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COURTNEY ANDREE

Broncho Billy and the Problem of the Male Movie Fan

ABSTRACT: This essay examines the decline of the male movie fan in the early 1910s in relation to one of silent film's first serial franchises—G. M. Anderson's Broncho Billy series. Much has been written in recent years about the rise of the female fan during this period, but few scholars have sought to explain why studios and other media so actively courted the female spectator in favor of the male audience that had sustained early hobbyist and fan publications. Looking at a Broncho Billy–inspired shooting from 1914, I argue that the decline of male fans (as subjects to whom the film industry at large, and Essanay Studios in particular, appealed) was intimately related to anxieties over feeble-mindedness, mental illness, juvenile delinquency, and adolescent violence.

KEYWORDS: Essanay, G. M. Anderson, male fan culture, violent crime, juvenile delinquency

While the image of the swooning and star-struck female fan is strongly ingrained in the cultural imaginary, historians have been careful to point out that movie fandom was never a distinctly female preserve. In their excavations of early fan culture in the silent era, Kathryn Fuller and Shelley Stamp have posited that the feminization of movie fandom was not a foregone conclusion. As Fuller argues, “the gender and social class of the movie fan became hotly contested issues among film producers, theater owners, magazine publishers, and audience members” throughout the mid- to late 1910s.¹ Admittedly, the composition of audiences would undergo a marked change in this period as the film industry began to court a female demographic that had been underrepresented in film audiences during the nickelodeon era. As the decade unfolded, the film industry and fan publications came to operate as if there were a female box-office majority, with *Photoplay* going so far as to claim that the American film audience was over 75 percent female by 1924.² In line with such a shift, the content and mode of address employed by fan publications and newspapers began to change noticeably in the mid-teens, as they increasingly appealed to the female fan with forms of gendered discourse, female-targeted tie-ins, and serializations in

ladies' magazines. While industry publications and fan magazines marginalized male fans more and more, the male fan did not simply vanish. The industry continued to originate successful western heroes that appealed to men, women, and children alike—among them, Tom Mix, William S. Hart, and Harry Carey, whose careers bridged the late teens and 1920s.

Although film historians have convincingly charted the progressive feminization of movie fandom in the silent period, and even gone so far as to highlight the increasing unease surrounding male participation in fan culture, the question remains: *why* was the male fan discouraged at this point in time, and why was his participation in fan activities increasingly cast as aberrant? Film magazines were far from the only site where male fandom was contested in the 1910s; film studios, lawmakers, psychologists, educators, and social reformers also worked to establish the image of the male fan as an aberrant and unpredictable force—a force that needed to be neutralized and taught to respect the dividing line not only between film fantasy and the realities of everyday life but also between potentially harmless childhood idolization and violent, adult imitation. The male fan was not only cast as anomalous as the decade proceeded but was often depicted as “diseased” and “backward,” and hence as a direct threat to national well-being.³

But, if the male *fan* was reprimanded for his excesses, the male *star* was also often held up as a negative exemplar in the late 1910s and the 1920s—acting as a potentially destructive influence that might lead male spectators astray. Mark Lynn Anderson has drawn attention to the dynamics of aberrance in the star scandals of Wallace Reid, Fatty Arbuckle, and Rudolph Valentino, making the argument that male deviance in particular became an “object of both public fascination and scientific inquiry that produced a specific transformation of the star-audience relation in this historical period.”⁴ Anderson suggests that “male deviance posed an important set of problems for a public institution such as the cinema,” since female deviancy was “constructed differently and often understood in the literature on deviance within the more circumscribed sphere of the domestic.”⁵ While female fans became increasingly mobile and vocal during this period, their crimes were often of a very different order than their male counterparts—sexual and reproductive in nature, rather than violent. As Hilary Hallett has suggested, film reformers shifted their focus in the mid-1910s to examine “how film content and stars incited criminal behavior among young women”—in particular “problems associated with women’s immorality.”⁶ Both Hallett and Anderson point to the distinct discourses surrounding female and male deviancy and desire in this period; I would like to probe this division between the male and female fan here as I turn to an examination of G. M. “Broncho Billy” Anderson and Essanay Studios.



Fig. 1: Broncho Billy playing card (issued by the Movie Souvenir Card Co., 1916)

Anderson was one of the very first “picture personalities” or silent film stars, cofounding Essanay with George K. Spoor in 1907. After moving to New York to attempt to break into the vaudeville and theater circuits in the late 1890s, Anderson picked up a series of minor roles under Edwin S. Porter at Edison and would appear in the *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). He would go on to direct a number of films for Vitagraph and Selig before approaching Spoor in February 1907 with a proposal that they start a new studio in Chicago.⁷ Anderson was among the first to originate a successful and long-lasting screen character, a character that would be developed and refined in the period from 1908 to 1915—concurrent with the move from the nickelodeon to the picture palace, and the period when the industry would court a middle-class female audience as never before. His Broncho Billy was a gun-toting western bandit with all of the trappings, but it is important to note that this character was almost always reformed in the end (particularly in later films). As Richard Abel suggests, Anderson’s “good badman” was “an outlaw with enough conscience to finally turn away from crime and lead an honorable life.”⁸ Under Spoor and Anderson’s leadership, Essanay was one of the first studios to actively publicize its stars, and its publicity machine was in full operation by 1911–12, distributing

stories to newspapers, fan magazines, and industry publications that modeled male fan behaviors. These early press materials encouraged young men (and adolescents in particular) to believe that it might be possible for them to find employment in the film industry, while also working to establish the authenticity of Anderson's cowboy character by fabricating a myth that he was in fact almost identical in real life to the "cowpuncher" that he played on screen.⁹ The stories in *Essanay News* (the studio's house organ) also emphasized Anderson's openness to interacting with fans at the studios in Chicago, Illinois, and Niles, California (fig. 1).

While these press materials indicate Essanay's early interest in male audiences, their promotional strategies would change markedly in the period from 1914 to 1916.¹⁰ Making an ever greater appeal to women, Essanay began to promote the Broncho Billy films in high-circulation women's magazines, including a series of tie-in promotions with *Ladies' World* in 1914 and 1915. They also became increasingly reliant upon many of the marketing strategies innovated by the women's serials. Beyond the changing placement of advertisements and tie-ins in female-centered venues, Essanay worked to establish the boundaries of male fan behavior as they modeled appropriate fan responses and castigated the excesses of male fans in their press materials. Rather than distributing stories about young men who had dropped by the Niles studio uninvited only to be offered a job, as they had in the early years of the Broncho Billy franchise, Essanay began to explicitly state that they no longer desired amateur input and did not wish to receive studio visits from eager young men. They also worked to disassociate Anderson from his onscreen persona by emphasizing that he wasn't a real-life bandit who always wore cowboy garb and carried a pistol, but instead was just a "normal" guy.

The dissociation of Anderson from his good badman character came at a time when censorship was on the rise nationally. The central impetus behind the censorship movement came from the deep-seated belief that films presented material inappropriate for a mass audience, an audience that was presumed to include children and other mentally and emotionally suggestible individuals. Westerns and crime films came under closer scrutiny than most other genres for their tendencies to glamorize and illustrate the methodologies of crime; both genres continued to be blamed for their supposedly negative influence on juveniles, appearing most prominently in the Payne Fund studies undertaken in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It is also likely that the western's popularity with working-class and adolescent demographics spurred many of these accusations. While Essanay and Anderson learned to adjust their narrative content in response to public opinion, the Broncho Billy films remained subject to local censorship; scenes depicting violence, gambling, and carousing were frequently cut.¹¹

In spite of Anderson's attempts to adjust content in the Broncho Billy shorts to appease local censorship boards, and although the films often staged the bandit's punishment and reformation in the end, his character inspired two separate shootings (one a murder) taking place in 1914 and 1916.¹² Both crimes, committed by adolescent boys, play upon elements of Broncho Billy's onscreen persona and concretely illustrate the problems posed by male fantasies of *becoming* and living out the onscreen actions of popular stars. Coverage of the 1914 Doylestown murder interestingly encapsulates many of the arguments then circulating about the mental and emotional aberrance of the male movie fan, explicitly describing "Broncho Billy' Miller" as mentally deficient because of the excesses of his fantasy life and fan activities and as a "defective" who should have been confined to an institution while he was still a child.¹³ The Miller case, which was publicized nationally over the wire, could not have escaped the notice of Essanay.¹⁴ In light of these acts of Broncho Billy-inspired violence, it is difficult to read the changes in content and studio publicity that took place at this time as a simple, economically motivated power play to attract female audiences. While economic considerations were undoubtedly influential, we can also track Essanay's attempts to negotiate the boundaries of acceptability with censors and safeguard against charges that their pictures were capable of inspiring acts of delinquency or murder. In response, Essanay not only sought to discourage the excesses of the male fan but also attempted to court a more refined female audience that was capable of elevating the western and all that it connoted.

COURTING THE LADIES

Aside from the problematics of male fandom in Essanay's early years, the Broncho Billy franchise worked to appeal to female audiences. This shift in strategy became apparent in 1914–15 when Essanay began an aggressive advertising campaign in *Ladies' World*, one of the largest circulation women's magazines in the nation. After *Ladies' World* helped launch the first successful serial narrative, *What Happened to Mary?*, in 1912, Essanay worked with the magazine on the existent Broncho Billy series. The magazine promoted two contests in 1914 and 1915 for *The Tell-Tale Hand* and *When Love and Honor Called*, respectively. Frank Blighton wrote the stories for both films and had also written *What Happened to Mary?* for Edison in 1912–13.¹⁵ As David Kiehn notes, "*Ladies' World* readers were invited to submit their interpretation of a missing paragraph in the story after reading the rest of the tale in the magazine," offering female fans an opportunity to participate in the construction of the Broncho Billy series, though within a set of narrow parameters established by the studio in advance.¹⁶ According to Shelley Stamp, contests such as these allowed women to experiment with the

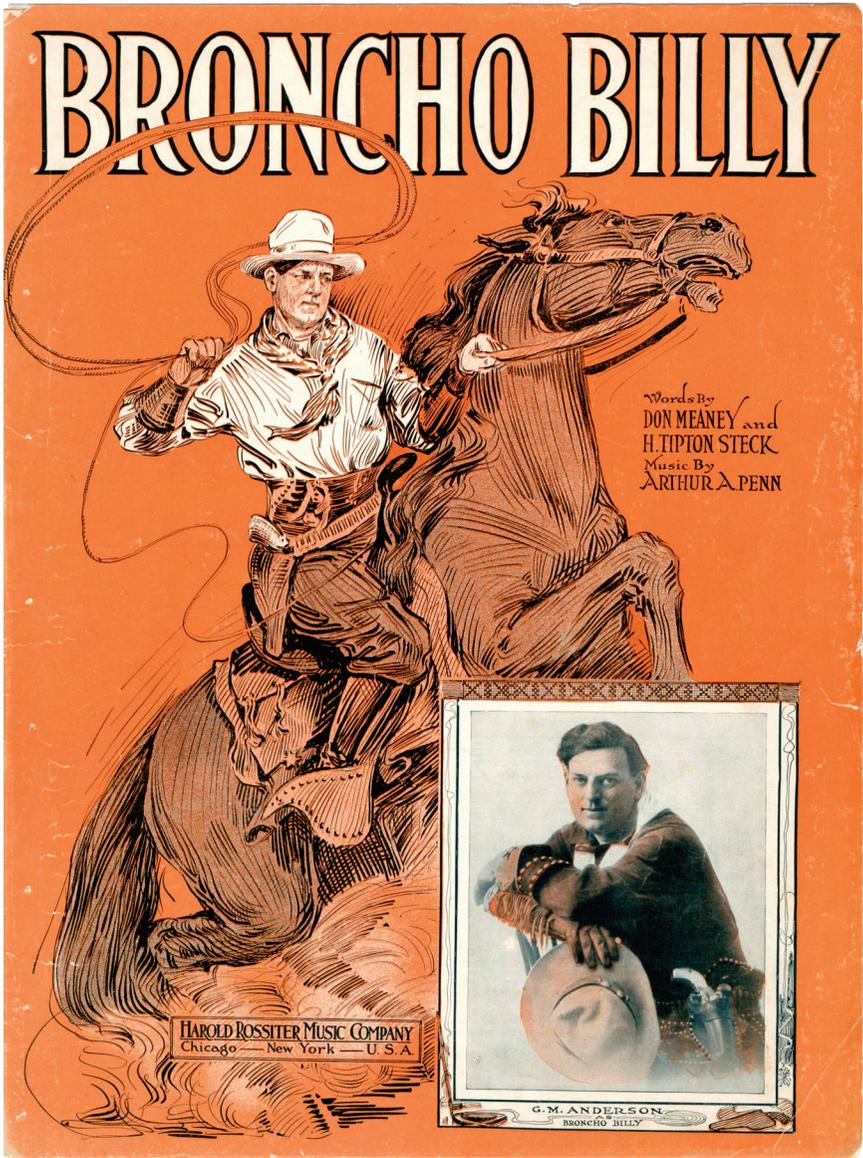


Fig. 2: “Broncho Billy” musical score, with lyrics penned by Essanay’s publicity man Don Meaney. (Published by Harold Rossiter Music Co., 1914. From the collections of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences)

serials in a controlled way, inviting female “viewers to fantasize within a serial’s given diegetic parameters, encouraging them to integrate fictional characters and situations into their daily lives.”¹⁷ Essanay also sponsored a series of beauty contests in markets across the nation, including a large national contest open to unmarried female telephone operators in the fall of 1914.¹⁸

Beyond advertisements and tie-ins with ladies’ magazines, Essanay also adopted many of the publicity strategies used in the promotion of serial heroines, with studio press releases increasingly devolving into an itemization of the harrowing realities faced by Anderson, his female costar Marguerite Clayton, and the Niles crew as they filmed the series (fig. 2). In “Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body,” Jennifer Bean has argued that “if we examine the institutional framework of the burgeoning star systems, with its behind-the-scenes interviews, evidential photographs, and personal testimony, we find the contours of a larger discourse of believability built to enhance the realism of onscreen performances, particularly the difficult feats” of the female serial heroine.¹⁹ We clearly see a similar tendency in the Essanay press releases for the Broncho Billy films starting in early 1914, which attempt to exploit and imitate the discourses surrounding serial heroines such as Pearl White and Helen Holmes.

These press releases foregrounded the real risks that Anderson and Marguerite Clayton faced in the making of the Broncho Billy films and relied upon the visceral effects of the danger and thrills that they described. The *New York Dramatic Mirror* reprinted several of these Essanay-distributed pieces in 1914, including one story that detailed how Anderson “narrowly escaped death during the taking [sic] of *Broncho Billy’s Bible*,” after falling over a cliff while filming a “thrilling hand-to-hand struggle on the edge of a precipice for the climax of the picture.” While Anderson is discovered alive, clinging to a root several feet below, and he springs back to retake the scene minutes later, the press release emphasizes how narrow his escape was and details his bodily injuries, which included “painful lacerations on his hands.”²⁰ A second article describes an episode where Anderson “escaped serious accident while depicting the hair-raising adventures of ‘Broncho Billy,’” narrowly evading death when a dynamite charge exploded prematurely in the staging of a mine explosion.²¹ Similarly, the *Syracuse Journal* describes an episode where Anderson was confronted with a bunch of rattlesnakes in the filming of a Broncho Billy short and was compelled to blow off their heads “himself” with “unerring and none the less willing aim.”²²

But Anderson was not the only actor in the western company to be positioned as fearless and intrepid. After Marguerite Clayton’s arrival in late 1913, *Essanay News* distributed a series of stories that revealed that their female star was also facing great risks on set.²³ One such piece was republished in

the *Anderson (SC) Daily Intelligencer* in July 1914, entitled “Marguerite Clayton Risks Life.” In the article, we learn that Clayton was “lowered down into a chasm from the highest point of a mountain side,” to an eagle’s nest over one hundred feet below. The article proceeds to remind readers that they “must not forget this thrilling and hazardous deed,” since “this is the first time it has ever been attempted by a girl, and will undoubtedly cause a sensation.”²⁴ Here, readers are made aware that Clayton is a young *woman* facing great danger. Later articles from *Essanay News* would similarly highlight Clayton’s exploits. In late 1914 while on the set of *Broncho Billy and the Claim Jumpers*, Clayton sprained her ankle in her “eagerness to lend more excitement to a scene” as she “drove the stage coach up to a land office, and without waiting to step down from the high box, jumped ten feet to the ground.”²⁵ In March of the following year, the *Washington Times* reported that Clayton had once again “risked her life in a wild ride” in an Essanay photoplay when her “horse ran away.” As the *Washington Times* reporter notes, “It was sheer luck that she was not thrown out, as the horse, once started, could not be halted.”²⁶ All of these stories point to Clayton’s athleticism and bravery as well as the supposed threats that she faced while making the Broncho Billy pictures.

By the time the company hired Marguerite Clayton to star opposite Anderson, the female-based serial was already on the rise, with *What Happened to Mary?* appearing in 1912, and *The Adventures of Kathlyn* in 1913. As the serial queens established the agility and nerve of female stars (and characters), Essanay repositioned Clayton in more active roles that allowed her character to overstep the boundaries of traditional femininity in certain instances. Even as they shifted Clayton within the Broncho Billy westerns, they also worked to reform their good badman by all but eliminating his banditry and criminality from many films. Many of the later films no longer focused on his reformation and turn from crime. Instead, he was cast as an upstanding hero from the very beginning, working to counteract the bad guy in order to enforce law and order.

Broncho Billy and the Greaser (1914) offers a useful case in point, as Anderson’s character is presented as an instrument of law and order from the beginning, immersed in the structures of conventional society. He is entrusted to carry the mail from frontier town to frontier town and is shown aiding women, the aged, and the weak. Here, the threat comes from an outsider, not Broncho Billy himself or other bandits, but a “half-breed” who insults Clayton’s character. She assumes an extremely active role in the film, and while costumed in trousers, Clayton first drives a wagon and then mounts a horse to ride out in search of assistance. In essence, she is the instrument of Broncho Billy’s rescue, as she brings a posse of townspeople back to his house to defeat the treacherous half-breed, who had trussed up Anderson like a serial heroine and is taunting



Fig. 3: Frame from *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914). A trussed-up Anderson awaits the assistance of his female costar Marguerite Clayton, who rides to the rescue

him with an enormous knife (fig. 3). One cannot help but notice that Anderson is placed in an extremely passive role in the film, where he is the *rescued* instead of the *rescuer*. While he attempted to defend Clayton's honor in the opening scene by reprimanding the half-breed, she in fact comes to save his life—a rather uneven exchange in the scheme of things.

EARLY BRONCHO BILLY AND THE APPEAL TO THE MALE FAN

While Essanay worked to counteract male fan culture from about 1913 onward, in the first years of the Broncho Billy series, the studio encouraged the input and interest of a body of male fans and amateurs with its publicity materials and studio practices. Beginning in 1912, Essanay submitted a series of stories to the press that modeled a form of fan behavior that might easily be viewed as somewhat invasive and excessive in succeeding years, presenting multiple stories of men who took it upon themselves to visit the Niles and Chicago studios in the hopes of meeting or being employed by their favorite star. They also presented a series of stories that concentrated on Essanay's tendency to hire amateurs and adolescent film enthusiasts, including a fourteen-year-old scenario writer.²⁷

Essanay's publicity department distributed a story in 1912 that demonstrates this attempt to support the interests and activities of male fans. Variations of the story were published in a number of outlets across the nation, including the *New York Dramatic Mirror* and *Chicago Tribune*. The *Mirror* version noted that "the Essanay Company [was] *proud* to entertain" a Texas rancher who had traveled to the Chicago studio in the hopes of meeting Broncho Billy (emphasis added).²⁸ While the Texan was "keenly disappointed" to learn that the "greatest brand of Westerner" he'd ever seen, Broncho Billy, was not in town, the Essanay crew took him in hand, and "the delighted ranchman was conducted throughout the big plant, and viewed with wonder the mammoth studio activities and the process of developing, drying, and assembling of film. After a hearty lunch Mr. Shelby departed for the Yards with Mr. Anderson's address in his pocket, and enthusiastic over the wonders of the Essanay plant and motion pictures in general."²⁹ This passage is illuminating, if only because it explicitly encourages active fan behavior and does not preclude the possibilities for direct interaction with Anderson himself or the filmmaking process. Instead of depicting Shelby as a nuisance or burden, the article details that he is treated to a personal tour of the studios, fed a nice lunch, and then entrusted with Broncho Billy's address. Most remarkable of all, it is not assumed to be unusual in the least that this man has traveled thousands of miles in order to meet with his onscreen hero—instead, the rancher is rewarded for his obsession.

Visits to the studios in Niles, California, where Anderson's western company was based, appear to have been equally common. According to Essanay's press releases and the *Essanay News*, the governor of California was a frequent visitor; the *Chicago Tribune's* cartoonists dropped by; and actors, tourists, and pleasure seekers from nearby San Francisco often stopped off at the studios.³⁰ One young architect even landed himself a job after he drove through the area with his father. After he encountered the western unit in the process of filming a Broncho Billy picture, "young Emory Johnson . . . was fascinated. Fascination led to desire, desire led to inquiry, inquiry led to a job, and a job to a position as an actor, but Emory has proved to be so natural and excellent in his work before the camera that within one week he has successfully played the leading part."³¹ Here, the acquisition of an acting job is presented as a simple project for the man who "desires" and "inquires."

It was not unusual for Anderson to hire young men on the spot, or even sight unseen, as he did when he was working to round out the studio's baseball team. The team's star infielder Roland H. Totheroh recounted that "a telegram came in from San Francisco. Broncho Billy Anderson . . . asked me in this telegram to join the Essanay film group baseball team. . . . I showed the telegram to my mother."³² Dropping out of high school, Totheroh took off for Niles, not

realizing that he was also going to be made into an actor and eventually a cinematographer.³³ When he wasn't attempting to stack the studio's baseball team with some of the state's finest high school players, Anderson was still hiring adolescent boys to join the Essanay forces. His cinematographer, Jesse Jerome Robbins, had been a teenaged manager of a nickelodeon in Middletown, Ohio, before Anderson hired him and would become an integral part of the Essanay team for years to come.³⁴ Beyond the recruitment of adolescents for acting and production roles, Anderson is known to have accepted story ideas and scripts from teenaged boys, as the *San Francisco Call* recounts in a 1911 story that details how he purchased a scenario from fourteen-year-old Taylor Graves for five dollars.³⁵

This is not to suggest that Essanay was only aiming to attract a male (or adolescent male) audience at this time. While women were not specifically targeted until early 1914, Essanay worked to establish the suitability of Broncho Billy films for children much earlier, emphasizing their moral overtones and basis in Christian values. It is possible that the studio viewed this aspect of publicity as a preemptive strike against those who considered the films too violent for children or capable of inspiring juvenile delinquency. The Essanay publicity department distributed two articles in 1913 that showed Broncho Billy's bravery, strength, and unique ability to act as a role model. In the stories, a little girl came through a harrowing illness and went under the surgeon's scalpel by calling upon his image, and a little boy gathered the strength for his spinal operation by applying to the example of Broncho Billy. However fantastic the tone of these stories, their emergence at this time seems indicative of a certain degree of uneasiness felt over the place of the child viewer in relation to the content of the Broncho Billy films. Essanay attempted to prove the merits of these pictures by emphasizing Broncho Billy's strength under duress and his ability to respond appropriately to pain and danger. It was the Broncho Billy persona that these children clung to when they lay on the operating table.

The first story, entitled "'Broncho Billy' Makes Injured Boy Brave," appeared early in 1913 in the *Marble Rock (IA) Journal*. The story was supposedly inspired by a letter from the boy's father, a Montana "frontiersman." The boy "was stirred by G. M. Anderson's deeds of valor in the plays and longed to do something brave," like Broncho Billy. He soon got his wish when the wagon he was driving was overturned after the horses bolted, and he suffered a broken leg and injured spine. When asked if he was afraid before his operation, "which might mean death," young Billy replied, "'Broncho Billy' wouldn't be afraid," and so he resolved not to be afraid either.³⁶ The second story was distributed later that year, appearing in multiple venues across the country, including the *Ogden (UT) Standard* and the *New York Clipper*. The article described the trials suffered



Fig. 4: G. M. Anderson appears out of cowboy character in this souvenir postcard from the mid-1910s. (Author's personal collection)

by little six-year-old Dorothy Williams, who was only able to undergo the ordeal of two operations and a bout of pneumonia because “the strongest appeal to her courage was that of her hero-worship of Broncho Billy, whom she had followed with appreciation and delight at the ‘movies,’ and had intuitively recognized his manly characteristics, especially his magnificent courage.” The piece proceeds to describe her fears and struggles against the “ether death” that she faced as she was fitted with the “black cap” that administered the drug, stripped, and placed on the operating table. Her fears could only be quenched by her mother’s appeal to the example of Broncho Billy, which worked to instantly calm the young girl.³⁷

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

While Essanay continued to uphold the image of Broncho Billy as a role model and inspiration for child viewers, over the same period the studio also began to model appropriate male spectatorship and establish a set of boundaries for male fans. By the mid-1910s, Essanay had begun the effort to separate Broncho Billy,

“the character,” from G. M. Anderson, “the man,” in their promotional materials (fig. 4). A widely syndicated press release from the second half of 1913 addresses both of these issues at once, with a headline that proclaims: “Broncho Billy Has Gun Only in Films.”³⁸ The piece was distributed along with a photo of Anderson and a line drawing of a cartoon cowboy comically firing off a pair of six-shooters into the air. In the piece, Anderson laments that “there are persons silly enough to believe I am the sort of person I appear to be in the pictures. I never carried a gun in my life outside the films and I’d run out of my shoes if there was any real shooting going on. At heart I’m as gentle as a kitten yet strangers all think I am a bandit.”³⁹ He then goes on to discuss his theatrical background and his life prior to Broncho Billy, effectively enforcing the separation between himself and his character.

The article also works on a second level as Essanay attempts to establish the boundaries of fandom. Anderson notes that “everywhere I go I find the kids know me. . . . I don’t mind the kids, but it is tiresome to have grown men come up and try to talk to me just because they have seen me in the pictures.”⁴⁰ While he considers it permissible for young boys and girls to follow him around, Anderson reproaches adult male fans for their excessive admiration and for believing that they “know” him. In the space of this brief article, Anderson also works to shut down amateurs’ hopes for attaining a place with Essanay, and certain stardom, noting that though hundreds of hopefuls “come to us and offer to work for nothing . . . we engage experienced actors only.” He adds that the ranches out west are “almost depopulated because all the cowboys want to be motion picture actors. . . . They all want to be leading men.” While Essanay would repeatedly and explicitly discourage the hopes of young men who hoped to appear on the silver screen beginning in 1913, they allowed both *Movie Pictorial* and *Motion Picture* magazine to visit their hiring department in Chicago and publish features on “extra” girls’ prospects at Essanay. In *Movie Pictorial*’s May 1914 piece, Emily Brown Heininger describes how the hundreds of hopeful young girls who swarm around Essanay are “all” allowed to leave behind a headshot and their address, and “nearly *always* these applicants get their chance” before the camera (emphasis added).⁴¹ In *Motion Picture*’s aptly titled “The Extra Girls of the Essanay Company—Girls, Girls, Girls!” from 1915, the author passes by male directors, crew members, and leading men in her tour of the studios, as she tells of how the young actresses she meets (quite easily) broke into the movies by following studio protocol. Significantly, she never encounters a *male* extra, leaving the reader with her impression that “everywhere were girls!”⁴² Denise McKenna has argued that this impulse to overlook the male amateur was common in this period, and she suggests that in spite of evidence that men were also attracted to film work in large numbers, “the male extra has been overshadowed by the

image of young women thronging the studio gates for a chance to break into the movies.”⁴³

From 1913 on, Essanay heavily emphasized that the studio was no longer open to collaboration with (or to the potentiality of hiring) male amateurs. Fan magazines, trade publications, and newspapers worked with studios to discourage amateur activities at this time by publishing a number of pieces that addressed or exposed the realities of entering the film industry. Several studios, including Essanay, Selig, and Mutual, addressed the activities of the male fan or amateur in particular. While Essanay’s publicity department continued to distribute stories dealing with how many of their female stars had been discovered (whether from the extra pool, the hotel lobby, or the department store), and although they would go on to conduct a series of beauty contests that earned the winners a spot in the movies, studio executives began to vocally discourage participation from male amateurs.⁴⁴ In 1914 and 1915, both Spoor and Anderson would speak out on this matter. Anderson’s 1914 interview was distributed through newspapers nationally and was issued in response to a letter that he received from a young man who hoped to become a film star. Anderson firmly, yet kindly, discouraged this hope as he reminded the boy (and the reader, simultaneously) that motion-picture acting “requires an unusual amount of talent” and the “hardest sort of work”—in brief, only a special class of individuals were cut out for it.⁴⁵ He closed with the warning that “the young man who has an idea that he is picking out a soft job for himself by entering the motion-picture field is making a mistake of his life.”⁴⁶

George K. Spoor was not as politic in his statement to the *Chicago Tribune* in April 1915, where he called the alumni of acting schools “dupes” and informed the public that he wished to “make known that no person who comes to us from one of the schools will be employed in any circumstances.”⁴⁷ In this piece the Essanay studio head offers up a tale of a “travel stained” and ungainly youth by the name of Carl Possert who burst past the guards at the Chicago plant, only to demand a meeting with the head of employment. Possert, a recent graduate of a phony acting school in Milwaukee, came to Chicago with just the clothes on his back, convinced that his talent and training would land him a place with the Essanay company. Once he slipped past the studio guards and forced his way into the office of the man in charge of hiring, Possert is subjected to mockery that he is too obtuse to recognize; informed that somebody has made a “sucker” out of him; and sent back to his hometown on foot—a mere ninety-mile walk—only to get his job back at the lunch counter where he had previously worked. It is not enough that Essanay turned the young man away and caused him to abandon his dreams of acting, they also felt the need to publish his story as a warning in a newspaper with one of the largest circulations in the

nation in order to dissuade other “dupes” like Possert from making nuisances of themselves in the future by showing up at the studio.

Essanay’s act of public shaming was hardly a new tactic in 1915; Mutual had convinced the editors of the *New York Dramatic Mirror* to reprint a ridiculous letter from an overzealous male fan as early as November 1913. Mutual’s publicist submitted the young man’s letter to the gossip columnist with his assurance that this communication was received by Lawrence Griffith, the chief director for Mutual Film Corp. Before reprinting the young man’s letter verbatim, complete with dozens of misspellings and grammatical errors, unspeakable delusions, *and* the young man’s full name, the editor jokes that “if it weren’t for your word, Phil, we’d say ‘there ain’t no such animal.’” Clarence B. Jones’s dreams of acting are not only discouraged, but he is effectively made into a laughingstock by the studio to which he applied.⁴⁸ In the piece, the young man attempts to sell himself as a “brigh [*sic*], Intelligent Active young man out of his teens” who “could do well at acting and dramatic [*sic*] parts of plays.” He goes on to write (always describing himself and his qualifications in the third person):

And yet he would do well in comedies. He has taken up a course in Photo Play writing of N.Y. National Institute of N.Y. and done very well in acting in a play. He can change his face quickly for expression. When dressed up like a young lady of 25 he can take the place well in a play. He has a disposition similar to a young lady. He [*is*] very comic and of a good disposition 5 ft 2 in tall, weigh [*sic*] 110 pounds, blue eyes and pretty dark brown Hair full rudy [*sic*] face which carries a smile by the name of Clarence B. Jones.

From even this short excerpt, his atypical physical, mental, and sexual traits become apparent. Out of his teens, yet only five foot two inches tall and 110 pounds, Jones clearly has an unusually small stature. Jones’s experiences dressing up “like a young lady of 25” and his “disposition similar to a young lady” also work to set him apart. By reprinting his letter in full, and the studio’s and editors’ reactions to it, it becomes possible to make an example of Jones that would likely act on other (less ridiculous) *Mirror* readers, and perhaps inject a dose of reality into the male fan’s fantasies.

A brief notice in the pages of *Moving Picture World* from that same year offers a similar depiction of a young film enthusiast, highlighting the teen’s physical and mental differences. In its headline, the editors announce that “Another Boy [*Is*] Lost” and proceed to describe him in detail, with his “rather small face, thick lips, [*and*] dark hair combed straight back over his head.” The boy, who is fifteen years old, has only reached a height of five feet, and weighs only seventy-five pounds. Like Clarence B. Jones, he has been engaging in

amateur activities from his home for quite some time, “endeavoring to write some photoplays, and had completed one called ‘The Wreckers.’” His family seeks his safe return but fully expects that he has run away to try to secure a position as an actor. They note that while “he might try to sign some other name” when seeking work, “he is a very poor writer.” It seems that they are hoping that his lack of intellectual ability and his poor writing skills will lead to his apprehension and safe return.⁴⁹ Similarly, his atypical physical qualities are also emphasized.

While Essanay was not alone in its attempts to discourage visits from amateur actors and eager fans, it was one of the first studios to enforce a policy that barred the submission of scenarios by nonprofessional writers. In 1915 Essanay began to publicize this move, and a piece rationalizing the new policy appeared in the *Mirror* in March of that year and in scores of other publications across the nation. Victor Eubank, part of the studio’s publicity team, informed readers that “no more scenarios from amateurs are wanted. The policy of the company now is to pick out the best short stories in the current magazines and the best standard novels and buy the rights to them. Expense is no object to the company.”⁵⁰ By emphasizing their reliance upon professional, published sources, Essanay frames this change in policy as a move that will help them to remain competitive in the market and escape their associations with mass culture. Armed with these more established literary sources, Essanay expected that “they should soon be turning out the best pictures on the market.” As Essanay turned away from lowbrow culture and the dime-novel tradition, we also see them moving progressively further away from the western genre and the single-reelers that had brought the studios their early success.⁵¹ Concurrently, Essanay also began to distance itself from the young, *male* working-class audience that had so enthusiastically supported the Broncho Billy and Snakeville series in the early years—the selfsame demographic that has been historically associated with the dime novel, as Michael Denning notes in *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*.⁵² By the time that Essanay made the decision to stop accepting story submissions from the public, it had become common practice for the western film (much like the previous generation’s dime novel) to be scapegoated for its ability to inspire young men to fantasize about and take up criminal activities. As Essanay began to hire well-known fiction writers (including George Ade) to pen lavish dramas and comedies, the features produced at the Chicago studios took on greater importance and came to claim the majority of company resources.⁵³

CAGING THE MONSTER: PATHOLOGIZING THE MALE FAN

While Essanay promotional pieces framed studio visits as a means of fan participation until late 1913, most studios had clearly begun to realize that they had created a monster of sorts—perhaps never imagining the onslaught of eager fans who were unable to distinguish the proper boundaries between themselves and the filmmaking process. What the fans who visited the Niles studios and the amateurs who intended to break into the business had in common was an insufficient recognition of the odds that were stacked against them. The studios and industry press increasingly held up the male amateur or fan who was locked into his fantasies of attaining stardom or becoming like his favorite star as a negative example, as was the case with Clarence B. Jones, Carl Possert, and others. While the “harmless” Clarence B. Jones was publicly ridiculed by filmmakers and the industry press alike, Essanay offered no public statement or comment on the Broncho Billy–related shootings that occurred in the mid-teens.⁵⁴

On New Year’s Day 1915, the editors of the *Bucks County Gazette* of Bristol, Pennsylvania, opined on a local murder committed back in September by a sixteen-year-old nickelodeon operator whose obsession with the western had reached a fever pitch, and they retroactively branded the young man as a “mental weakling” and a “defective” in the wake of his crimes. After ruining himself and his business by only exhibiting the rough and tumble cowboy films that he loved, “Broncho Billy” Miller attempted to flee to the mythic west depicted in his favorite Broncho Billy single-reelers, and packing a suitcase “with things that would come in handy on the plains and the great desert, [he] then went with a spirit of bravado to the railroad station.”⁵⁵ In the process, he shot and killed Constable Henry A. Kolbe with his Colt revolver (the same model wielded by Anderson in his films) after the lawman tried to apprehend him for passing off a forged check.

While national coverage of the case focused on Miller’s obsession with Broncho Billy and his excessive fan practices, local media took a different approach. Over three months after the shooting, the editors of the *Bucks County Gazette* used Miller’s case to lobby for the detection and incarceration of the feebleminded, recognizing that by not making “any effort to discourage his eccentricities at a period when they could have been corrected,” by “laugh[ing] at and with him,” by not taking enough interest in his activities and anomalies, and by not providing sufficient “home restraint,” the community and his family were responsible for encouraging his delinquent proclivities.⁵⁶ The editors repeatedly express the “certain[ty] that he is a defective” and lament that he was allowed to drift and “imbibe wrong impressions of life very early,” perhaps largely from the films that dominated his life. The editorial not only expresses an

interest in the plight of the feeble-minded but also a deep concern for the safety of the community at large, arguing that “the community in self-protection must provide for the education of the defective. . . . this is necessary as a preventive of crime and even of race deterioration.” But, special schooling alone is not sufficient in their outlook, as “institutional training is necessary” in order to remove this “serious menace to society.”⁵⁷ They close the piece by arguing that if the measures they have recommended are adopted, “there will be many less Millers when the time comes, with hope always present of their final extinction.” Many eugenicists of the period shared this writer’s belief in the ultimately correctable nature of society’s ills through the removal of the “defective” individual and the prevention of them passing on their genetic traits to a future generation (often through enforced sterilization, which was on the books in several US states by the mid-1910s).

One of the first pieces of coverage on the Miller murder went out over the wire on September 22, 1914, to be picked up nationally in such news outlets as the *Decatur (IL) Daily Review*, the *Indianapolis Star*, the *New Oxford (PA) Item*, and the *Frederick (MD) News*. The headline that ran with the short article in the *Decatur (IL) Daily Review* proclaimed that “A ‘Broncho Billy’ Turns Murderer” and went on to argue that Miller engaged in the crime because of his “‘wild west’ proclivities.”⁵⁸ As this first batch of stories indicates, Miller combines aspects of both the overzealous amateur and the obsessive movie fan, as he runs his nickelodeon into the ground by screening only his favorite films and comes to assume that the scenes presented in the films are a reality that he can enter into if he leaves his life behind, packs his bags full of appropriate “western gear,” and hops on a train to the west.

This is not to suggest that the 1914 murder perpetrated by Miller was the only crime or infraction connected to Anderson’s character. Broncho Billy was also named as the inspiration for a 1916 shooting in Chicago (even though Anderson had made his final Broncho Billy picture for Essanay the previous year). In this case, a fifteen-year-old boy wounded a Native American vaudeville actor outside of the thespian’s boardinghouse.⁵⁹ The *Chicago Tribune* claimed that the boy was “inspired by ‘Broncho Billy’ Movies” to “take his trusty gun” and engage in a game of cowboys and Indians—wielding an all-too-real gun. The initial coverage of the shooting took on a jocular tone, as the author details how the boy planted a lead slug in Chief Sendehoa’s left side, attributing the crime to Broncho Billy’s influence:

“Broncho Billy” Anderson, whose acquaintance he made via the movies, is his notion of what a man should be, and the redskin infested plains of border fiction are his ideal of a *mise en scene*

[sic] for a regular career. . . . Lacking anything better to do, Newton donned his cowboy togs yesterday, took his trusty shotgun, and went forth in search of adventure. Somewhat to his surprise, he found it.

While this piece is interesting for its staging of race relations, it makes light of the Chicago teen's crimes and downplays the dangerous possibilities of adolescent fantasies.

Anderson's successors—William S. Hart, Tom Mix, and Harry Carey—would also be blamed for the violent and foolish actions of their young male fans in the years to follow, with all of their names appearing repeatedly in the Payne Fund studies undertaken by Herbert Blumer and Paul Cressey.⁶⁰ Both Broncho Billy and William S. Hart were held to be the inspiration for fourteen-year-old Frank Oresto's schoolroom gunfight in May 1920. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* reported that "Germantown's 'Bill Hart'" held his classmates hostage with a cap pistol, before aiming it at his teacher's heart. After the gun jammed, the school's janitor wrested it from his grip and took the boy to the police station next door.⁶¹ A fourteen-year-old boy's 1920 disappearance from his hometown of Columbia, Missouri, was also attributed to his obsession with Hart, and his parents noted that his "over-active imagination ha[d] been a source of wonder and worry" for them since he caught "the wild west bug." With his "wild" and uncontrollable imagination, the boy had become out of touch with reality and neglectful of his work.⁶²

The coverage of the "Broncho" Miller case was far from the only site where the activities of the male movie fan or amateur were called into question in this period. Throughout the 1910s and early 1920s, the activities of the male fan were increasingly castigated, as film studios, lawmakers, psychologists, educators, and social reformers worked to establish the image of the male fan as a potentially unpredictable and uncontrollable force. Because of his excessive interest in the movies and his active fantasy life, the male fan was often linked to forms of mental, emotional, and sexual aberrance—and like the delinquent, he was often shown to be an immature and somewhat backward adolescent boy. Censuring and pathologizing male fantasy and the accompanying imitative and obsessive behaviors made it possible to establish and police boundaries of appropriate male spectatorship. It is important to distinguish the behaviors of the male fan, which were considered to be vastly different from the more consumer-driven (and sexual) forms of imitation undertaken by the female fan. While the female fan sought to don the fashions worn by her favorite starlet and longed to be the object of ardent love and desire, it was feared that the male fan would imitate the violent actions of the screen cowboy or criminal and reenact

the crimes presented in the movies. In many ways, the image of the deviant male fan came to overlap with that of the deviant male star by the 1920s, as star lives and star scandals became impossible to suppress. In either case, the deviant male was held to have strayed from psychological and behavioral norms—and acted as a problem figure that the film industry was forced to contend with. As Mark Lynn Anderson carefully notes, “Hollywood’s continual acknowledgment of its own social effects in this period, together with its attempts to educate its audiences about public life and social conditions,” meant that the industry assumed some responsibility for male deviance and fan infractions.⁶³

Interestingly, Miller’s case encapsulates many of the debates that were in circulation at the time concerning the connections between juvenile crime and feeble-mindedness, the cinema’s ability to influence an abnormal or “sub-normal” mind, and the activities of the male movie fan.⁶⁴ William Healy, the pioneering criminologist and psychiatrist, devoted his career to the study of juvenile delinquency and was one of the first researchers to recognize a link between adolescent crime and the lure of the movies. In 1915, Healy argued that “the effect of moving pictures in starting criminalistic tendencies . . . is almost always along such conspicuous lines that it is not necessary to cite cases. It is nearly always a boy who is affected, and the impulse started is an imitative one. He proceeds to get weapons and cowboy clothes and wants to make off for the plains.”⁶⁵ In *The Individual Delinquent*, his analysis of “defective and unsatisfied” adolescents, Healy highlights an “excessive interest in moving picture shows” as a major symptom of juvenile delinquency (occurring in a relatively large number of the cases he analyzes).⁶⁶ Healy includes a number of case studies from male movie fans who have turned to a life of crime—some in order to support their habits. One Albert S., who is described as having a “curious mixture of [physical] conditions,” “goes much to moving picture shows” and is described as wanting to go to Texas to learn to ride a horse because of what he’s seen in films.⁶⁷ In his notes, Healy highlights the boy’s abnormal emotional and mental states:

He cries upon the slightest provocation, and at times seems silly and even simpering. Except for an unusually small mouth, his features are good. . . . It is interesting that it was the weak and silly features of this boy in the court room, in spite of his fairly good features, that led directly to his case being further investigated. On the mental side we also found contradictions.⁶⁸

Healy emphasizes the physical characteristics of the boy here, as if he expected to find more external markers of criminality and mental deficiency written on Alfred’s body. Like the atypical forms of Clarence B. Jones and Carl Possert, Alfred’s body can also be read for signs of his deviancy.

Most strikingly, Healy points to an essential division between the male and female fan in *The Individual Delinquent*, noting that it is “nearly always” a young man who is affected by the movies in this fashion; it is a young man who becomes violent in response to, or in imitation of, what he has viewed on the silver screen, and it is a young man who is censured for his excessive behavior. The problem is framed as one of identification, and Healy was far from the only intellectual to try to grapple with and define the differences between male and female spectatorship and the deviant actions of male and female fans in the 1910s and 1920s. Understandings of this gendered divide would persist over the following decades, and by the time that Alice Miller Mitchell published *Children and Movies* in 1929 the difference between male and female youth spectators would still be recognized:

The scenes which make the greatest appeal to the boys are usually those which satisfy some desire which is in them. The scenes which appeal most to the girls are those which correspond to but apparently do not satisfy some desire they have. . . . [T]he girls only long for the things that they see there. The boys like to see acts of bravery because it makes them feel that they are participating in the brave deeds. The girls like to see acts of love-making because it makes them wish that they could be so loved. The boys imagine themselves in the place of the hero; the girls wish that they were in the place of the heroine. The boys seem to live in the pictures more than do girls.⁶⁹

Mitchell depicts girls being placed in a position where their desires are unfulfilled, and where they cannot perfectly identify with either the hero or heroine. This supposes that females engage in a more passive “longing” or desiring mode of spectatorship: “The girls only long for the things that they see there,” while the boys enter into the fantasy and believe that they are riding along with the cowboys on screen.

Essanay recognized quite early on that there was a discernible difference between the desires and actions of its male and female fans. Both Mary Ann Doane and Miriam Hansen have examined this problem of female desire in recent decades, and they forge a connection between female spectatorship and consumerism. In *The Desire to Desire*, Doane suggests that the feminine position is based in a “curiously passive desiring subjectivity” where the spectator desires to inhabit the world occupied by the female star:

In her desire to bring the things of the screen closer, to approximate the bodily image of the star, and to possess the space in

which she dwells, the female spectator experiences the intensity of the image as lure and exemplifies the perception proper to the consumer. The cinematic image for the woman is both shop window and mirror, the one simply a means of access to the other. The mirror/window takes on then the aspect of a trap whereby her subjectivity becomes synonymous with her objectification.⁷⁰

In Doane's outlook, the female subject position is an uncomfortable—and in many ways inescapable—one. Miriam Hansen, in *Babel and Babylon*, extends Doane's argument when she describes a passive, desiring female subjectivity that is "defined by narcissism and a fixation on appearances."⁷¹ She continues to suggest that "the paradox of women's simultaneous agency and subjection turns upon the logic of reification, the consumer's mimetic empathy with the commodity." The female spectator is welcomed by the film industry because of this "passive desire," a desire that is closely bound up with consumerism and a desire that might be sanctioned by the studios and fan publications (and managed within appropriate boundaries).

While there were obviously economic reasons for shifting the focus to a female audience from 1914 onward, it is evident that Essanay assumed that there was a fundamental difference between the activities and agency of female and male fans. Male fans, like Broncho Miller, were viewed as being more likely to imitate the activities of the hero, which included participation in crimes, holdups, and shootings, whereas female fans were viewed as being more likely to engage in studio-supported activities, such as beauty contests, promotions in ladies' magazines, and the purchase of tie-ins. The crimes perpetrated by female fans were typically of a very different nature than those of their male counterparts and were grounded in the imitation of appearance and sexuality rather than violent action. The *New York Dramatic Mirror* reported on the case of two girls who had travelled around California in August 1914 impersonating Lillian and Dorothy Gish. After having a "very joyous time" leading the "high life" and "beating hotel bills," the girls were apprehended.⁷² Their crime of impersonation placed them in a luxurious setting—like what they had seen onscreen, or the places they imagined the Gish sisters to inhabit, and made it possible for them to wear clothes and makeup like their idols. The following summer reports surfaced of another impersonator—this time a "young woman with a penchant for romance and adventure [who] has been posing across the continent as Blanche Sweet." All went well for the girl until she was detected in Spokane, Washington, and there her spree ended.⁷³ In this instance the young woman had not committed any crime beyond that of fraudulently identifying herself as her favorite star.

In spite of these female crimes of impersonation, it does not seem surprising that Essanay would wish to court women audiences from 1914 on—an audience that is unable to perfectly identify with the screen hero and his acts of violence, an audience with increasing purchasing power, and an audience that is (presumably) willing to engage with its favorite stars in sanctioned ways and venues. More importantly, this female fan was considered to be incapable of offering the same level of physical threat as a transgressive, fantasizing, role-playing male fan, such as Broncho Miller; the female fan's deviance and impersonation played out in very different ways. By working to pathologize the excesses of male fans, Essanay and the industry sought to enforce rules of normal male spectatorship and establish boundaries that restricted male fantasy to the physical space of the theater and the temporal space of childhood. But despite industry efforts to discourage the deviant male fan and to restrict his activities, western stars would continue to bear the blame for their fans' misdeeds for decades. Hence, though Anderson left Essanay in early 1916, his name would continue to be linked to the crimes of adolescent males in years to come.

Notes

1. Kathryn Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 133–34.
2. This *Photoplay* article (“Does Decency Help or Hinder?,” November 1924, 36) and the mounting significance of the female audience is discussed in greater detail in Gaylyn Studlar, “The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women’s Commodified Culture in the 1920s,” in *Silent Film*, ed. Richard Abel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996); and Hilary Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).
3. For a discussion of fandom and deviance in a more contemporary context, see Joli Jensen, “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization,” in *The Adoring Audience*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992).
4. Mark Anderson, *Twilight of the Idols: Hollywood and the Human Sciences in 1920s America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 4.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Hallett addresses the rise of female audiences and the mass migration of women to Hollywood in the late 1910s and early 1920s in *Go West, Young Women!*. While the young women who resettled in California numbered over ten thousand annually throughout the early twenties, their “movieitis” is largely sanctioned by “the industry’s most prestigious fare,” which “became a feature-length story picture centered on a female star” (14).
7. For more details on Anderson’s early career, see Andrew Brodie Smith, *Shooting Cowboys and Indians: Silent Western Films, American Culture, and the Birth of Hollywood* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2003); and Robert S. Birschard’s entry on G. M. Anderson in the *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (New York: Routledge, 2005).

8. Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences, 1910–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 69.
9. *Ibid.*
10. This account ends with Anderson's resignation from *Essanay* in February 1916 and the folding of the Western Company at Niles. *Essanay News* would cease publication the following year.
11. Censorship of the Broncho Billy films was particularly common in international settings. E. J. Fleming notes that in Quebec "over two dozen of the *Broncho Billy* westerns . . . were denied distribution for everything from 'too much gunplay' to being 'immoral and criminal.'" Deniz Göktürk has also located German records that indicate that the Broncho Billy films were subject to local censorship, as "violent scenes generally tended to be cut." See Fleming, *Paul Bern: The Life and Famous Death of the MGM Director and Husband of Harlow* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 332n13; and Göktürk, "Moving Images of American in Early German Cinema," in *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 96.
12. The attribution of these shootings to the Broncho Billy name seems all the more remarkable since Anderson had emphasized both his good badman's sentimentality and strong moral code from the beginning. In the first Broncho Billy film, *The Bandit Makes Good* (1908), Broncho Billy is a captured bank robber who retrieves the money that he has stolen, receives a pardon, and becomes sheriff's deputy. See Lane Roth and Tom W. Hoffer, "G. M. 'Bronco Billy' Anderson: The First Movie Cowboy Hero," in *Back in the Saddle: Essays on Western Film and Television Actors*, ed. Gary A. Yogy (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998), 12. Nonetheless, as Andrew Brodie Smith has noted in *Shooting Cowboys and Indians*, Anderson did adjust the content in his pictures with censors in mind. By 1912, "as trade journalists and exhibitors began to complain about the sensationalism and sexual suggestions in western stories featuring Indians and Mexicans, Anderson discontinued using them as central protagonists" (58). Smith also suggests that the Broncho Billy character was largely shaped in response to "moral crusaders within and outside the industry—who were disturbed by depictions of crime, violence, and interracial sex in cowboy and Indian pictures" (134).
13. "Broncho Miller—A Lesson," *Bucks County Gazette* (Bristol, PA), January 1, 1915, 1.
14. One of the actors in Anderson's western company would also receive a slightly sinister gift in late 1914—a thirteen-inch-long Colt revolver, sent by a male admirer who was convinced that "the one [Boardman] used in his acting looked too small for his hand." See "Boardman Gets Pistol," *Essanay News*, November 22, 1914, 1.
15. David Kiehn, *Bronco Billy and the Essanay Film Company* (Berkeley, CA: Farwell Books, 2006), 177.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 120.
18. "Phone Girl Photoplay Is Awaited by Millions," *Essanay News*, November 21, 1914, 1.
19. Jennifer Bean, "Technologies of Early Stardom," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer Bean and Dianne Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 407.
20. "Anderson's Escape," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, February 18, 1914, 34.
21. "Gossip of the Studios," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, January 14, 1914, 73.
22. "Snakes Dreaded by Western Players," *Syracuse Journal*, March 14, 1911, 12.

23. Throughout 1914 and 1915, *Essanay News* began to publish a number of stories based on the brave exploits of their female stars—including one from November 21, 1914, that details how Beverly Bayne “narrowly escaped death when attacked by a deadly copperhead snake while taking a scene” (1). The December 19, 1914, issue tells of how Betty Brown successfully “broke” a bronco pony on the Essanay grounds at Niles (1), while the July 31, 1915, issue featured stories about Ruth Stonehouse’s death-defying leap from a “high window” and a piece on how Nell Craig had taught all of the girls in the Chicago studio how to fence (1).
24. “Marguerite Clayton Risks Life,” *Anderson (SC) Daily Intelligencer*, July 12, 1914, 13.
25. *Essanay News*, December 19, 1914, 1.
26. “Behind the Screen,” *Washington Times*, March 25, 1915, 6.
27. Kiehn, *Bronco Billy*, 58.
28. “A Stranger from Texas,” *New York Dramatic Mirror*, August 7, 1912.
29. *Ibid.*
30. “Film Flashes,” *San Antonio Light*, December 13, 1914, 27; “Art and Reality Have Grim Meeting,” *Ogden (UT) Standard*, February 5, 1914, 8; “Essanay News,” *New York Clipper*, April 12, 1913, 9; “Essanay News,” *New York Clipper*, February 15, 1913, 16c.
31. “Essanay Closeups,” *New York Clipper*, December 20, 1913, 14.
32. Kiehn, *Bronco Billy*, 95.
33. Totheroh would go on to act as cinematographer for the western company, filming several of Chaplin’s films for Essanay before moving to Hollywood. He would continue filming Chaplin throughout the Mutual years and into the final years of the comedian’s career.
34. Kiehn, *Bronco Billy*, 11.
35. “The Moving Picture Drama as Played in Wild Marin,” *San Francisco Call*, September 3, 1911, 4.
36. “‘Broncho Billy’ Makes Injured Boy Brave,” *Marble Rock (IA) Journal*, March 23, 1913, 3.
37. “‘Broncho Billy’—The Man, the Actor,” *New York Clipper*, August 16, 1913, 14.
38. I have located variations on the press release in the *Lincoln (NE) Daily News*, *Ogden (UT) Standard*, *Eau Claire (WI) Leader*, *Syracuse (NY) Journal*, and *Kansas City (MO) Star*.
39. “Broncho Billy Has Gun Only in Films,” *Syracuse (NY) Journal*, September 29, 1913, 11.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Emily B. Heininger, “‘Extras’: How They Look, Act, and Talk,” *Movie Pictorial*, May 23, 1914, 19.
42. Rhea I. Kimball, “The Extra Girls of the Essanay Company—Girls, Girls, Girls!,” *Motion Picture*, September 1915, 98.
43. Denise McKenna, “The Photoplay or the Pickaxe: Extras, Gender, and Labour in Early Hollywood,” *Film History* 23, no. 1 (2011): 5–19.
44. The *Ogden (UT) Standard* offers a brief anecdote on Essanay’s Helen Ferguson in the December 17, 1917, issue, noting that she “visited the Essanay studio every day for four months before she was given a chance to work in a picture, even as an ‘extra’” (28). Helen’s persistence and passiveness were ultimately rewarded, as was the case with several of Essanay’s other screen heroines. Ruth Stonehouse tells the story of her discovery and “determination” in *Movie Pictorial* in May 1914. After being a “background woman for

weeks and weeks," she describes how she had "grown fearfully discouraged when the part came to [her] quite by chance one day" (12). The discovery of Anderson's costar Marguerite Clayton follows a similar pattern, as "quite by chance one day, she picked up a home-town paper" and answered an ad for a "girl to do 'odd bits of work' for a moving picture company" (*Day Book*, July 24, 1914). The repetition of the phrase "quite by chance" by both Stonehouse and Clayton is striking and emphasizes their patience and passivity. Essanay's male stars do not simply come up from the extra pool or follow the same paths to discovery—though Augustus Carney was discovered as he was assisting Anderson in a department store.

45. "Notes Written on the Screen," *New York Times*, August 9, 1914, 7.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Spoor would also offer a lengthy statement on his (and Essanay's) policies on hiring in a *Photoplay* piece from June 1916 entitled "Mail Order Genius." While Spoor mentions the "thousands upon thousands" of male and female hopefuls, his unsuitable test case is male: "If an applicant is unsuitable, is the school going to tell him he must not spend his money for tuition as he has no chance to succeed? I rather think not" (128). The case of Possert appears in "Movie Schools Trap Gullible by Fake Claims," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 16, 1915, 15.
48. "Gossip of the Studios," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 26, 1913, 36.
49. "Another Boy Lost," *Moving Picture World*, May 10, 1913, 574.
50. "With the Film Men," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, March 24, 1915, 25.
51. This turn away from the dime-novel tradition is curious, if only because Anderson's character was taken (purportedly without permission) from the story papers. Peter B. Kyne's early Broncho Billy tale appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, as William K. Everson notes in *American Silent Film* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 241.
52. Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso, 1987).
53. This change in company focus was made even more apparent when the Niles studio was disbanded (unbeknownst to Anderson) via telegram on February 16, 1916. He would tender his resignation shortly thereafter.
54. While the 1916 shooting is interesting in its own right, and while the Broncho Billy name was attached to this crime as well (with the *Chicago Tribune* claiming that the boy was "inspired by 'Broncho Billy' Movies" to "take [up] his trusty gun,"), it is unclear whether or not the local press embellished this linkage between the act of delinquency and the popular film series.
55. "Doylestown Man Kills Officer as He Awaits Train," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, September 22, 1914, 3.
56. "Broncho Miller—A Lesson," *Bucks County Gazette* (Bristol, PA), January 1, 1915, 1.
57. *Ibid.*
58. "A 'Broncho Billy' Turns Murderer," *Decatur (IL) Daily Review*, September 22, 1914, 11.
59. "Kit Carson of Cass Street Shoots a Regular Indian," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 10, 1916, 1.
60. Paul Cressey's *Boys, Movies, and City Streets* was never completed for the series, though portions of the "lost" manuscript have been published in *Children and Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy*, ed. Garth Jowett, Kathryn Fuller, and Ian

Jarvie (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Herbert Blumer's *Movies and Conduct* (New York: MacMillan, 1933) offers several case studies from adolescent males who were inspired to violence by their screen heroes. One eighteen-year-old boy recalls being inspired by a Tom Mix picture to shoot his blank pistol at a neighbor, who sustained powder burns (27).

61. "Pupils, Cowed by Gunman, Watch Him Shoot Teacher," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), May 7, 1920, 1.
62. "Adventure Is Sought by a Columbia Boy," *Columbia Missourian*, December 15, 1920, 1.
63. Anderson, *Twilight of the Idols*, 4.
64. These debates would play out in a diverse array of sources in the decades prior to the Payne Fund studies, from the 1914 "Motion Picture Commission Hearings" in the US Congress, to G. Stanley Hall's *Educational Problems* (1911), and in the works of psychologists, such as Dr. A. T. Poffenberger, "Motion Pictures and Crime," *Scientific Monthly* (1921): 336–39.
65. William Healy, *The Individual Delinquent* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1915), 309.
66. *Ibid.*, 136.
67. *Ibid.*, 667.
68. *Ibid.*, 666.
69. Alice Miller Mitchell, *Children and Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 124.
70. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 32–33.
71. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 121.
72. "Arrest Girls Impersonating Majestic Stars," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, August 19, 1914, 22.
73. "Studio Gossip," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, August 11, 1915, 26.