



MOVIES AND CONDUCT

HERBERT BLUMER ■ 1933 ■ EXCERPTS

What was the influence of movies on modern youth? As movie production and attendance exploded in the 1920s—and especially after the arrival of sound films in 1927—the call to answer this question became more insistent. In a series of twelve studies conducted from 1929 to 1932 (funded by a group advocating legal restrictions on filmmaking), sociologists and psychologists compiled a massive amount of research on youth and movies (see title list, p. 10). Perhaps the most influential study was reported in *Movies and Conduct* by the University of Chicago sociologist Herbert Blumer, whose team gathered data from nearly two thousand students through questionnaires, interviews, and students’ “motion picture autobiographies” in which they reported their personal impressions of movies’ influence. Presented here are excerpts from the culminating chapter, “Schemes of Life.” What did this research reveal about movies’ influence on young people’s ideas about life, how it should be lived, and what it offered them?

___ CH. 10: SCHEMES OF LIFE ___

THE reader who has followed our previous discussion anticipates perhaps a treatment of the influence of motion pictures on ideas and attitudes. One would expect that movies would be effective in shaping the images which people form of their world and in giving form to the schemes of conduct which they come to develop. Motion pictures depict types of life which are unfamiliar to many people and consequently shape their conceptions of such a life. Further, many of the situations and kinds of conduct which are treated are shown very attractively. In witnessing them some people may develop longings for these forms of life. What is presented in the movies constitutes a “challenge” to the life of many. Out of the reflection may emerge attitudes, ambitions, dissatisfactions, desires, temptations, re-enforced ideals, and so forth. . . .

INFLUENCE ON GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF THOUGHT

LET us begin with a general statement of how motion pictures shape conceptions of life and influence subsequent schemes of conduct. Particularly in childhood we can detect the role of motion pictures in building up a world of imagery used by children for purposes of interpreting and illustrating life. It is no misstatement to say that motion pictures fashion the minds of grade school children in an appreciable way by providing both specific ideas and a general framework of thought. A large part of the average child’s imagery used for interpretation of experiences in everyday life has its source in motion pictures. One may easily get an appreciation of this as the writer has done, by asking, on a number of occasions, classes of school children to draw pictures of action or of interesting life. Given no further suggestion but encouraged to use their imaginations freely, children will submit drawings showing unmistakably motion picture imagery. The cowboy, the Indian, the airplane combat, mystery characters, and other familiar motion picture types or themes spring out of the children’s sketches. . . .

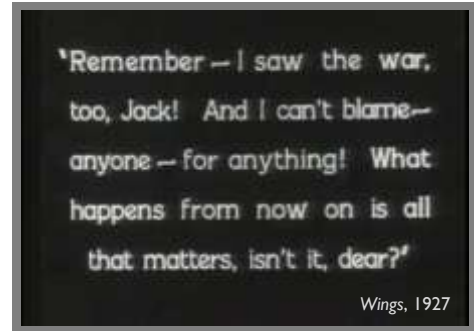
There are other indications that many people carry, so to speak, a movie world in their heads. The great popularity of motion picture magazines and the avidity [enthusiasm] with which they are read by many suggest how greatly people’s thoughts and interests may be bound up with motion pictures.

This is particularly true in the case of high school students, perhaps chiefly in the case of high school girls. It is very common to find the lockers of high school girls profusely decorated with photographs and pictures taken mainly from motion picture magazines. The keeping of motion picture scrapbooks is again a common practice and further suggests the degree to which people may have their minds preoccupied with the movies. . . .

STEREOTYPED VIEWS

. . . In depicting villains, heroes, gangsters, nationalities, life of the rich, war, and other subjects, motion pictures may determine how people visualize these things. The following account suggests, in a general way, this kind of influence.

Male, 20, white, college junior—A year or so ago I saw a picture in which a Jap was shown in a very brutal light, and I began to think that perhaps all Japs were that way.¹ I realize now that I became prejudiced too early, but when a picture shows nothing but the evil side of a race, it is hard to believe them capable of good. Pictures of the World War used to make me very biased against all Germans. One or two of them I remember made me actually thirst to spill German blood. But more recent pictures have absolved Germany of these brutal charges, and enabled me to see their side of the question. I'm afraid that in all cases where a picture has been presented from a prejudiced point of view, I jumped too readily to the conclusion that it was all true.



Many of the writers of the motion picture autobiographies tell of having their ideas of nationalities formed by the motion pictures. One of the chief of these types is the Chinaman. In many pictures he has been presented as a cunning, mysterious, treacherous person and has come to be regarded as such by some moviegoers. The examples which follow speak for themselves. The first three refer to the way in which the Chinaman was presented in serials [multi-episode dramas shown weekly in movie theaters].

Female, 19, white, college senior.—One thing these pictures did was to establish a permanent fear of Chinamen in my mind. To this day I do not see a Chinese person but what I think of him as being mixed up in some evil affair. I always pass them as quickly as possible if I meet them in the street, and refuse to go into a Chinese restaurant or laundry.

Male, 20, white, college sophomore.—While still at a very tender age I followed one serial picture called *The Yellow Menace*. It was a story of Chinatown with plenty of daggers and opium. For quite a while afterwards I had an inward fear of every Chinese laundry man I saw walking along the street with a bag on his back.

. . .

Let us continue with a few further instances merely to illustrate the point that conventional depiction of certain types in motion pictures may implant fixed images of these types in the minds of many people. The writer of the following account, a Negro high school girl, protests against the way she feels the Negro is usually presented in motion pictures. Her statement suggests the stereotyped image of the Negro which motion pictures have formed in the minds of many.

Female, 17, Negro, high school senior.—It seems to me that every picture picturing a Negro is just to ridicule the race. When a Negro man or woman is featured in a movie they are obliged to speak flat southern words, be superstitious, and afraid of ghosts and white men. They have to make themselves as ugly and dark as possible. The bad things are emphasized and the good characteristics left out. This is very unfair to the race. All Negroes are not alike; there are different types as in other races. Why must they be portrayed as ignorant, superstitious animals instead of decent people that are just as capable of doing great things as any other race; all they need is the chance. It is the same with other dark races besides the Negro. They are always the loser, the shrinking coward, and never the victor. It is very unjust of the white race to make every nation appear inferior compared to them.

¹ The epithet *Jap* for a Japanese person was in common usage at the time. [NHC]

The following instances show how in their respective experiences, the writers developed a stereotyped conception of a “villain.” . . .

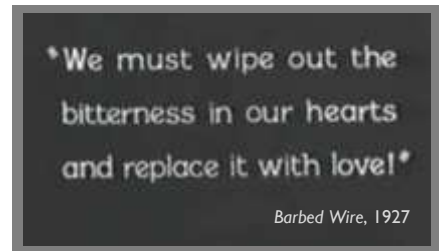
Female, 20, white, college sophomore.—It was when I started high school that I began to enjoy pictures in which the love theme was prominent. I’d put myself in place of the heroine always, never the hero. It was at this time villains would wear a mustache and I still can’t dispel the idea that every man with a mustache is a villain. I used to enjoy going over the picture in my mind and daydreaming about them. These pictures developed my imagination immensely.

...

One thinks also in connection with the point under discussion of the way in which the Germans were depicted during the World War. It is unnecessary to give any accounts (many are available) to appreciate how successful the movies were in helping to develop an intense attitude of hatred towards the Germans through such pictures as *Hearts of the World*. More recently through the presentation of the theme of war from a different point of view the movies have helped change the earlier stereotyped attitude. Some indications of this are shown in the following accounts:

Female, 20, white, college junior.—The following pictures of today such as *The Big Parade*, *Wings*, *Mother Knows Best*, etc., have increased my horror of militarism. No speeches or lectures or doctrines desiring war can ever convince me to change my opinion or hatred of the beastly human practice.

Female, 17, white, high school senior.—The War Pictures, and I believe I am right in capitalizing what I did, have convinced me of the real evils of war, of the ideas that though war is a menace, disarmament can never be fully and thoroughly put into effect. *Barbed Wire* with Pola Negri, *The Legion of the Condemned*, and *The Big Parade* served as the founders of those ideas. . . .



Further ways in which motion pictures have developed stereotyped conceptions are suggested by the two following accounts dealing with conceptions of “formal” society:

Female, 19, white, college sophomore.—Some of my ideas about life in general, particularly those connected with association with the modern young man, were drawn from the movies. I shall never forget my disappointment upon discovering after having attended my first real grownup dinner party that all grownup dinner partners weren’t clever, distinguished, worldly-wise, and charming individuals I had thought them to be after seeing a large number of society melodramas.

Female, 20, white, college sophomore.—So long as the vehicle [film] was amorous, the cast was of secondary importance; and I would dote upon a tender love scene for weeks at a time. The height of my desire was to be of an age where fine clothes, parties, an ardent lover would not be out of place. I longed to be a society belle, and my ambitions seemed to be realized when I was able to see the objects of my fancy on the screen. Of course, I believed that life was exactly as it was painted and that at the age when I would be able to go out, life would be a sort of bed of roses.

Finally, we may give the following account which represents a protest of the writer against the distorted impressions which he declares the movies have given him. This document is given here not to incriminate motion pictures, but merely to illustrate further how influential they are in developing stereotyped conceptions of life.

Female, 19, white, college sophomore.—The impressions which the movies gave me as a child had to be torn down by experience, by reading, and by contact with other people. I thought that only wicked women smoked, that criminals were hard and inhuman and were to be dealt with accordingly. I thought that all society women neglected their children, had parties most of the time, and were untrue to their husbands. I got an idea that divorce was wrong and that people who were in love married and lived happily ever after, in a little rose-covered bungalow. The movies gave me a lot of foolish ideas which my imagination accepted as facts. I think that movies make adjustment to life and understanding of people and their problems more difficult, because of the wrong impressions which they give. The understanding should come first then the movies. Also I think that the movies overemphasize the sex interest, and cause people’s minds to dwell on sex out of all proportion to its importance.

...

MOVIES & CONDUCT

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CONCEPTIONS OF MODERN LIFE

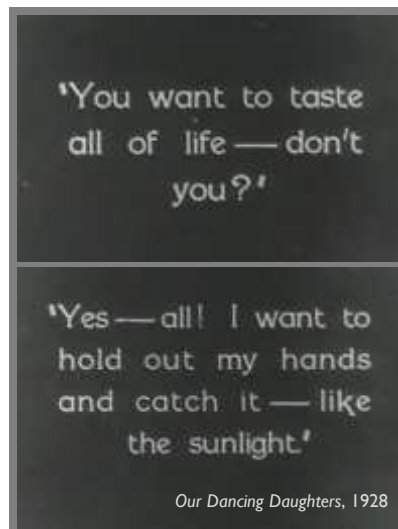
MANY motion pictures are devoted to the life of modern youth. They deal particularly with relations between the sexes but also present schemes of conduct with respect to family and community life. These forms of life are of genuine concern to many young men and young women. The schemes of conduct which they imply are likely to be shown in a romantic and entrancing manner and may frequently carry the weight of authority and correctness. Some young men and women, because of their attitudes and background of experience, regard the life of modern youth as it is shown in motion pictures not only as an “ideal” type of life but as the proper type of life. From such pictures they are likely to derive ideas of freedom, of relations to parents, and of conduct towards one’s associates. In this way motion pictures give sanction to codes of conduct and serve as an instrument for introducing the individual into a new kind and area of life. We follow with a series of experiences taken from the accounts of the writers of the motion picture autobiographies. These reveal the ways in which pictures of modern life may shape attitudes and implant ideas.

Female, 18, white, high school senior.—I saw *Mother Knows Best* a few weeks ago and thought it was great. I think that Madge Bellamy is “darling” and Barry Norton is great. He sort of gets under one’s skin. *Mother Knows Best* proves that she doesn’t always. The problem of whether mother does know best is being discussed universally just now, and this picture made me feel that maybe if daughter or son did get a word in edgewise once in a while, parents and children would not be having so many difficulties.

Male, 18, white, high school senior.—From my observations in high school, I think that the movies have played a large part in influencing the actions of what is called the fast modern of today. The high school students see these wild pictures of fast night club life then they think that it is smart to mimic these actions. I know of several cases right here in _____ high school, girls who think it is smart to smoke, drink, stay out all night at clubs that have not a good reputation. They see these things done in the movies; therefore they think that they are being very cute.

Female, 16, white, high school sophomore.—When I go to see Greta Garbo and John Gilbert in a movie I feel disgusted, because I think they are carrying it too far, but when I go to see a modern picture like *Our Dancing Daughters* I am thrilled. These modern pictures give me a feeling to imitate their ways. I believe that nothing will happen to the carefree girl like Joan Crawford but it is a quiet girl who is always getting into trouble and making trouble.

Female, 16, white, high school junior.—The movies have given me some ideas about the freedom we should have. For instance, in the pictures the wildest girl always tames down and gets the man she loves. Why not in real life? My notion of the freedom I should have, and I have it, is to go out and have a good time, but watch your step. I don't believe chaperons are necessary because if you don't know how to take care of yourself now you never will. One thing that gets my goat is to have someone constantly harping about automobile rides and they don't mean strangers either but boys you have known for years.



In another part of her document the writer of the last account states:

On the screen when it shows a party with the heroine included they are generally the life of the party and I believe that “when you're in Rome do as the Romans do.” I used to think just the opposite but after seeing *Our Dancing Daughters* and *The Wild Party* I began to think this over, and I have found out that that is the best way to act.

CONCEPTIONS OF LOVE

. . . The sample of 458 high school documents were checked with reference to the item “Did the individual get any ideas of love from the movies?” Definite indications that the writers had secured such ideas appeared in 228 documents, or approximately 50 percent. Denial was made in 13 percent of the documents, while no information appeared in 37 percent of the accounts. . . .

Let us give a few other accounts typical of those who acknowledge getting ideas and schemes of love from motion pictures.

Female, 17, white, high school junior.—I read a little and I went to the movies quite often. From both I learned about the customs of other countries and some highlights in the history of the United States. I learned something about the art of lovemaking and that bad and pretty girls are usually more attractive to men than intelligent and studious girls.

. . .

Female, 19, white, Jewish college, sophomore.—Certainly the movies have made me sharply aware of the fact that men place a high premium on the physical aspect of woman, that primarily a man's attention is drawn to a woman because of her beauty, that a large degree of the proverbial “IT” may be attained by pretty clothes, risqué clothes.

Female, 16, white, high school junior.—Love in the movies as portrayed by the stars always made me squirm because I knew nothing about it. Now I think it's all “applesauce.” When I was younger, though, these scenes always stayed longest in my mind. I'd put myself in the girl's place and try to make believe. But after all the feeling was secondhand. No wonder girls of older days, before the movies, were so modest and bashful. They never saw Clara Bow and William Haines. They didn't know anything else but being modest and sweet. I think the movies have a great deal to do with present-day so-called “wildness.” If we didn't see such examples in the movies where would we get the idea of being “hot”? We wouldn't.

Female, 15, white, high school sophomore.—Goodness knows you learn plenty about love from the movies. That's their long run. You do see how the gold-digger systematically gets the poor fish in tow. You see how the sleek-haired, long-eared, languid-eyed siren lands the men. You meet the flapper, the good girl, 'n all the feminine types and their snappy comebacks which are most handy when dispensing with an unwanted suitor, a too-ardent one, a too-backward one, etc. And believe me, they observe and remember too.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SEXES

FINALLY, let us quote two accounts which reflect the judgment of the writers concerning the way in which motion pictures present ideas or schemes of conduct between the sexes:

Female, 16, white, high-school junior.—The fellows get all their ideas of necking from the movies. The girls learn how to lead a fellow on from the movies. In that respect they are both out for the thrill. One thing I must admit. When I go to a love or romance movie, I wish some sheiky looking fellow would fall in love with me.

Female, 14, white, high school sophomore.—From my observations in high school I think that the movies have played a large part in influencing the actions of the, what is called, fast modern of today. The high school students see these wild pictures of fast night club life and then think that it is smart to mimic these actions. I know of several cases right here in our high school girls who think it is smart to smoke, drink, stay out all night at clubs, that have not a good reputation. They see these things done in the movies; therefore, they think that they are being very cute.²

MOTION PICTURES AND UNREST

. . . The sample of 458 high school autobiographies was gone over to ascertain the number of writers who wrote of having become dissatisfied with their home at some time or other as a result of what was witnessed in motion pictures. It was found that 22 percent of the writers spoke of such experiences. There was a denial of any such influence in the case of 28 percent of the writers, whereas in 50 percent of the documents there was either no information or insufficient information to permit one to make a judgment. It is interesting to observe in the case of those who spoke of having become dissatisfied as a result of witnessing motion pictures that the percentage of girls was twice as great as the percentage of boys.

Some indication of the way in which motion pictures develop dissatisfaction in the case of high school boys and girls is given in the following accounts: . . .

Male, 20, white, college sophomore.—I have compared the life shown in society pictures to the life around me and have found it very misleading. It furnishes one with the wrong ideas of luxuries and tends to make one discontented with his surroundings. In this way the movies depicting social life at first disturbed me. I wasn't satisfied with my environment; I expect too much from my parents in the way of comfort and leisure.

. . .

Female, 15, Negro, high school freshman.—Since I have gotten old enough to realize what good times really are I am dissatisfied with my clothes and my home. I see the girls in the movies going out in cars to roadhouses and to balls, cabarets, and many other things that put me in the habit of wanting to go too. Sometimes I feel like stopping school and going to work for myself so I can go any place I want, do anything and get anything. I think the young girls of today should be given privileges to go and have a good time, not all of the time, but very often so they can enjoy themselves as everybody else.

In the light of these accounts it is fitting to observe that motion pictures often present the extremes as if they were the norm. Further, it is an attractive norm. For many young moviegoers no discrimination is possible the intriguing appeal of the picture, the seemingly natural sanction which it carries, and the simple vividness of its display combine to impress its content as proper and unquestionable.

RESENTMENT OF PARENTAL CONTROL

ON occasion the dissatisfaction represented by the accounts given may take a more acute expression in a form of some rebellion against parental restraints. The rebellious tendencies may merely exist in the form of feelings of acute dissatisfaction, or they may break over into some actual form of complaint and rejection of parental control. In the 458 high school documents there is definite indication of such rebellious feelings at some time or other as a result of motion pictures in 12 percent of the writers. Denial is made of such influence in the case of 31 percent of the writers, while no information is contained in the documents of the other 57 percent of the writers.

² The repetition of this entry, ascribed to two different young people (see p. 4, "Male, 18"), is in the original text. [NHC]

In order to give meaning to this type of influence, to show how the movies, in other words, may induce in certain individuals feelings of rebellion against parental control, the following cases are presented:

Female, 19, white, college sophomore.—Another thing that movies are responsible for, I am sure, is my resentment at times of too much parental restraint especially in the matter of how late I stay out and where I go. Young daughters in films seem to have such a gay time traveling from night club to night club either ignoring their parents' wishes or being blessed with the kind that do not object, and I am afraid at times I think I should have as much liberty as they seem to have. Very recently I saw *Dancing Daughters* which in a way strengthened my ideas stated above, as the girl in it who was held down too much by her parents turns out badly, while the one who is "the modern" and is allowed full freedom ends up the best.

Female, 16, white, high school junior.—Of course the movies made me want to rebel against my parents' supervision. They still do. My ideas of the way to behave come some from the movies, but more particularly, when it came to treatment of boys, from my older brother. I think that girls should be treated the same as boys by their parents. They should tell their folks where they're going, but shouldn't be kept on a strict time limit.

...

Female, 17, white, high school senior.—After seeing a wonderful picture full of thrills and beautiful scenes, my own home life would seem dull and drab. Nothing unusual would happen and I would become dissatisfied and wish I could run away. My clothes were never smart enough and I felt that my parents were far too strict with me. The girls in the motion pictures nearly always had far more privileges than I.

Male, 17, white, high school senior.—One great desire that has risen from the movies has been the desire to own a car and to be able to go anywhere, anytime that I wanted. The movies have made me dislike restraint of any kind. They have also made me dislike work.

...

Finally we may quote an account which presents another angle to these feelings of dissatisfaction with one's home and one's mode of life. The account stresses the element of temptation usually involved in such experiences.

Female, 16, white, high school junior.—Although moving pictures have many good points, they also have their bad. They have suggested many temptations to me. Sometimes they have made me want to be a very bad girl, and do things that people would find hard to approve of. They have given me the idea I'd like to leave home, and go dance in some cabaret. I imagine I'd like the life in some night club. But upon reflection I have always decided that these things were not the best things to do, so I banished all thought of them from my mind.

...

TRAVEL AND COLLEGE

... Pictures treating such themes are of noticeable influence in developing desires, respectively, to visit other lands or to go to college. Writers of the motion picture autobiographies speak very frequently of having been so affected. We may confine ourselves to the mention of a few typical cases.

A college girl whose early life was spent in a small Arkansas town declares:

Female, 16, white, college sophomore.—Life in a small town such as mine was not so thrilling after I passed the age of twelve, and oftentimes I went to the Friday night show and sat in a daze, picturing myself in the places I saw on the screen. My world was very small, for up to this time I did not know what existed outside the small circle I had been traveling in. When I would see the great open spaces of the desert and the cities with great buildings, my heart would yearn to break away from the surroundings I had always lived in and to get out into the world and see what it was all about.

...

FILMS

cited in students'
"motion picture autobiographies"

1916	<i>The Yellow Menace</i>
1918	<i>Hearts of the World</i>
1920	<i>Humoresque</i>
1920	<i>Pollyanna</i>
1920	<i>Over the Hill to the Poorhouse</i>
1923	<i>The Ten Commandments</i>
1925	<i>Ben-Hur</i>
1925	<i>The Big Parade</i>
1927	<i>King of Kings</i>
1927	<i>Seventh Heaven</i>
1927	<i>Wings</i>
1927	<i>Barbed Wire</i>
1928	<i>The Racket</i>
1928	<i>Street Angel</i>
1928	<i>The Legion of the Condemned</i>
1928	<i>Mother Knows Best</i>
1928	<i>Our Dancing Daughters</i>
1929	<i>Wild Party</i> (sound)
1929	<i>The Broadway Melody</i> (sound)

We follow with some accounts which show the role of motion pictures in engendering or re-enforcing desires to go to college. The accounts, incidentally, call attention to the very attractive way in which college life is usually depicted and suggest the kind of stereotyped picture of such life that motion pictures help to form.

Female, 20, white, college sophomore.—When I was about twelve years old, college pictures had a particular fascination for me. I had a beautiful mental picture of college life and an ambition to be allowed some day to attend one. I used to get the biggest thrill when I saw pictures of young people having such glorious times at college, entering into athletics, being in dramatics, going to “proms,” and having midnight escapades. After these shows I used to go home and study with renewed vigor so that I might get to college all the sooner. Alas, college is not all that I saw it to be on the screen or even imagined it to be in my wildest dreams. But that only proves that my imagination and my emotions overshadow my sense of reality.

...

AMBITIONS

... It would seem from the autobiographies that motion pictures are of quite minor significance in the formation of ambitions since indications of such an effect appear in less than 7 percent of the accounts. We shall content ourselves with listing a few of the descriptions of this effect as they appear in some of the documents.

...

Male, 20, white, college sophomore.—One ambition which I got from the movies has become a part of my daily life. In some circus picture (I forget the title) a few years ago, I saw Joe Bonomo perform some wonderful feats of strength. At the time I was a physical weakling, suffering from lung trouble which it seemed could never be cured. The picture fired my ambition to become a strong man. I do not intend to say that the movie was responsible for that desire, for I had always wanted to be strong. But that picture was the event which made me decide to do something to realize my ambition. . . .

Female, 16, white, high school junior.—I can remember very distinctly that when I was thirteen years old I saw a moving picture in which the heroine was a very young, pretty girl. In school she had taken a business course and after working hard she had been promoted to the position of private secretary. To this very day I would like to be a private secretary. I used to sit and dream about what my life would be like after I had that position. For quite some time after I had seen another picture in which the girl was a very talented dancer, my greatest ambition was to be a dancer. Then at other times I’ve wanted to be a motion picture star, but that ambition didn’t last quite as long as the other two did.

...

INSPIRATION AND THE DESIRE TO BE GOOD

... In addition to such pictures³ which are probably consciously designed to implant definite kinds of attitudes, more casual pictures may call forth incidental responses of this nature in certain moviegoers. Some understanding of how this or that picture may fortuitously stir the desires of individuals and awaken within them resolutions towards good conduct can be inferred from the following accounts:

...

Female, 19, white, college sophomore.—I remember a certain picture of a little boy running away and who got into a good deal of trouble. Ever since that picture I held my tongue every time I felt like saying, “I’m going to run away.” A picture like that should be shown to every child because in his life every child gets the idea that he “wants to run away from home.”

Female, 19, white, college sophomore.—When I was about fifteen years old, Mary Pickford and her curls in little girl parts attracted me. I saw *Pollyanna*, and cried and responded to her emotions as though it were myself. I can remember vowing to myself that I would be real good, too, and make everyone like me for my politeness and self-effacement. I lived with her through her trials and tribulations in orphanages and in poverty, and I’d be so delighted at a happy ending for her. I was so impressed because she played the parts of girls as old as I was, and I could appreciate their feelings.

...

³ Motion pictures “which have a ‘propagandistic’ character,” e.g., those produced by religious denominations for student viewing.

FAMILY AFFECTION AND LOYALTY

A MORE distinct appreciation of the role of motion pictures in fortifying moral ideals and in inducing individuals “to be good” should be conveyed by the series of accounts presented below. The experiences described have been evoked by sentimental pictures centering around the theme of family affection.

...

Female, 16, white, high school junior.—I remember once I had had trouble with my mother. I said that everything that was done in the house I had to do. I was very downhearted and thought how cruel they were to me. That night I went to the movies. I do not remember the name of the picture but it hit the nail on the head. It concerned a girl who did not get along with her family and one who did. The one girl was so good that everyone loved her and her life was very happy. The other girl was not happy and people did not like her because she was not sweet, good, and kind to her mother like the other girl. This made me think that I was just like the girl who was not good. I always wanted to be liked by everyone and to be happy so I went home that night with the intention of being as good as possible to my mother and of trying to make family life as happy and pleasant as possible both for myself and mother and father. It has been a good many years since I saw this picture and I am still trying to be that kind of a girl. I have succeeded some, but not enough yet.

...

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

MOTION pictures centering around religious themes are the other kind which seem effective in supporting schemes of moral conduct, and inducing intentions and vows to follow such schemes. Let us turn our consideration to some accounts which show this sort of influence.

...

Female, 17, Negro, high school junior.—After I saw *Over the Hill [to the Poorhouse]* I made up my mind to always respect my parents and try to do all I can for them. It was a sad picture, but I think it was a great one to teach children to obey and respect their parents. *The Ten Commandments* was another great picture. The man in the play broke all the commandments and to make things worse killed his mother although he didn’t know it. It made me want to try to keep the commandments as best I could and to think about the next world. I think the movies are wonderful for if you would only try to do the things some of them try to teach, I think you would never go wrong.

...

... The feelings of inspiration and the accompanying vows “to be good” may, and perhaps usually are, shortlived, although this remark should not cause one to forget that in certain cases the individual may maintain a lasting resolution. Usually, as the memory of the picture is lost the accompanying intentions disappear unless they are thoroughly assimilated into a life-organization which is in general possible if re-enforced by other influences. . . .

DIFFERENCE IN INTERPRETATION

... Very frequently one can detect a distinct difference in the interpretation of the same kind of picture on the part of elders and adolescents. A picture which on the part of one may be regarded as chiefly salacious may carry a distinct moral to others. An interesting example was *Our Dancing Daughters*, featuring Joan Crawford. Many adults in conversation with the author impressed upon him their judgment that this picture was harmful and would likely lead to immoral attitudes and thoughts in high school boys and girls. These informants included a number of high school teachers, an editor of an educational magazine, and two college professors. In the experience of a number of high school boys and girls, however, the picture tended to emphasize other values.

Some of these descriptions are of experiences which are illuminating:



Our Dancing Daughters, 1928

Female, 14, white, high school sophomore.—I should say that movies are taken at their value according to the modern standard. For instance, *Dancing Daughters* was modern as could be and everybody (I mean the students) liked it. It portrayed petting and the evil consequences of drink and of taking people at face value. In other words, it was an educational picture, if one could take the example to heart, clothed in modernism.

Female, 17, white, high school senior.—The last show that I am going to mention is the show that so accurately pictured the viewpoints of the younger generation *Our Dancing Daughters*, starring Joan Crawford. In Joan Crawford the true spirit of the younger generation was shown. No matter what happened she played fair. She even lost her man, and in the eyes of the older generation they think that when a modern young miss wants her man back she'd even be a cutthroat, but Joan Crawford showed that even in the crisis like that she was sport enough to play fair! And "Play Fair" is really the motto of the better class of young Americans, and even in the best products there is always a blemish so why must the younger generation be so shamefully thought of. I hope many of these women who are scandalized at the actions of the modern miss saw that show and, if they did not change their beliefs after seeing it, well, then, it does not mean that the movie was a failure, but that they are the failures, not to recognize a truth so obvious.

...

Another instance of what some may regard as an unexpected response is given in the following account of a girl's reaction to the picture *The Wild Party*. The reader may recall from instances previously cited [in earlier chapters] how certain individuals experienced impulses towards passionate love from this picture. The following account represents a different angle of interpretation the selection from the picture of a different feature.

Female, 18, white, high school senior.—Cinemas have indeed strengthened me in my ties of friendship. My girl friend and I were raised in the same community. We never quarreled or fought as the other children of our age did. As we grew older we began to drift apart. We were forced to separate when we reached high school age. She left the city and I did not keep up the correspondence, although she would write often. When I saw *The Wild Party* I determined to write more often and "stick by her" as a pal.

...

CONCLUSION

...

It is easy to see, for one thing, that many kinds of life presented in motion pictures are shown in an attractive and appealing way. This is likely to be true particularly of those forms of life which are of momentous concern to young men and young women, those to which they look forward. In particular the life of modern youth as presented in the movies is full of romance and adventure, freedom and excitement.

In view of the likelihood of many young men and women being latently disposed to such possible experiences, that movies of this type should implant schemes of conduct is to be expected. Those affected may extract ideas as to their rights, ideas of what they come to believe they are privileged to enjoy. They may become dissatisfied or discontented with their own community control, may indeed actually rebel. Such results are likely to occur where the discrepancy is greatest, i.e., where one's own life seems very drab and confined in contrast to the pleasures and freedom of that portrayed on the screen. From this point of view, one can understand the seemingly greater effect of this sort in the case of girls, rather than in boys, and in girls of the poor and immigrant families than in girls of wealthier and more emancipated families; awakened desires and family control are greater in the first instances than in the latter instances.

...

MOTION PICTURES AND YOUTH: THE PAYNE FUND STUDIES (1933)

Getting Ideas from the Movies

Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children

The Social Conduct and Attitudes of Movie Fans

The Emotional Responses of Children to the Motion Picture Situation

Children's Attendance at Motion Pictures

How to Appreciate Motion Pictures

Motion Pictures and Standards of Morality

Children's Sleep

Movies and Conduct

The Content of Motion Pictures

Movies, Delinquency, and Crime

Boys, Movies, and City Streets