CHANGING THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S MEDIA IMAGES: THE EMERGENCE OF PATTERNS IN A NEW AREA OF HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

By Carolyn Kitch

This interpretive, historiographic essay surveys the past twenty-five years of historical research on images of women in American mass media, a growing field of inquiry in communication history. It places this work into four categories of scholarship – the stereotypes approach, the search for alternative images, the examination of imagery as ideology, and the "reading" of images as polysemic texts – that provide a temporal framework for discussing the trajectory of critical perspectives on the subject. It argues that significant patterns have already emerged in this relatively new area, and that these trends illustrate larger issues in historical research. Indeed, the range of content revealed by this survey is less significant than the array of theoretical models that, when considered together, point to important concerns underlying all media history scholarship: how we define our mission as scholars, what counts as historical evidence, and who controls the meaning of mass-media imagery.

When academic research focusing on gender began to appear across disciplines in the early 1970s, one of the first clear themes was that of the representation – the verbal and visual imagery – of women in American mass media. Since then, scholars doing historical work in several fields have turned their attention to this subject. This article surveys the past twenty-five years of published work on the topic in order to search for patterns in the emergence of a new historical subfield that is likely to be of increasing importance to media historians in the twenty-first century.

The works discussed in this article comprise four categories of scholarship: (1) the "stereotypes approach," in which historians have documented oppressive media imagery and contended that such images "reflected" real options for women; (2) the search for alternative representations of women inside and outside mainstream media; (3) examinations of the function of media imagery within cultural and political ideology; and (4) semiotic analyses of media images as texts with multiple meanings. These categories, particularly the middle two, overlap in content and time, and works fitting their descriptions do not always fall neatly into particular periods. Nevertheless, these four types of scholarship provide a temporal framework for discussing changing historical perspectives on women's representation in American mass media.

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It is important to note at the start of this survey that a considerable amount of the work has been done in the humanities, *outside* communication programs. Furthermore, some of it is by researchers who are not primarily "historians," but rather critics (particularly of literature and film) doing historical research, scholars who have viewed and reviewed mass media through their own particular disciplinary lenses. The resulting body of work in this subfield is thus richly interdisciplinary though perhaps atypical of much "mass communication research."

Such interdisciplinarity characterizes each type of scholarship discussed here. What is most significant about these categories is that they are distinguished not by discipline or even by content, but rather by theoretical standpoint. In only a quarter-century, scholars have brought fundamentally different, and often competing, assumptions to the task of assessing the meaning of women's media imagery in various eras, and through time. These assumptions raise important questions for all communication historians, concerns about who controls the meaning of mass-media imagery, what we consider to be reliable historical "evidence," and what we see as the purpose of our scholarship.

The evolution and interplay of critical viewpoints in this particular historical subfield, in other words, makes it useful as a case study of how historical scholarship changes in general. These patterns also suggest the extent to which the work of media historians, especially in an emerging area, is influenced by the intellectual climate of our own time, by prevailing notions about the content and function of mass media imagery.

Stereotypes and "The Reflection Hypothesis"

Most histories of women's media representation done during the late 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s focused on the documentation of sexist stereotypes. Furthermore, such work was based on what Gaye Tuchman has called "the reflection hypothesis," in which cultural imagery serves as a mirror held up to the real world, reflecting women's real-life values and options.[1] Much of it took an activist tone, naming stereotypes to call for change in the real world. This writing resembled the model of Betty Friedan's 1963 landmark *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she argued that (then-contemporary) media imagery – specifically, women's-magazine fiction – offered evidence of American women's social oppression.[2]

While many early scholars taking the stereotypes approach turned their attention to literature, some broadly defined "literature" to include not only fiction, but also prescriptive pamphlets and journalism. These sources were included in Ann Stanford's 1977 essay "Images of Women in Early American Literature," which suggested that the status of American womanhood declined along with the nature of women's depiction in American writing from 1620 to 1800.[3] Barbara Welter examined both fiction and prescriptive literature in her discussion of how images of "the American girl" and "the True Woman" bracketed acceptable behavior for American women in the nineteenth century.[4]

Popular culture, especially magazines, contained visual as well as verbal representations in which historians found stereotypes. In her 1975 book *Myth America: Picturing Women, 1865-1945*, Carol Wald sorted these images into categories such as The Working Girl, American Beauty, and Good Girls/Bad Girls, writing that throughout history, visual representations served to "mirror changes that took place in women's lives" and "influence popular attitudes since the repeated messages form[ed] and

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reinforce[d] standards and norms."[5] Thomas Hess's essay "Pinup and Icon" and Mark Gabor's book *The Pin-Up: A Modest History*, both published in 1972, examined photographic representations of the sexualized female body, both the evolution of stereotypes and the "look" that united such images stylistically.[6] Published the same year, Martha Kingsbury's essay "The Femme Fatale and Her Sisters" concerned sexually provocative images of women in turn-of-the-century popular illustration as well as portraiture.[7]

Women's magazines were common objects of study for scholars taking the stereotypes approach. Dominic Ricciotti argued in a 1972 article that *Godey's Lady's Book* offered role models for nineteenth-century American women through its verbal and visual images of faithful wives and devoted mothers.[8] In "Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night: The American Housewife Between the Wars" (1976), Ruth Schwartz Cowan used women's-magazine nonfiction and advertising to extend Betty Friedan's description of the 1950s "happy housewife" to American women in the 1920s and 1930s.[9]

Film was the second mass medium that has held special interest for historians of women's representation. The most important early study in this area was Molly Haskell's 1974 book *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. Haskell listed female stereotypes in twentieth-century film, including the vamp, the virgin, the sex goddess, and the mother/Madonna, and explained their historical significance in terms of the reflection hypothesis: "Movies are one of the clearest and most accessible of looking glasses into the past, being both cultural artifacts and mirrors."[10] Mary P. Ryan's 1973 essay, "The Projection of a New Womanhood: The Movie Moderns in the 1920's," documented the shift from pure maiden to sex symbol in images of women in early film.[11] In *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream*, Marjorie Rosen suggested that evolving on-screen stereotypes of women – the 1910s innocent girl and vamp, 1920s flappers, 1930s hard-luck women, working women during World War II, 1950s sexpots, 1960s flower children, and 1970s single heroines – represented the changing roles of real women.[12]

Several works linked particular actresses with "types" of womanhood, whether ongoing or specific to their day. In *The American Movie Goddess*, Marsha McCreadie maintained that Greta Garbo, Rita Hayworth, and Marilyn Monroe represented the ideal for American womanhood in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.[13] Similarly, in her 1977 study of "Actress Archetypes of the 1950s: Doris Day, Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn," Janice Welsch argued that these actresses portrayed the "basic female film types" of sister, mistress, mother, and daughter.[14] A year later, in *On the Verge of Revolt: Women in American Films of the Fifties*, Brandon French wrote that movies of that decade "reflected" both the domestic ideal and "the malaise of domesticity . . . they documented the practical, sexual, and emotional transition women were undergoing."[15]

The reflection hypothesis is evident in the title of another major work, Kathryn Weibel's 1977 *Mirror Mirror: Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture*. Weibel explained contemporary images of women in five forms of popular culture – fiction, television, movies, women's magazines, and magazine advertising – in terms of their historical roots. She traced the evolution of four ideal qualities of American women (housewifely, passive, wholesome, and pretty) in popular-culture imagery and argued that these shaped women's self-images: "It is hard for a girl growing up with a Donna Reed image of womanhood to consider a career as a doctor," she wrote.[16]

Like other scholars in this category, Weibel claimed that exposing such stereotypes was a means of changing them.

The stereotype approach and/or reflection hypothesis can be seen in later histories of women's representation in mass media. Examples are Terry Hynes's 1981 monograph, *Magazine Portrayal of Women, 1911-1930*, and several articles, including Patricia Searles and Janet Mickish's 1984 "'A Thoroughbred Girl': Images of Female Gender Roles in Turn-of-the-Century Mass Media" and Susan Ferguson's 1991 "The Old Maid Stereotype in American Film, 1938-1965."[17]

Nevertheless, by the late 1970s – even while critics continued to examine stereotypes of women in *contemporary* media – many historians suggested that this approach had been exhausted after only a decade of work. While in fact much historical media was left unexamined, the use of stereotypes as a lens for media history was itself in question: a growing number of scholars seemed to agree with literary critic Elaine Showalter that this approach had "lost much of its power to surprise, disturb, or rearrange our ideas."[18] Some of them searched, instead, for imagery that challenged stereotypes; others addressed broader issues of ideology.

The Search for Alternative Images

One new type of scholarship searched for alternative mass-media representations of women and womanhood in the American past – images of unusual women inside as well as outside the mainstream culture. This approach began in the 1970s and remained popular through the early 1990s. Though in many ways this scholarship was based on the same theoretical assumptions as the stereotypes approach, its primary goal was to recover media images of women who did not fit the larger American ideal in particular historical periods.

Some work pointed to real-life alternatives that were missing from mainstream media. For instance, Helen Franzwa, in her 1974 article "Working Women in Fact and Fiction," noted the absence of images of working women from women's-magazine fiction.[19] Other work celebrated positive images that *were* present in popular culture: in a 1977 article, Jeanine Basinger discussed films from the 1930s to the 1960s in which heroines "remained true to themselves."[20] Some scholars documented the ways women have historically subverted conventional imagery. This was true of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's 1985 essay collection *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, which considered how nineteenth-century middle-class female reformers used journalism (among other institutions) as a forum in which to turn cultural stereotypes to their advantage.[21]

Most historical work in the alternative-images area, however, focused on the (largely negative but neverthless present) media representations of women who were outside mainstream culture. Donald Bogle examined stereotypes of African American women, as well as men, in American films in his 1973 book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (1973).[22] Writing seventeen years later, Patricia Hill Collins argued that the recurring media stereotypes of "mammies" and "matriarchs" have historically formed a framework for controlling black women.[23] Dolores Mitchell included not only African American, but also Native American and foreign women in her 1992 study of images of women in turn-of-the-century American tobacco advertising, noting their exoticization and subsequent construction as deviant.[24]

Rayna Green identified the dichotomized stereotypes of "civilized princess" and "destructive squaw" in popular-culture representation of

Native American women in her 1975 article "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture."[25] In 1982 publications, David Smits examined the media image of the "squaw drudge," while Maryann Oshana surveyed images of Native American women in film westerns of the 1950s and 1960s, concluding, "if they are not being raped or murdered, they are usually shown as slaves, household drudges, or bodies en masse in camps and caravans."[26]

A related body of alternative-images scholarship dealt with women in the American West. Some writers embraced the reflection hypothesis: Cheryl Foote, for instance, argued that women's evolving roles in Western films corresponded with changes in American women's social and political prospects throughout the twentieth century.[27] Conversely, other writers contrasted media images with the realities of Western women throughout U.S. history. Glenda Riley used women's diaries and reminiscences to disrupt the dichotomy of the heroine/victim stereotypes in popular-culture portrayal of "pioneer women"; she also argued that this term should include African Americans, Native Americans, Mormons, and prostitutes.[28] J. W. Williamson challenged the accuracy of the depiction of both Western and Southern "backwoods" women in American film.[29]

Not only racial, but also class concerns have prompted historians to question media stereotypes and reconsider media content. Elizabeth Ewen argued in "City Lights: Immigrant Women and the Rise of the Movies" (1980) that early film represented the lives of immigrant women as did no other form of popular culture.[30] Maureen Honey's 1983 article, "The Working-Class Woman and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II," examined images of working women in magazine fiction written for middle-class and working-class readers.[31] Honey argued that popular-culture imagery varied according to the economic class of the audience because imagery suggesting upward mobility – such as women's entry into high-paying jobs during the war – was ideologically unacceptable for working-class women. Honey's work is an example of both this category of media-imagery history and the next, which concerns the use of women's representation for larger purposes.

The turn to ideology represented a second shift in scholarly perspectives. At the same time that some researchers spotlighted non-traditional women in mass media – again calling for change, contending that imagery had the potential to challenge as well as confirm stereotypes – others turned their attention to the cultural and political systems from which imagery emerged. This next body of work suggested that individual images were less meaningful than the systematic ways in which media representation of women furthered capitalism and patriarchy.

Women's Representation as Ideology

A third type of representation history focused on women as symbolic of larger ideas and idea systems. Like the second category of work discussed here, such scholarship appeared primarily from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. These writings were based on at least one of three assumptions about the function of women's representations: (1) that they are part of a larger American story, a cultural mythology that has more to do with national values and identity than it does with the literal description of women; (2) that they are intentionally constructed by societal leaders to perpetuate the political, economic, and social order of the United States; and/or (3) that they constitute a patterned form of patriarchy, a symbolic system that reinforces sexist ideology.

Some historians have considered the symbolic function of women in the grand narratives of American history. In her 1975 book *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present,* Mary P. Ryan examined "archetypal female images" in popular culture since the seventeenth century and argued that "different ideal types of femininity have marked America's growth from peasant to 'post-industrial' society."[32] Writing twelve years later in *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History,* Martha Banta examined both visual and literary images of women in American culture (high as well as popular) from 1876 to 1919 and argued that what "America" came to mean during these years was closely tied to what "womanhood" came to mean. She also argued that images of womanhood in this era stood not only for patriotic concepts, but for American concerns about race, sexuality, and consumerism as well.[33]

Banta's subtheme of women as symbolic of broader societal issues was typical of other historical work that dealt in ideology. In her 1975 article "The Spinster Detective," Mary Jane Jones suggested that this character type in film mysteries embodied a cultural desire for social order between 1920 and 1940.[34] A similar argument about the conservative function of women's images in popular culture during this era was made in two 1990 articles, Timothy Scheurer's "Goddesses and Golddiggers: Images of Women in Popular Music of the 1930s" and Robert Westbrook's "I Want a Girl Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James."[35]

In *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), Ann Douglas argued that notions about ideal womanhood in the nineteenth century "feminized" American culture and "provided the inevitable rationalization of the economic order" under industrialism.[36] Early-twentieth-century women's representation was the subject of Sumiko Higashi's 1978 *Virgins, Vamps, and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine.* Higashi discussed the emergence of a heterosexual ideal and argued that the evolution of popular-culture images of women have always been "a manifestation of larger social, economic, and cultural developments."[37]

While more cultural than ideological in its approach, Lois Banner's 1983 *American Beauty* echoed the notion that representational patterns in popular culture are linked to larger societal forces. Visual ideals in the media and in society, she wrote, depend on "the interaction of class, women's changing expectations, social modernization, medical points of view, and other factors . . . . the particular constellation of forces – social, medical, artistic – that happen to be predominant in a given period."[38]

Some ideological scholarship has pointed to economic forces behind women's media representation. The commercialization of women's images was the subject of two works of the early 1980s, Samuel Thomas's article examining the image of "woman as invalid" in late-nineteenth-century advertising, and Robin Lakoff and Raquel Sherr's study of appearance ideals in twentieth-century consumer culture, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty.*[39]

Other works have specifically critiqued the patriarchal function of women's media imagery. Kay Sloan's 1981 article "Sexual Warfare in the Silent Cinema," on images of suffragists in early film, concluded that "America could tolerate 'liberated' women as long as they hid their strength behind a guise of frailty and indecision."[40] In her 1977 article "Women at Work: Warners in the 1930s," Susan Dalton argued that film imagery reinforced cultural prescriptions during the Depression that women belonged at home, not at work.[41] Movies of the 1940s contained the same message, wrote Andrea Walsh in her 1984 book *Women's Film and Female*

Experience, 1940-1950: though female characters were shown as independent, they found ultimate fulfillment in marriage.[42]

Two articles published in 1995 by media historians (Mei-ling Yang, and the team of Charles Lewis and John Neville) indicate the continuing popularity of ideological critiques, especially in studying war years. Both examined images of working women in World War II-era magazine advertising and argued that, by offering contradictory images of women's place in the work world, the American advertising industry functioned as a propaganda tool of a government committed to maintaining women's economic dependence.[43]

Still, by the late 1980s, a third theoretical shift was already evident in historical work on women's representation. In a sense, this move was a continuation of the second category, the focus on alternative imagery, though now the emphasis was on alternative *readings* of images. More strikingly, this new view problematized both the stereotypes approach and ideological perspectives.

Semiotic Analyses: The Rhetoric of the Image

In a fourth type of scholarship, which remains influential today, historians assess the meaning of imagery itself. Much prior scholarship was based on the notion that meaning is inherent in media images – that is, that anybody looking at (or "seeing" through reading) such images would receive the same messages. The newer approach borrows from semiotics and cultural studies to consider images as "texts" containing multiple meanings, depending on who is "reading" them and on historically-specific discourses that increase the likelihood of multiple readings. Its scholars tend to agree with art historian Griselda Pollock that "the efficacy of representation, furthermore, relies on a ceaseless exchange with other representations."[44]

Because of this assumption of "exchange" among representational forms, the newer scholarship tends to define "media" broadly. Some work has considered types of cultural production that were not mass media in a modern sense and yet were forms of public communication to large and diverse audiences. As suggested by the title of his 1990 essay "'The Leg Business': Transgression and Containment in American Burlesque," Robert C. Allen looked at the imagery of the American burlesque show and saw messages about both the restriction and the expression of women's sexuality.[45] In *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Art and Theater*, published the following year, Barbara Melosh considered Depression-era public murals, sculptures, and plays as sites for "the social negotiation of meaning, the ongoing and contested process of making sense of . . . social life" during the 1930s.[46] Melosh noted the roles of both the producer and the receiver of public culture in determining the "rhetoric" of the image.

Valerie Steele positioned her 1985 book *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* – which considered imagery disseminated through mass media as well as through personal display – against the tradition of the stereotype and ideological approaches to studying women's representation. She argued that while some fashion ideals were restrictive and oppressive to women, the notion of fashion itself was not inherently anti-feminist, and that women throughout history used fashion as a means of self-expression, of creating their own representation.[47]

The recent work of two film historians shared the premise "that popular culture is not a looming, hegemonic monster who always insists on

conformity and consistency of thought," to quote one of them, Julie Levinson.[48] In her essay "Genre and Gender: The Subversive Potential," Levinson named "subversive" representations of womanhood within film genres – media images that have "implicitly question[ed] axiomatic assumptions about gender"[49] and yet have existed within films that otherwise served to uphold the social order. Similarly, in her 1993 book *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960*, Jeanine Basinger argued that even as film imparted sexist ideology, it also offered female viewers encouraging models, such as that of career women, in a "subversively clever" way.[50] While these works could fit into the alternative images category, their authors stressed the additional importance of the decoding process, not just media production, in the creation of "alternative" messages.

One of the most interesting examples of the newer scholarship is Joanne Meyerowitz's 1993 article "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958." Meyerowitz used the same type of source Betty Friedan used – magazine editorial (though she looked at nonfiction rather than fiction) – in the same time period. Yet in her reading of nearly 500 articles, she saw a very different image of womanhood, a celebration of women's achievement in Horatio-Alger-type tales through which the magazines conveyed "overt admiration for women whose individual striving moved them beyond the home."[51]

In explaining how she came to such a different conclusion than Friedan did, Meyerowitz discussed the difference between her generation of scholars and their predecessors of twenty-five years ago. She argued that current historians studying women's popular-culture representation bring fundamentally different theoretical assumptions to the task. Though Friedan's 1963 book was not itself a work of history, it became a model for early historical writing on women's media images. Meyerowitz explained her own perspective in comparison to theirs: "For Betty Friedan and for some historians, popular magazines represented a repressive force, imposing damaging images on vulnerable American women. Many historians today adopt a different approach in which mass culture is neither monolithic nor unrelentingly repressive. In this view, mass culture is rife with contradictions, ambivalence, and competing voices."[52] A growing number of current scholars argue that the "competing voices" Meyerowitz detected in midcentury magazines are evident as well in the imagery contained in other historical media.

Discussion

As this survey suggests, the existing body of historical work on women's media representation covers a wide range of subject matter, and source material is likely to become even more diverse in the future. So far, most work has focused on film and magazines. This bias may have to do with the relative permanence of (the critic's ability to re-view and reread) these media, yet may also simply be due to their age.

It is worth noting that a large amount of contemporary (i.e., not historical) critical scholarship in communication focuses on images of women on television, and this medium is now old enough to be the subject of some historical writing as well.[53] A historiography of this field of inquiry written twenty-five years from now may well be dominated by work on television imagery. A further interesting aspect of recent scholarship is historians' attention to the impact of imagery *across* media, a trend that seems

likely to continue as mass communication increasingly involves many different technologies. Media historians will need to continue to consider the significance of the mass-dissemination of similar or identical imagery in more than one medium and the interplay of imagery between and among media.

More important than the content range of this scholarship, however, is its array of critical perspectives. This theoretical diversity not only provides a framework for a historiography of one particular subfield, but also illustrates larger issues in media history, debates that have impacted scholarship in the field as a whole during the last twenty-five years and that will continue to do so into the next century.

When considered as an entire body of work, historical writing on women's media representation appears to "evolve" through increasingly sophisticated theoretical approaches. In fact, however, the four categories of scholarship described here exist in continuing tension(s) with one another, and both their similarities and their differences speak to philosophical issues about media that continue to spark debate. Indeed, the categories defined in this article can be seen not as a logical theoretical progression but rather as sets of related ideas that are likely to go in and out of favor. Moreover, depending on the theoretical issue at hand, it is possible to make sense of them in very different ways.

One view, which has to do with the relationship between image and reality, would group the first two categories together against the last two. The first two approaches (stereotypes and alternative imagery) draw on several similar assumptions: that media stereotypes exist; that they are widely recognized by audiences, who see them as some kind of reference to a day-to-day "reality"; and that they provoke responses, whether compliance or defiance, from real people. The last two approaches (ideological and semiotic) rest on the opposite assumption: that media imagery is never a literal depiction of reality, but rather is part of a complex symbolic system that serves to advance particular ideas among particular people at particular times.

This interpretation aligns perspectives according to whether or not scholars view imagery as "evidence" of historical reality. For those who do not, the theoretical shifts outlined here might suggest a true evolution, an increasingly sophisticated view of the cultural and political meaning of representation.

Such a conclusion is complicated, however, by the other way one can divide these categories into sets – by grouping cateogories one and three versus two and four, and thus disrupting the neat timeline of "advancing" theory in the field. In fact, this second way of grouping assumptions is more compelling in that it points to one of the most fundamental continuing disputes among scholars of mass media: the question of who controls the meaning of media texts.

Underlying the scholarship in categories one (stereotypes) and three (ideological) is the notion that, through mass media imagery, meaning is imposed on audiences. Conversely, some of the work done in category two (alternative images) and all of the work done in category four (semiotic analyses) suggest that audiences decide the meaning of imagery, either by recognizing and responding to atypical imagery or through an even more active and personal reading of media. Thus a second interpretation of this survey would focus on the issue of agency in meaning-making and would consider the importance of decoding as well as coding in this process.

No matter how one interprets the different theoretical viewpoints here, one is struck by their sheer variety, by the fact that wide-ranging and even contradictory perspectives have informed this area of inquiry in a short period. In this sense, this subfield serves as an illuminating case study of media history scholarship, underscoring an important general concern. As bracketed by the writings of Betty Friedan and Joanne Meyerowitz, the theoretical debates of the recent past in this particular area might suggest to future scholars the extent to which all media scholarship is, itself, historically specific. This survey offers evidence for the growing belief that the work of historians – despite their commitment to careful methodology and in many cases their aspiration to objectivity – is very much influenced by their own academic (and cultural and political) moment.

Despite recent shifts in the dominant theoretical perspectives on women's media imagery, each of the four types of historical scholarship discussed in this article is still underway (none can, or should, be considered "over"), and each continues to make important contributions to media history. Many scholars, including this one, believe that it is still possible and necessary to point to the use of media stereotypes in the past to limit real-life women's options, and to consider the emergence and meaning of alternative imagery as well. Examining the ideological functions of representation also remains an important project for scholarly work, as do close readings of media texts and careful considerations of oppositional as well as expected interpretations of those texts. Furthermore, these approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can be integrated in rich critical work.

Future scholarship may well find ways to reconcile the varying theoretical perspectives outlined in this article, yet it is also likely to further discussion of the concerns they raise. Historians working in this area will no doubt (and should) continue to question the use of popular culture as objective evidence of the past and the relative agency of media producers and receivers. These are important issues for all journalism and mass communication historians, not only those assessing the representation of women.

NOTES

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16. Kathryn Weibel, *Mirror Mirror: Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture* (NY: Anchor Books, 1977), xx-xxi.

17. Terry Hynes, *Magazine Portrayal of Women, 1911-1930*, Journalism Monographs, no. 72 (Columbia, SC: AEJMC, 1975); Patricia Searles and Janet Mickish, "'A Thoroughbred Girl': Images of Female Gender Roles in Turn-of-the-Century Mass Media," *Women's Studies* 10, no. 3 (1984): 261-81; Susan J. Ferguson, "The Old Maid Stereotype in American Film, 1938 to 1965," *Film & History* 21 (December 1991): 131-44.

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