

# Promoting and Containing New Womanhood in the Pages of *Photoplay*: The Case Of “Little Mary” Pickford and Her Mediated Alter Egos on the Cusp of the Roaring Twenties

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## Abstract

*Actress Mary Pickford is perhaps best remembered for her silent-screen persona “Little Mary.” But there was another important aspect to her Hollywood career that is frequently overlooked today: Pickford’s rise to power and fame corresponded with the era of the “New Woman” in U.S. society. This article explores the mediated construction of new womanhood as communicated through the coverage of Pickford’s career between 1918 and 1921 in the pages of the fan magazine Photoplay. It demonstrates how Photoplay used coverage of Pickford to promote the ideal of new womanhood until 1919, when she became the most powerful woman in American moviemaking by co-founding United Artists with three men. After that, at the start of the Roaring Twenties, the magazine sought to contain new womanhood by presenting Pickford almost exclusively as a child, without continuing to acknowledge her abilities as a savvy movie mogul and grown woman as it had regularly done in the past – until significant changes in her personal life required another noteworthy shift in the magazine’s coverage patterns of this star.*

**Keywords:** *fan magazine, feminism, new womanhood, Roaring Twenties, stardom*

Actress Mary Pickford (1892–1979) is perhaps best remembered for her silent-screen persona “Little Mary,” the charming, childlike, demure, mischievous, spunky character type she played in so many of the more than 200 movies she appeared in over the course of her career (Felder 1996: 334; Windeler 1973: 7). With her barely five-foot frame, expressive features, and trademark curls, Pickford became widely regarded as America’s Sweetheart after she gave up a decade-long career on the stage in 1909 and made her transition into movies. In an era that prided itself on innocence, Pickford emerged as the cinematic feminine ideal, the girl every young man wanted to have – as his sister (Felder 1996: 334). She played a 12-year-

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old when she was 24 (in 1917's *The Little Princess*) (Corliss 1998: 53); she was equally convincing playing the long-suffering, poor little girl (e.g., in 1919's *Daddy Long Legs*) as the poor little rich girl (e.g., in 1917's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*). As entertainment writer Richard Corliss sums up Pickford's appeal to fans:

Pickford was a household goddess of the silent screen. [...] She didn't ooze sex appeal, even of the Lolita type; in her film roles she was closer to daughter than to sweetheart. [...] Little Mary struck so deep a chord in the new mass of moviegoers because she reflected the dreams of the immigrant and the pain of those she called "the Great Unloved." [...] Like Steven Spielberg, Pickford made an art and millions from the acute remembrance and reconfiguration of childhood. (1998: 54)

But there was another important side to Mary Pickford that is frequently overlooked by many of her remaining fans today. While on screen Pickford retained an innocent, childlike appeal, off screen she was regarded as a powerful businesswoman in her own right, one who achieved complete control over her own career – "including the contractual right of final cut of her films, by the time she was 25 years old" (Eyman 1990: 2). "It took longer to make one of Mary's contracts than it did to make one of her pictures," producer Sam Goldwyn once remarked, attesting to the star's keen ability to negotiate the most favorable terms for herself in exchange for her much-in-demand performances (Felder 1996: 334). Pickford earned \$5 a day when she started working in movies in 1909; by 1916, as a result of her business acumen, she was earning an unprecedented \$10,000 a week (Windeler 1973: 6; Felder 1996: 334). She was a pioneer in product endorsement with offerings ranging from Mary Pickford massage cream to the Little Mary radiator cap (Corliss 1998: 53), as well as the first female movie star to helm her own independent production company, Mary Pickford Film Corporation, upon launching it with her mother in 1918 (Felder 1996: 335). The following year, when she founded United Artists along with fellow actors Douglas Fairbanks and Charles Chaplin and director D. W. Griffith at the age of 26, Pickford ranked among the most powerful players Hollywood has ever encountered.

Pickford's rise to power, fortune, and fame corresponded with the era of the "New Woman" (Singer 1996: 177) in U.S. society, which came into being in the years between 1880 and 1920, and it reached new heights at the start of the Roaring Twenties, a decade filled with significant social, cultural, and lifestyle changes for American women and others (Hourly

2017). During this period, new conceptions of a woman's legitimate domain emerged that deviated from the stringent expectations of women during the Victorian era. As film studies scholar Ben Singer (1996: 177) has noted, substantially reduced fertility rates and the growing range of widely available, labor-saving products and machines provided lower-, middle-, and upper-class women alike greater freedom to pursue activities outside of the home. "Whereas only about 10 percent of women worked in paid labor in 1880," he writes, "this figure had almost doubled by 1910, or tripled if one looks only at the urban population. By 1910, over 40 percent of young, single women worked for several years before marriage, and the figure was probably over 60 percent in urban areas" (Singer 1996: 177). In addition to the workplace, Singer explains that the ongoing development of amusement parks, department stores, movie theaters, and music halls encouraged the increasing presence of women in the public sphere during this period, as did enhancements in mobility enabled by electric trolleys and the heightened popularity of bicycles as symbols of female emancipation.

As the United States moved into modernity at the turn of the century and beyond, the increasingly pervasive cultural image of women as able to stand on their own began to displace outdated notions of female dependence on men (Singer 1996: 178). The trademarks of the New Woman included energy, independence, initiative, self-reliance, and direct interaction in the extradomestic world; print media became preoccupied with these attributes and their corresponding cultural construct of modern womanhood as they continuously endeavored to articulate, caricature, critique, define, detail, and mythologize its various dimensions (Singer 1996: 177-178). These were not always easy tasks, however. Ultimately, popular magazines and other publications in this period ended up seeking to contain the New Woman almost as frequently as they sought to liberate her, as many began to highlight "a general disintegration of public civility coinciding with the greater independence of women in an urbanized America no longer protected by Victorian structures of social decorum" (Singer 1996: 187). One type of publication that played a substantial role in this process was the fan or movie magazine, which, as film scholar Gaylyn Studlar emphasizes, offers "a crucial index of the ideological and historical dimensions of the cinematic field of the 1920s and a neglected source for assessing how women were positioned" (1991: 7) in U.S. culture during that era. At cover prices typically ranging from five to twenty-five cents per copy, fan magazines were widely available to and popular among a broad

segment of the U.S. population, and their visual and textual contents offered readers endless complex and (frequently) contradictory messages about the cultural construction of new womanhood (Studlar 1991: 8).

The present article explores the mediated construction of new womanhood as communicated through the coverage of Mary Pickford's career between 1918 and 1921 in the pages of one such fan magazine, *Photoplay*. Established in 1911, *Photoplay* was among the most popular fan magazines during this era of intensified and anxious gender awareness, achieving a circulation of approximately two million copies for each of its monthly issues by the early 1920s (Studlar 1991: 8-10). Like its journalistic counterparts, *Photoplay* "explored, albeit in ideologically contradictory terms, the historically specific locus of women in American cinema, culture, and society during the 1920s" (Studlar 1991: 8), providing a comparatively "progressive view of women's changing sexual and economic roles" (Studlar 1991: 10).

An analysis of Pickford's treatment by this fan magazine in feature articles about the star and in the monthly column "Plays and Players," which offered regular updates and commentary about motion pictures and their stars, reveals that Pickford was covered in relatively standard ways – with accounts alternating between foregrounding the childlike and adult aspects of her star persona – until she became the most powerful woman in American moviemaking by co-founding United Artists with three men in April 1919. Thereafter, she was presented almost exclusively as a child, without explicit acknowledgment of her talents as a savvy movie mogul and grown woman, within the pages of *Photoplay* for approximately one year. This changed yet again as soon as the shocking news of her marriage to actor and United Artists business partner Douglas Fairbanks seized headlines worldwide, when presentation of the childlike qualities of Pickford's star persona were banished from the pages of *Photoplay* for approximately one year, and coverage focused almost exclusively on Pickford the movie mogul and grown woman. The ideological implications of these coverage patterns with regard to the cultural construction of new womanhood are identified throughout the analysis that follows.

### **May 1918 to April 1919: Standard Coverage of "Little Mary" Pickford**

During the twelve-month period preceding *Photoplay's* first feature article about the formation of United Artists, coverage of Pickford was approached in ways typical of reporting throughout the first decade of the

star's movie career. Since by this time it had become clear that America's Sweetheart would likely never be fully accepted as "the woman" on screen, Pickford devoted significant energy to constructing herself as "the girl" in her movie roles and as a combination of girl and woman in her personal life. In front of the cameras, she wore flats, trussed her bosom, and performed in oversized sets to appear smaller and younger, and she preferred to work with significantly taller actors opposite her (Corliss 1998: 58). Since she so frequently played young girls and early adolescents, Pickford had mastered the art of transforming her expressions to include a range of cuteness, innocence, poutiness, and sweetness, which she utilized regularly in both her professional and personal lives. Because the dichotomy between child and adult was so germane to Pickford's star persona, typical media accounts alternated between foregrounding one side of Pickford's persona (childlike or womanly) while simultaneously, though more subtly, reminding the reader of the other.

Coverage of the actress in *Photoplay* prior to the formation of United Artists in April 1919 is no exception to this trend. Examination of the feature articles about the star and her mentions in the monthly "Plays and Players" column by Cal York during the period of May 1918 to April 1919 reveals that Pickford was frequently presented as a successful adult and savvy businesswoman as well as a childlike being. The five feature articles focusing on the actress during this period, for example, are divided with regard to the side of Pickford's persona they choose to foreground. The feature "'Colonel Mary'—of the 143rd" from the May 1918 issue of *Photoplay* foregrounds Pickford's adult side, explaining that the actress "adopted" the 143rd Field Artillery regiment and visited the troops at their San Diego-area base to inspect them (Anon. 1918a: 64). "She is the first woman to have that honor," the article states, explaining that Pickford dined with officers, was guest of honor at a regimental ball, and led the grand march during the event (Anon. 1918a: 64). In the photographs accompanying the text, Pickford is clearly dressed as a grown woman and embracing her role as such, amid the company of tall, strikingly handsome military men. In contrast to this presentation, however, the related short feature "Colonel Mary of the 143rd Field Artillery, U. S. A." from the September 1918 issue of this fan magazine features Pickford photographically as an overgrown child in a borrowed military outfit and reports textually that the soldiers in the regiment she adopted have come to be known as "Mary's lambs," further foregrounding the childlike side of

Pickford's persona through the connection to a child's nursery rhyme and by referring to the military men as "boys" (Anon. 1918b: 71).

The remaining three feature articles—"Star Dust" from June 1918 (Quirk 1918), "Mary Pickford, the Girl" from July 1918 (Evans 1918), and "Has Mary Pickford Retired?" from October 1918 (Anon. 1918d)—similarly reveal the dichotomous tension surrounding print media portrayals of the star. Written by James R. Quirk, "Star Dust" addresses the key components of Pickford's star quality. Foregrounding Pickford's adult side, the article refers to the actress as "the best example of a star in the world of pictures" and identifies the fact that she is a "brilliant woman" to be the secret to her unprecedented success (Quirk 1918: 18). "Every admirer knows that this charming person appearing as a bit of a child is a mature woman," Quirk states, noting that Pickford's marriage is well known to all picture fans and acknowledging that she is far more than simply "a pretty girl with a lot of curls" (1918: 18-19). Similarly, the article "Has Mary Pickford Retired?" focuses exclusively on Pickford the successful adult and savvy businesswoman, highlighting the star's knack for negotiating profitable business deals, her commitment to consistently providing top-quality narratives with competent direction, and her possible plans to travel to France to contribute to war-relief efforts (Anon. 1918d: 85).

In contrast, the feature article "Mary Pickford, the Girl" (Evans 1918)—described in the issue's table of contents as being "the *real* Mary Pickford" (Anon. 1918c: 6)—foregrounds the childlike side of the star visually by presenting a collage of more than 35 photographs of the actress in her most famous roles as a young girl or early adolescent that spans two pages. Although the accompanying text refers to Pickford as a talented performer who promotes war bonds and is well-connected in Hollywood, it simultaneously continues to foreground her child side by relaying Pickford's reaction during an incident in which an inconsiderate person at the studio irritated her—"Hurt, she fled to her dressing room, covering her face with her hands and crying like a little child" (Evans 1918: 90)—and by emphasizing her dependence on her mother: "And Mary says, 'Mother is my world'" (Evans 1918: 111).

Pickford's appearances in Cal York's "Plays and Players" column during this period reveal similar patterns of reporting. The actress receives two mentions in York's July 1918 column; the first foregrounds Pickford the child, as she stands on a stepping board to appear taller beside Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin in a photograph, while the second foregrounds Pickford the woman, who is being sued for more than

\$100,000 by individuals claiming to have previously been in her employ yet who have received no compensation for the work they provided (York 1918a: 108). The actress appears twice in York's October 1918 column (York 1918b), as well. Her first mention foregrounds Pickford the child, photographically portraying her as a youth in a bathtub during the filming of *The Mobilization of Johanna*; her second mention, on the next page of the column, foregrounds Pickford the adult, who is shown behind the wheel of an automobile on the set of *How Could You, Jean?* (York 1918b).

As previously stated, the practice of reporters alternating between foregrounding one side of Pickford's persona over the other was a standard approach to covering the actress from the earliest days of her movie career, so it is no surprise that Pickford is featured this way in the pages of *Photoplay* during the year before her involvement in United Artists was officially announced. What is surprising, however, is that this standard approach to reporting on Pickford did not continue unabated in the months after she became one of the "Big Four" founding members of United Artists. The reality that *Photoplay* significantly altered its approach to reporting on the actress in the aftermath of that historic announcement—thereafter presenting Pickford almost exclusively as a child (rather than an adult) for approximately one year—provides an ideal opportunity for exploring ideological processes associated with the mediated construction of new womanhood.

### **May 1919 to April 1920: "Little Mary" Becomes "Littler Mary"**

Pickford emerged as the most powerful woman in Hollywood when she went into partnership with Chaplin, Fairbanks, and Griffith in April 1919. "Of the quartet of luminaries who founded United Artists [that year]," writes Richard Corliss about the star, "Pickford wasn't simply the token girl. While Charlie Chaplin fussed at his films and Douglas Fairbanks gallivanted and [D. W.] Griffith moved back to New York, she ran things" (1998: 54). Pickford's popularity continued to increase in the months after United Artists was formed, as did her earnings: by 1920, America's Sweetheart had become a multimillionaire (Felder 1996: 335). Little Mary also began to devote more and more time to her various productions, serving as an accomplished producer and director (and, occasionally, as writer) in addition to her role as star (Corliss 1998: 60). As biographer Scott Eyman explains about Pickford:

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We are, nowadays, used to strong, dominant women who mold their own show business careers. Stars like Jane Fonda, Barbra Streisand, or Jessica Lange produce their own pictures, officially or *de facto*. We admire them; from the heavy, sighing interviews in which they talk about the burden of it all, that admiration is obviously important to them. Yet the fact is that Mary Pickford was doing all this more than seventy years ago. In addition to managing her own career, [...] she was instrumental in setting up and running United Artists, a major movie distribution company. Mary Pickford, in fact, was the first female movie mogul. On the scale on which she worked, she was, perhaps, the *only* female movie mogul. (1990: 3-4, original emphasis)

Clearly, Pickford revealed herself to be the epitome of new womanhood the moment the ink dried on her contract with her three partners, proving incorrect the various Hollywood insiders who felt that she and the others – being “childlike, insecure, flighty creatures” (Whitfield 1997: 192) – could not profitably run such a company. “[W]e produced and financed our own pictures,” Pickford remarked of the experience, “and if they had lost money – which they never did – we were prepared to accept the losses as well as the profits” (Windeler 1973: 111). This unprecedented experiment in movie distribution turned out to be a success for Pickford and her colleagues; however, Pickford’s role in the partnership received remarkably little coverage in the pages of *Photoplay* during the entire first year of its existence.

*Photoplay* made brief mention in its April 1919 issue of an early announcement asserting that the Big Four (along with William S. Hart, who soon withdrew from the potential arrangement) would unite to distribute their own product (York 1919a), but it was not until the following month that the fan magazine devoted a feature article, and a giant photograph of the four major players involved, to these historic developments. In this article, titled “All They Say Is: ‘See Our Lawyer!’” Pickford is prominently featured as an equal to her three male partners, both in the text of the piece and in the accompanying photograph (Anon. 1919a). It is communicated that she is able to hold her own, and pull her own weight, as one of the “Big Four.”

With the exception of brief mentions in Cal York’s “Plays and Players” column during that same month (York 1919b) and during the next (York 1919c), this is the last time that the adult side of Pickford’s persona is foregrounded in the magazine’s coverage for nearly one full year. If it is at all possible for members of the press to “infantilize” Little Mary, that is



precisely what happened in the pages of *Photoplay*—Pickford was no longer presented in the traditional way as Little Mary, a combination of both the childlike and adult sides of her persona; instead, she was presented almost exclusively as a child, without explicit acknowledgment of her talents as a savvy movie mogul and grown woman, in a revised portrayal that I have termed “Littler Mary.” Reporter pressures to contain new womanhood, whether explicitly or implicitly communicated or perceived during this era, can be invoked to help explain this shift in reporting approach.

In June 1919, the editors of *Photoplay* launched a new monthly feature called “Movy-Dols,” which promised to present a different movie star every month “with character make-ups just as they appear in real life” (Reeves 1919: 91). The concept behind this monthly offering was that fans could clip out a paper doll of the featured star “as herself” (Reeves 1919: 91) and then adorn the doll with accompanying costumes worn by the star’s most popular characters. Although this feature faded from existence within four issues, it is noteworthy that the subject selected for the first installment, devised and drawn by Percy Reeves, was Mary Pickford.

At a time when she had become the most influential woman in Hollywood history, the editors of *Photoplay* opted to present her as a “doll” to be played with and admired, rather than in ways more befitting of her newfound status. Two months later, when Pickford was featured as part of the magazine’s monthly “Duotone Art Section” (Anon. 1919b), again the actress was presented as a child rather than an adult, unlike all of the other actors and actresses presented as part of the same feature (including Richard Barthelmess, Dorothy Gish, Evelyn Gosnell, Mollie King, and Bryant Washburn). The caption accompanying the girlish photograph of Pickford reads, “The quaint charm of curls and crinolines is Mary Pickford’s. She might have stepped out of an old frame in a colonial drawing room to grace these pages” (Anon. 1919b: 21).

But perhaps the most shocking example of *Photoplay*’s revised approach to covering Pickford appears in the magazine’s March 1920 issue, with the article “Mary Pickford—Director” by M. Lewis Russel (1920). Again, during the period in which Pickford emerged as the most powerful female director in Hollywood, the magazine chose to infantilize Little Mary by portraying her as Littler Mary in this piece. The subtitle of this article reads, “Demonstrating that often a little girl can best direct little girls” (Russel 1920: 93), and its primary aim apparently is to show how much this grown woman actually has in common with the little girls she directs. “Remember, now, I’m a big old bear, and I’m going to get you if you don’t

do just what I tell you! G-r-r-r-r,” Pickford is quoted as instructing her young actresses, to which the three dimpled youngsters erupt in gleeful laughter (Russel 1920: 93). She is featured in a photograph sharing chocolates with two of the young girls, who are adorned as cherubs, as if Pickford is simply enjoying carefree moments with her playmates. “No wonder she is so successful with them,” the article concludes, “when, after two hours of hard work, she can leave them with [a happy] feeling. Perhaps the secret of it is that after all she is, at heart, ‘Just a little girl!’” (Russel 1920: 94).

Here again, the impressive accomplishments of Pickford the woman are virtually ignored, overshadowed by seemingly intimate glimpses into the world of Pickford the child. The star is presented similarly in Cal York’s “Plays and Players” column during this period, which in July 1919 discusses the birthday celebration thrown for Pickford by her mother – gifts included “a canary or two” and “a saddle horse” (York 1919d: 116) – and in March 1920 explains that a body double had to be hired for the fragile star in order to “save Miss Pickford the tedious task of standing in front of the camera merely for the purpose of getting the focus and height range before even rehearsals can begin” (York 1920a: 96).

As film scholar Gaylyn Studlar has noted of this era, the “unprecedented rise of the fan magazine’s popularity in the 1920s took place within a broader ideological framework marked by women’s growing economic and sexual emancipation and the widespread belief that changes in women’s behavior were contributing to a radical subversion of American gender ideals” (1991: 9).

Accordingly, it seems more than likely that *Photoplay*’s shift in its approach to covering Pickford in the months following her rise to the apex of female power in Hollywood occurred as a result of the perceived pressure by journalists to contain the New Woman they were simultaneously seeking to liberate, if she became too great a threat to the male-dominated social order of the times. By infantilizing Little Mary more so than usual – in the form of Littler Mary – following the formation of United Artists, the writers and editors at *Photoplay* served to symbolically strip Pickford of her cultural capital in the eyes of the magazine’s readership. As such, the most immediate threat posed by the cultural construction of new womanhood – significant independence of the New Woman to the point that she poses a challenge to the entire male-dominated world of business – was (temporarily) symbolically thwarted.

### May 1920 to April 1921: “Littler Mary” Becomes “Big Mary”

One significant question thus arises: Given the effectiveness by which an emphasis on portrayals of Pickford as a childlike being could enable the smooth functioning of the hegemonic patriarchal social order, why would *Photoplay’s* coverage change so dramatically in May 1920, shifting instead to portraying the star almost exclusively as the successful movie mogul and powerful woman that she had become, and virtually eliminating coverage of Pickford the child for nearly one full year? The answer lies in developments that unfolded on the evening of March 28, 1920, when the recently divorced star married her recently divorced United Artists’ business partner, Douglas Fairbanks, making them Hollywood’s first supercouple (Schmidt 2012).

As Booton Herndon explains in his book *Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks: The Most Popular Couple the World Has Ever Known*:

After the first glow of their marriage, Douglas and Mary were afraid that their fans, in the third decade of the twentieth century, would not accept the marriage of two divorced persons. Relatives and business associates had advised them against marrying, but they had gone ahead. Now, though they were genuinely in love, they were fearful that the world might not understand, and might stay away from their films. (1977: 2)

The couple certainly had cause for concern. Mary in particular suffered moments of anxiety and anguish, fearing that her fans would come to view her as far less innocent than her on-screen persona, turn their backs, and leave her with empty theater seats (Herndon 1977: 184). She knew that Fairbanks had had an easier time divorcing his spouse – wife Beth was the one who had filed for divorce – than she’d had divorcing first-husband Owen Moore, which involved payment of an undisclosed sum of money (believed to be approximately \$100,000, but rumored to be as much as \$1 million) to Moore for her freedom as well as charges of collusion stemming from her enacted plan to receive a quick divorce in Nevada, a state known for having comparatively liberal divorce laws (Herndon 1977: 185-187). As a result, Pickford and Fairbanks kept their marriage a secret for three days, before news of the event exploded worldwide and reporters inundated the stars at their homes (Herndon 1977: 187). Reporters’ reactions to the news were mixed, but many felt there was a sense of scandal surrounding the romantic developments. When Pickford and Fairbanks departed for their honeymoon sailing trip to Europe nearly two months later, they still feared

that they may have sacrificed both of their careers for love (Herndon 1977: 188).

*Photoplay's* first mention of Pickford's divorce from Moore appeared in York's (1920b) "Plays and Players" column in May 1920, and it was followed by a feature article about Pickford's marriage to Fairbanks in the following month's issue. In "The Pickford-Fairbanks Wooing" (Bates 1920), writer Billy Bates recounts the perceived scandalous nature of the union between the two stars as it was shouted from oversized newspaper headlines worldwide and insiders' hopes that the furor might soon die down. He also attempts to convert any negative feelings that fans may be harboring toward the couple. "Far above the sly eye-winking and the rib-poking of the scandal monger and the rumor-peddler," Bates writes, "is the love of a woman—a love that has come after great sorrow; a love that would willingly sacrifice the fame that came before it. [...] When Mary Pickford stood before the minister, she stood there as any woman might stand, radiant with love for the man at her side, a bit tearful perhaps for the tender memories left behind, but with smiling hope for the future" (1920: 70, 73). Bates then provides the highlights of the blossoming of the Pickford-Fairbanks romance from the day they met into the present.

Given the intensity of these somewhat unexpected developments, I contend that it would have been virtually impossible for the writers and editors of *Photoplay* to continue their coverage of Pickford almost exclusively as a childlike being from this point onward, as they had done so consistently in the year leading up to these events. The resulting coverage shift following the news of Pickford's divorce and remarriage, however, likely had little (if anything) to do with a conscious decision as to how new womanhood would be presented with regard to developments in Pickford's personal life and career. Instead, I believe that *Photoplay* had no choice but to begin acknowledging the adult side of Pickford's persona in the aftermath of these sexually charged (and potentially scandalous) developments. Why the magazine's coverage approach shifted so dramatically from one extreme to the other (child to adult) for the next twelve months or so is less certain, although eventually the periodical returned to its standard approach to covering Little Mary—rather than what I have termed to be "Big Mary" with regard to coverage between May 1920 to April 1921—by the middle of 1921.

During *Photoplay's* coverage of Pickford as Big Mary, feature articles and her mentions in "Plays and Players" focused almost exclusively on Pickford the movie mogul and grown woman, to the exclusion of

references to the childlike qualities of Pickford's star persona. In August 1920 the magazine ran a two-page feature of Pickford and her new spouse titled "A Western Union" (Anon. 1920b), identified in the issue's table of contents as "Douglas and Mary Pickford Fairbanks as they are today" (Anon. 1920a: 6). The layout features two large photographs of the grown-up lovers taken in the garden of their California mansion, Pickfair, along with a simulated Western Union telegram that reads: "Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Fairbanks. Honeymoon Lane. Happiness Always. Come home. All is forgiven. Photoplay" (Anon. 1920b: 65). Pickford's next significant appearance in a feature occurs in the February 1921 issue, when a special etching by Walter Tittle (1921) of the mature Pickford is included as part of the "Rotogravure" section.

In the pages of "Plays and Players" during this period, Pickford is similarly portrayed as successful movie mogul and working woman rather than as a child. A May 1920 entry in this column notes that Pickford and ex-husband Moore are managing to work on the same studio lot (York 1920b). August 1920 finds stars Pickford and Chaplin appearing as extras in Fairbanks' most recent movie (York 1920c). September and October 1920 provide updates of Pickford and her husband's worldwide sailing expedition (York 1920d, 1920e), and November 1920 brings news of the couple's recent presence as a performance of the Ziegfeld Follies (York 1920f). December 1920 brings news that Pickford and Fairbanks intend to make a series of films around the world (York 1920g), and January 1921 finds the couple burying their favorite dog, Rex, before Pickford heads to Carmel, California, to film scenes for her new picture (York 1921a). February 1921 reveals that Pickford now owns a "home on wheels" containing a "kitchenette, library, dressing table and other comforts of home" that she uses when she is not on the set (York 1921b: 72), and March 1921 reveals that Pickford and Fairbanks may have to postpone a planned springtime trip to Europe in order to fulfill their current moviemaking commitments (York 1921c). Certainly, gone from the pages of *Photoplay* are glimpses of Mary the childlike being in any noteworthy form.

### **Concluding Remarks**

By the middle of 1921, *Photoplay* eventually returned to its initial coverage approach to Pickford as Little Mary, rather than as Littler Mary or Big Mary. A feature article titled "Little Mary Remembered 'When'" from the March 1921 issue of the magazine began this coverage shift back to its

original state of affairs, blending textual imagery of Pickford both as a young child and as an accomplished actress (Anon. 1921a). Similarly, a photograph of the mature Pickford in the June 1921 issue is accompanied by a caption leaving the decision of whether to think of her as “Miss Mary Pickford” or as “Mrs. Douglas Fairbanks” entirely up to the viewer (Anon. 1921b: 16). This culminating state of affairs seems only logical, not only because it marks a return to the coverage approach granted to Pickford during the majority of her career up to that point, but also because it acknowledges the complexity associated with the mediated construction of new womanhood and its simultaneous containment.

The extreme cycle of containment that began in the weeks following Pickford’s emergence as a powerful partner in United Artists, with its virtually exclusive focus on attributes of childhood, rebounded to the opposite extreme when the star’s womanhood could be denied no longer in the weeks following her much-publicized divorce and remarriage. However, an exclusive focus on Pickford’s adult qualities and accomplishments was as threatening to the prospects for containment as an exclusive focus on the star’s childlike qualities was to the emergence and promotion of new womanhood. Eventually the situation could be expected to return to its initial “happy medium,” as it did, as the reporting cycle had run its course. It would not be long before Pickford’s Hollywood reign would be challenged by an emerging group of younger stars, including Clara Bow and Gloria Swanson (Schmidt 2012). And by the time the Roaring Twenties came to their end, the silent pictures she was best known for had run their technological course, being replaced by the talking pictures that so rapidly superseded them.

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