)). Titled "A Mere Slip of a Girl," it showed an embarrassed New Woman who had slipped and fallen.

In magazines and films, the newest New Woman was a flapper, a "free" woman who, rather than using sexuality to overpower men, used sex appeal to win their approval. In film, the flapper character popularized by actress Clara Bow was often a "career girl," though one with little professional identity or economic independence. Film historian Patricia Erens notes that Bow

played a manicurist, usherette, waitress, cigarette girl, taxi driver, swimming instructor, and salesgirl. Interestingly, her jobs always brought her into contact with men. As a manicurist in *Mantrap* (1926), she worked in a barber shop. Even as a salesgirl in the

lingerie department, she was visited by more men than women buyers. Also, these jobs provided ample opportunities for touching members of the opposite sex. [\(32\)](#)

Movie flappers of the 1920s behaved outrageously but only hinted at promiscuity; they were "always chaste at heart . . . they preserved their virginity until marriage," writes historian Mary Ryan.[\(33\)](#) Molly Haskell concurs that the flapper "was not as naughty as she seemed, but rather a disturber of the peace, redeemable by marriage." [\(34\)](#)

On the covers of *Life*, *Judge*, and other humor magazines, flappers appeared regularly in the work of illustrator John Held, Jr. Held envisioned this brand of New Woman not as a predator, but as a silly girl who danced the night away. Even more telling of her inconsequentiality, Held's excessively thin flapper had little physical presence.

The artist occasionally used the big woman–little man motif, sometimes in ways that mimicked the evilness of women in 1910s imagery—for instance, the physically violent young woman on the cover of a 1923 *Judge* issue shown in [Figure 22](#). Yet unlike earlier versions of the destructive woman, Held's fighting girl was unglamorous and clearly ridiculous, as was his pointy-toed socialite who "launched" her older, balding date in [Figure 23](#). Both scenes stressed the apolitical self-absorption of the modern girl. The only truly oversized women in Held's visual world were overweight ones, such as the grotesquely muscular woman (whom no man would want anyway) in [Figure 24](#). [\(35\)](#)

Discussion

The visual motif of the destructive woman and her tiny male victim lost its popular–culture currency at essentially the same moment that American women won the right to vote. While these developments at first seem contradictory, they were in fact complementary. Despite the achievement of suffrage, by 1920 (and for another half a century), the fundamental social, economic, and sexual relations between American men and women remained much the same as they had been in the nineteenth century.

Scholars of women's history offer varying interpretations of why the early U. S. women's–rights

movement collapsed and the seeming promise of the New Woman dissipated during the 1920s. Some attribute the failure of first-wave feminism to women's reduced educational and professional opportunities after World War I, and/or to the political conservatism during the war that stamped out political radicalism in the United States. Others blame female activists' sole focus on suffrage at the expense of other, more important reforms that would have increased women's economic power. Still others contend that women's "freedom" was transformed by commercial interests into individual narcissism in an age of mass-produced goods.

Whatever one's explanation, the waning of the New Woman was strongly suggested, and most likely furthered, by the symbolic use of women in popular visual culture. Popular-culture references to sex-role reversal suggested real public discomfort about the possibility of change in the relations between American men and women. In this sense, such imagery was evidence of one part of the hegemonic process, in which dissenting ideas are aired rather than suppressed. Various types of media accomplished this not in isolation from one another, but together--creating an iconology, a patterned shorthand, through which political and social issues were debated.

Yet this imagery also illustrates the second part of the hegemonic process through which the status quo is maintained: cultural tensions were publicly discussed in such a way that they were ultimately dismissed. The big woman-little man motif was a joke expressed through "humorous" media that self-consciously diffused the explosive power of its subject matter.

With the passing of the threat of the New Woman (and other political challenges of the 1910s) came a similar passing of the broad popularity of humorous media of the era. The slapstick comedy of early silent film gave way to longer features on more complex themes, while American humor magazines rapidly lost readership to broader-circulation titles, such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *McCall's*, that focused on family life.

The big woman-little man motif departed magazines and film during the 1920s, but it would resurface half a century later, during the second wave of the American women's movement. On television, which had taken over magazines' role as America's most popular mass medium, shows featured a genie and

witch who, with a nod of the head or a twitch of the nose, could control their men's careers (and even make them disappear). In films of the 1970s, Woody Allen created characters quite similar to Chaplin's, insecure little men who pleaded in vain with coolly glamorous women. As the likelihood of women's "liberation" again seemed real, mass media again portrayed women as a danger to men--yet, at the same time, spoofed that danger.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to closely examine a single visual motif, which in itself may seem of only comic interest, as symbolic of larger historical issues that were important in their day and that have continuing meaning today. In doing so, it makes several suggestions for communication scholars' future research: that in our analyses of media texts, we consider humor as not merely relief, but social commentary with lasting power; that we analyze the visual dimensions of media not just as adjuncts to the written word, but as powerful communication in and of itself; and that we look across different types of popular culture for patterns that may offer valuable context for our studies of specific media.

This analysis serves, in other words, as a case study whose significance should be understood as broader than the particular visual device it examines. It also calls for a way of re-visioning mass media imagery as iconology that reveals deeper commentary on American life--as a collective text through which historians might better understand pivotal political and cultural moments of the past.

NOTES

1 Women comprised 35 percent of all college students in 1890 and nearly half in 1920; the percentage of professionals who were female rose from 35 to 44 percent between 1900 and 1920 (Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987], 148, 350n4). [Back](#)

2 John Higham, "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s," in *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 82. [Back](#)

3 Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 121. Kimmel notes the rise in the proportion of female schoolteachers (from 66 percent in 1870 to 80 percent in 1910) and quotes a report in which educators worried about the effect of the "feminization" of schools. [Back](#)

4 Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Knopf, 1983); Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973); Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973); Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Sumiko Higashi, *Virgins, Vamps, and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine* (Brattleboro, VT: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1978); Alice Sheppard, *Cartooning for Suffrage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994). [Back](#)

5 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Images, Text, Ideology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 9. [Back](#)

6 Marion Marzolf, "American Studies--Ideas for Media Historians?" *Journalism History* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1978), 15. [Back](#)

7 In addition to the authors already mentioned, such scholars include Nancy Cott, who in her history of early feminism (*The Grounding of Modern Feminism*) notes the perceived "danger" of women in this era; Michael Kimmel, who traces masculine ideals based on that threat (*Kimmel, Manhood in America*); and Virginia Smith, who documents the emergence of what she call "the funny little man"--the same image discussed in this paper--in primarily European poster art of the 1930s. [Back](#)

8 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 80, 182. [Back](#)

9 This was "the old Life," a humor magazine, not the photojournalism magazine of that title launched in 1936. [Back](#)

10 Ernest Earnest, *The American Eve in Fact and Fiction, 1775– 1914* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 229–230; Vera McHenry Klein, *Charles Dana Gibson: A Study of an Artist as Social Historian*, M. A. Thesis, California State University, Northridge (1978), xviii, xix, 119–120. [Back](#)

11 "Man and Woman: As They Were, As They Are, As They Will Be," *New York Evening World* (November 30, 1910), reprinted in Sarah J. Moore, "Making a Spectacle of Suffrage: The National Woman Suffrage Pageant, 1913," *Journal of American Culture* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 97. [Back](#)

12 Smith, *The Funny Little Man*, 33. [Back](#)

13 Higashi, *Virgins, Vamps, and Flappers*, 170. [Back](#)

14 C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), xi–xii. [Back](#)

15 Kay Sloan, "Sexual Warfare in the Silent Cinema: Comedies and Melodramas of Woman Suffragism," *American Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (Fall 1981), 417, 421, 436. She cites, as sources for these plot lines, the films *Calino Marries A Suffragette* (Gaumont, 1912), *When Women Vote* (Lubin, 1907), *The Suffragettes' Revenge* (Gaumont, 1914), and *Suffragette Sheriff* (Kalem, 1912). [Back](#)

16 Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 69. [Back](#)

17 Joe Goodwin and George W. Meyer, "We All Fall" (New York: F. B. Haviland, n. d. [ca. 1910s]), Alice Marshall Collection, The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg. [Back](#)

18 Alfred Bryan and George W. Meyer, "The High Cost of Loving" (New York: Leo Feist, n. d. [ca. 1910s]), Alice Marshall Collection. [Back](#)

19 Jack Yellin, Ira Schuster, and Jack Glogau, "Oh, What Wonderful Things One Little Girlie Can Do" (New York: Leo Feist, 1917), Alice Marshall Collection. [Back](#)

20 James R. McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre–World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals," *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 2 (September 1968), 325. [Back](#)

21 Andrew B. Sterling and Harry Von Tilzer, "Somebody

Else Is Getting It" (New York: Harry Von Tilzer Music Publishing Co., 1912), Alice Marshall Collection. [Back](#)

22 Janice Marie Coco, John Sloan and the Female Subject, Ph. D. diss., Cornell University (1993), 18. Rebecca Zurier interprets these images as evidence of male radicals' maternal fixation, their desire for their women to mother them--an "Oedipal mode" that served to reinforce the messages of free-love radical feminists who saw motherhood as the greatest possible glory for a woman (Art for the Masses: A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics, 1911-1917 [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988], 8). [Back](#)

23 George H. Douglas, The Smart Magazines: 50 Years of Literary Revelry and High Jinks at Vanity Fair, The New Yorker, Life, Esquire, and The Smart Set (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1991), 45-46; David E. E. Sloane, "Life," in American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals, ed. David E. E. Sloane (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 141-153. [Back](#)

24 Not all of Phillips' work was satirical; he drew "straight" pretty-girl covers for a variety of magazines, including Liberty, Collier's, McCall's, The Ladies' Home Journal, The Woman's Home Companion, The Saturday Evening Post, and Good Housekeeping. Phillips did more than five dozen covers for the latter magazine. For more on this artist, see Michael Schau, "All-American Girl": The Art of Coles Phillips (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1975). [Back](#)

25 All titles of Phillips' works mentioned here were printed underneath his illustrations on Life covers, even though they do not appear in the figures that accompany this article. [Back](#)

26 Figures 17 through 20 are examples of Phillips' signature "fadeaway girl," a young woman whose dress or hair blended into the color or pattern of her background. This technique "served to both camouflage and reveal her," notes Walt Reed (Great American Illustrators [New York: Abbeville Press, 1979], 116). [Back](#)

27 David A. Jasen, Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers, and Their Times (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1988). [Back](#)

28 Yellen, Schuster, and Glogau, "Oh, What Wonderful Things One Little Girlie Can Do." Their "patriotic" verse

was: Some little girls take a mighty big chance, One little girl led the soldiers of France, Many a girl gladly gives ev'rything, Just for her Country, her Flag and her King. And Miss America she'll do the same, For the old Red, White and Blue, In the hour of need, Oh, what wonderful deeds You little girlies can do. [Back](#)

29 This poster campaign was coordinated by Charles Dana Gibson, who headed the government-appointed "Division of Pictorial Publicity" under George Creel's Committee on Public Information during the war. Magazine artists who did poster work included James Montgomery Flagg, Howard Chandler Christy, Harrison Fisher, J. C. Leyendecker, Norman Rockwell, and Gibson himself. [Back](#)

30 During 1917 and 1918, more than 20 million copies of some 2,500 recruitment and homefront-fundraising posters were displayed in stores, at theaters, in train stations, and at post offices across the U. S. This artwork is reprinted and analyzed in Walton Rawls, *Wake Up, America! World War I and the American Poster* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988) and Joseph Darracott, *The First World War in Posters* (New York: Dover, 1974). [Back](#)

31 The combination of spirituality and maternity was especially significant. Joseph Darracott attributes the wide appeal of this poster to "religious associations with the Virgin and Child" (*The First World War in Posters*, xxii). [Back](#)

32 Patricia Erens, "The Flapper: Hollywood's First Liberated Woman," in *Dancing Fools & Weary Blues: The Great Escape of the Twenties*, ed. Lawrence R. Broer and John D. Walther (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), 36. [Back](#)

33 Mary P. Ryan, "The Projection of a New Womanhood: The Movie Moderns in the 1920's," in *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*, ed. Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 119. [Back](#)

34 Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 45. [Back](#)

35 Held's work and life are surveyed in Shelley Armitage, *John Held, Jr.: Illustrator of the Jazz Age* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987). [Back](#)

36 For more on these varying, and sometimes

overlapping, arguments, see: Estelle B. Freedman, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," *Journal of American History* 61, no. 2 (September 1974), 372–393; Leslie Fishbein, "The Failure of Feminism in Greenwich Village before World War I," *Women's Studies* 9 (1982), 275–289; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night: The American Housewife between the Wars," in *Decades of Discontent*, 177–196; Martin Pumphrey, "The Flapper, the Housewife and the Making of Modernity," *Cultural Studies* 1 (May 1987), 179–184; and Rayna Rapp and Ellen Ross, "The Twenties' Backlash: Compulsory Heterosexuality, the Consumer Family, and the Waning of Feminism," in *Class Race and Sex: The Dynamics of Control*, ed. Amy Swerdlow and Hanna Lessinger (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983), 93–107. Some historians maintain that first-wave feminism did not "fail," but quietly continued through social-reform activism; see, for instance, J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987) and Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). [Back](#)

37 Judge's circulation peaked at a quarter-million in 1923; *Life* lost half of its 500,000 readers between 1920 and 1922, and by 1929 its circulation had fallen to 113,000 (Douglas, *The Smart Magazines*, 46; Sloane, "Life," 150). In 1936, *Life* ended its existence as a humor magazine, and the title was bought and repositioned as a photojournalism magazine by Henry Luce. [Back](#)

38 These themes are explored more fully in books by two scholars of contemporary media: Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994) and Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). Douglas notes the way in which (as in the 1910s) women's political power was cast in mass media in terms of sexuality that could be softened through stereotyping and ridicule: "Since viewers had been socialized to regard female sexuality as monstrous, TV producers addressed the anxieties about letting it loose by domesticating the monster, by making her pretty and . . . by playing the situation for laughs" (126, 137). [Back](#)

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Figure 1



Figure 4



Figure 2



Figure 5



Figure 3



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 11



Figure 9



Figure 12



Figure 10



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 18



Figure 16



Figure 19



Figure 17



Figure 20

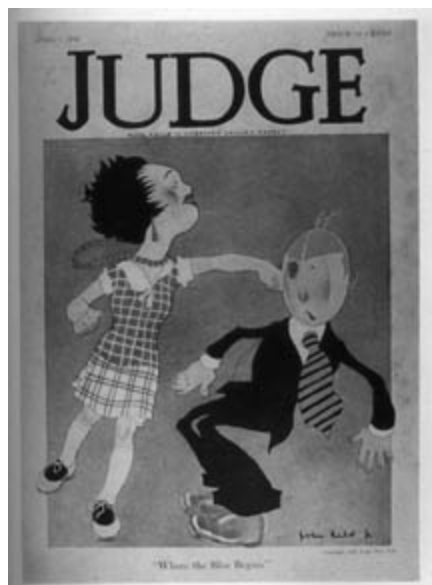


Figure 22





Figure 24