

Interactions in the text:

Girls' magazines and their readers

1955–2000

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Doctor of Philosophy at Oxford Brookes University.

July 2019

'What was in [magazines] was promise. They dealt in transformations; they suggested an endless series of possibilities, extending like the reflections in two mirrors set facing one another, stretching on, replica after replica, to the vanishing point. They suggested one adventure after another, one wardrobe after another, one improvement after another, one man after another. They suggested rejuvenation, pain overcome and transcended, endless love. The real promise in them was immortality.'

(Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* 1987, p. 165)

Abstract

In this thesis, I explore textual interactions between teenage girls and their magazines to ask how did this textually-mediated conversation between readers and producers of the magazines contribute to the developing narrative about the nature of girlhood on display in those magazines. This use of readers' interventions in the text is a new approach to the study of girls' magazines, as well as a contribution to the tension in feminist magazine scholarship between magazines as an insidious tool of patriarchy, and readers as critically aware. I use a combination of theoretical approaches from book history, feminist theory, and critical discourse analysis, and draw primary data both from magazine texts and from survey responses from adults sharing their recollections of reading teen magazines.

I use case studies covering romance, sex, relationships with parents, sexism, and becoming a woman, to examine how changes in the historical context were reflected in teen magazines and especially in the letters girls wrote to the magazines. On each theme, I explore the way the topic developed in the magazines in general, and then focus on a particular magazine in more depth.

Exploration of these case studies, and my survey responses, allows me to argue that, contrary to the usual depiction of girls as passive recipients of information aimed at them, some of them do challenge some of this information, but that the patriarchal influence of magazines nevertheless remains with them into adulthood. Paying close attention to the commercial aims of the magazines, I also argue that the textual interaction between readers and magazines, perhaps especially when readers are expressing disagreement with the magazine, serves an important function for magazines in keeping their readers engaged, but also in mitigating possible threats from advertisers, parent companies, and readers' parents, that might ensue from the publication of contentious material.

Dedication

In 1882, the *Girl's Own Paper* published a polemic by a writer using the initials M.P.S., arguing against higher education for women. Two months later, the paper published a response from reader 14-year-old Bertha Mary Jenkins, passionately disagreeing with M.P.S.

Just as the *Girl's Own Paper* planted the seed for subsequent popular girls' magazines, so Bertha Mary Jenkins planted the seed for this research, and it is dedicated to her, as well as to the women I read magazines with as a teenager, and everyone who filled in my survey, or talked to me about their own teenage magazine reading experience.

The thesis is also dedicated to Rowan, whose appearance partway through made everything afterwards more complicated, but who is worth every delay.

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to my supervisors, Jane Potter, Leander Reeves, and Caroline Davis, for help, support and advice.

Thanks to my fellow labourers in the word-mines, Anja, Brienne, Jo, Lucy, Lydia and Rhiannon, for rants, sympathy and cheerleading.

Above all, and always, my thanks to Ralph, without whom...

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Introduction

I don't want to sound like a miserable nag-bag, but I have a little complaint...

(*Mizz*, 15 March 1995, p. 28)

In 1995, teen magazine *Mizz* published an article in which, among other tips on how to have sex appeal, they suggested that boys prefer dark-haired girls to blondes. A blonde reader from Lancashire calling herself 'MIZZ male model fan' was outraged, and instead of meekly accepting the magazine's authority she wrote to complain. The magazine published her reply (quoted above), thus endorsing her right to air it, and implicitly accepting her criticism.

Teenage girls are often portrayed as being easily influenced by the messages of the media and society around them, and seen as having little or no critical faculty through which to filter these messages. However, in magazines for them – perhaps the medium with the closest relationship to the teenage girl throughout the twentieth century – we can see evidence of girls like the writer of the above letter, who take issue with what the magazines are telling them, and argue back. This sort of interaction, and what it says about girls' magazines, the girls who read them, and wider society, is the main topic of this thesis.

I will be asking how girls' letter-writing interaction with magazines affected magazine coverage of some of the big issues of teenage girlhood. That is, how did this textually-mediated conversation between readers and producers of the magazines contribute to the developing narrative about the nature of girlhood on display in those magazines, and what was the role of girls' published letters in this developing narrative?

I will explore the relationship between the producers (writers, editors, publishers) of magazines for teenage girls, and the readers of those magazines (mostly the teenage girls they are aimed at, but also sometimes others, including their parents and their boyfriends). There are inherent tensions for the magazines between catering to the needs and desires of their readers, and catering to the adult gatekeepers, such as parents, who might control access to those readers. Alongside this, there are societal demands to educate girls about the kind of women they 'should' grow up to be, the kinds of women that society of the time requires, or expects, and at

the same time the need to cater to the advertisers who largely pay for the magazines. I argue that this balancing act makes magazines a key site of negotiation in the developing issues of twentieth-century girlhood; just as late-Victorian girls negotiated issues around work, education and suffrage in their magazines (Lovegrove, 2010), late-twentieth-century girls negotiated issues such as relationships, sex, and sexism. I show that magazines were operating on the tipping point of increasing rights and freedoms for girls, whether encouraging girls to take advantage of developing options, cautioning them against leaping too quickly into new possibilities, or merely providing a place where readers were able to practice their own negotiation with these issues (either directly in print, or by using the magazines as a prompt and an aid to face-to-face discussion). As the century progressed, the possibilities of girls' lives widened out, and the contradictions of these new possibilities were partly played out in the pages of magazines, functioning as part of both the public and private spheres.

The producers of the magazines, too, were actively engaged in negotiating these contradictions, in creating, selecting and presenting content which was appropriate for their existing readers, the new readers they hoped to attract, and the prevailing social attitude of the time. Each shift in type of content – fewer photo-romance stories, more coverage of sex, different kinds of fashion and makeup, and the myriad others – represented a magazine's producers negotiating with readers and society about the nature of girlhood.

This study will offer a new angle on feminist struggles of the late twentieth century. While the academy, the mainstream (adult) press, and other social institutions argued about issues, teenage girls negotiated the same issues in their own lives, and they did so partly through the pages of their magazines. Their voices are often absent both from the debate at the time and from current scholarship. Sections of magazines where readers actively contribute therefore form a particular focus of this research. Problem pages are a specialised subset of reader contributions, and the questions asked give some insight into which issues readers were

concerned with at the time, and particularly into the magazines' attitudes to those issues.¹ My work looks at the magazines' various letters pages as conversations between the magazine and the reader, and as a means of magazine readers speaking to each other, using the magazine as an intermediary.

The relationship between girls and magazines was mutually-dependent: magazines are developed on the basis of what girls are perceived to be interested in, or on what their elders and betters think they should be interested in, and in turn girls are partly formed by their magazine reading, which shapes their own expectations of what it means to be a girl. Also present in this relationship, although still under-explored, is the commercial role of these magazines, their primary aim to make money, and in support of that, to serve up their readers to their advertisers. This represents another delicate balancing act for the magazines: their content must entice readers in order to be able to entice advertisers.

Although my focus is historical, my findings have current relevance in increasing our understanding of the teenage experience of today's women: the struggles of the twentieth-century girl are important in considering the struggles of the twenty-first century woman she grew up to become. It will also have current interest as a contrast to the ways that girlhood is negotiated today, through media which is a descendent of the magazines discussed here, and signposting areas of girls' lives where their freedom has increased, or perhaps decreased, following the 'backlash' described by Susan Faludi (1993). The issues discussed in my case studies might be different in the details, and in the linguistic choices used to describe them, but these issues persist. All of these questions are still faced by girls today. How they were handled or mishandled in the past might help us to handle them in the present and in the future.

There is little scholarship on the relationship between girls' magazines and their readers. As discussed below, much of the existing research focuses on the messages conveyed by the

¹ Although magazine producers are often accused of writing their own problem page letters this accusation probably has little basis in fact; see discussion in the methodology chapter.

magazines, with little attention paid to the contributions that readers make to magazine content, or to what the relationship between those contributions and the magazine as a whole might be.

By using the combined theoretical lenses of book history, feminist studies and critical discourse analysis I am able to explore the interaction of commercial issues and patriarchy², unpacking the operation of those issues along several different axes of analysis, and contributing to a view of late-twentieth-century girlhood which has not previously been seen by research.

Consideration of the way that magazines used the voices of their young women readers is particularly important, since these readers are often portrayed as being easily influenced by the messages of the media and society around them, and seen as having little or no critical faculty through which to filter these messages. However, we can see evidence of girls like the one writing to *Mizz*, quoted at the beginning of this introduction, who do not just accept what the magazines say, but argue back. Analysis of this sort of interaction can give us a new view of girls' magazines, the girls who read them, and their relationship to wider society.

This attention to the contributions of young women readers to their magazines, in an attempt to redress the way that their input has been largely ignored, has the potential to offer rich new insights into their lives, their magazines, and the way that they related to this moment of transition in the possibilities open to young women.

² Precise definitions of 'patriarchy' are slippery and problematic. Kate Millett's early definition of the term places power of many different sorts '*entirely* in male hands' (1977, p. 25; my emphasis), glossing over the ways that society is not that simple; Judith Butler criticises the term because it 'has threatened to become a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distance articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts' (1999, p. 48). However, it is nevertheless a convenient shorthand for the ways that power in society tends to be concentrated in male hands, and to operate to the detriment of women and girls. bell hooks' simple definition is a useful one: 'another way of naming [...] institutionalised sexism' (2015, p. xiii).

Girls' lives and magazines

Although there have been mainstream magazines for teenage girls since at least 1880, when the *Girl's Own Paper* was founded, the magazines which began to appear after the Second World War were strikingly different in kind from those earlier publications. Most obvious was the increased use of colour, of glossy paper, and of photographs: all improvements which had appeared in the women's press between the wars (White, 1970), and now started to move across to magazines for girls. The content of these magazines began to change, too, reflecting the ways that society was changing around girls and their magazines: Penny Tinkler describes these new post-war magazines as embodying

a new and dynamic ideal of young womanhood, characterized by celebration of the distinctiveness and potential of youth and by emphasis on the importance of independence, fun, experience and opportunity. (2014, pp. 597–8)

Heiress, the 1950s name for the magazine which had earlier been called the *Girl's Own Paper*, was the last of a dying breed. In 1955, the point at which my research begins, *Marilyn* was founded, the first of a new kind of girls' magazine with a focus on romance and pop music albeit within the 1950s push towards feminine domesticity. It was swiftly followed by *Mirabelle* (1956), *Romeo* (1957), *Valentine* (1957) and others, capitalising on what Penny Tinkler calls the 'ascendancy of the "teenager" characterised by age-distinctive leisure, consumption and style' (2018, p. 153), which had begun to flourish in the new opportunities of the 1950s. As Mark Abrams reported in 1959, teenagers – working-class teenagers in particular – were becoming a newly sought-after consumer market, with increasing amounts of disposable income, and the urge to spend their money on 'goods and services which are highly charged emotionally' (1959, p. 19). The new magazines of the 1950s offered teenage girls a way to fulfil that urge, in a way that considered – and depicted – them as a consumer group distinct from their older sisters and mothers, with whom they had often been conflated earlier in the century.

With the success of the 1950s titles, others followed in the 1960s, for example forward-facing and fashion-focused *Honey* (1960), often considered the first 'true' teenage magazine (Tinkler,

2018), and *Jackie* (1964), with its more traditional depiction of feminine roles. If, as Philip Larkin claims, 'Sexual intercourse began / In nineteen sixty-three' (Larkin, 1974), *Jackie* was not yet prepared to admit it, focusing instead on the attainment of romance as a route to marriage and domesticity.

This domestic push led to rising disillusionment and unhappiness with domestic confinement, as described most famously by Betty Friedan as 'the problem that has no name' (1963).

Alongside Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and the rise of the women's liberation movement, other ground-breaking books about womanhood, such as *Sex and the Single Girl*, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, and *The Second Sex* were being published,³ and some of their ideas were seeping into the ordinary consciousness. Their impact was, of course, not felt immediately in girls' magazines, but some writers and editors working on the magazines will have read them, and some mothers and teachers of these teenagers will also have read them. Some of their arguments about, for example, the unfulfilling nature of domesticity, and the right of women to claim ownership of their own bodies and sexuality, would have had a 'trickle-down' effect on the magazines for teenage girls.

The contraceptive pill had been available in the UK since 1961, but only to unmarried women since 1967 (National Health Service, 2015), and through the sixties and seventies there was public debate about its wider availability. Although the pill wasn't the first female-controlled contraception available (diaphragms and cervical caps had been in use since the nineteenth century), the pill's ease of use and convenience led to its widespread adoption, and meant that for the first time, sexual relationships need not automatically lead to motherhood. This increased sexual freedom led to opportunities for greater personal freedom, too; even university

³ *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), by Helen Gurley Brown, promoted the idea of women enjoying the same sexual freedom men had always enjoyed; *Our Bodies Ourselves* (first published in the US in 1971 with a UK edition in 1978) by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, aimed to educate women about their own bodies; Simone de Beauvoir's monumental study of what womanhood means, *The Second Sex* (1949), was originally published in French, but not translated to English until 1988.

access eased for girls once they were no longer seen as a constant pregnancy risk (Dyhouse, 2013, p. 168).

By the 1970s 'women's lib' was well established, but it didn't necessarily reach teenagers, as demonstrated by Sue Sharpe (1994). In the 1980s, a new crop of girls' magazines, including *Just Seventeen* and *Mizz*, started to take up, if not explicitly, some of the ideas of what was now more usually called the second wave feminist movement. By the 1990s, teen magazines were publishing fairly explicit articles about sex, including details which would earlier have only been possible in the problem pages, and earlier still, either merely implied, or missing entirely. Angela McRobbie assigns responsibility for this increased sexual content partly to the spread of AIDS, which required the promotion of government-sponsored safe sex messages, and general sex information piggy-backed onto that (1997, p. 200). By 2000, home internet use was beginning its meteoric rise,⁴ which would eventually contribute to the demise of the teen magazine market.⁵

The latter part of the twentieth century, then, was potentially both an exciting and an unsettling time to be a teenage girl. Many aspects of girlhood and womanhood which had previously been mostly taken for granted became increasingly open to debate, and allowed girls to envisage new possibilities which might not have been available to previous generations. The ways that magazines and their readers interact with these issues, and with the expectations that are placed on girls, have therefore changed over the time this thesis examines. Despite these changes in attitudes over the decades, the reading habits of girls have always been a source of

⁴ The Office for National Statistics started collecting data on internet access in its Family Expenditure Survey in the period April–June 1998, when 9% of UK households had access to the internet. By the same period in 2000, that number had increased to 27%, and it continued to rise. (Office for National Statistics, 2004)

⁵ Working with Audit Bureau of Circulations data, Anthony Quinn describes a 97% drop in circulation figures of teen magazines in the twenty years from 1998 to 2018 (2018). The turn of the century was effectively the beginning of the end for teen magazines.

concern to those who see themselves as the guardians of morality. For example, Kate Flint's work, looking at the period 1837–1914, explores society's particular concerns about female readers, their impressionable nature, and the need for caution about what they are permitted to read (1993); these concerns are of course magnified when the reader is not merely female, but also juvenile. In the same period, John Ruskin advised parents to '[k]eep the modern magazine and novel out of your girl's way' (1866, p. 101): simply by reading magazines, girls were engaged with conflicting notions of appropriate feminine behaviour. These concerns continued into the twentieth century: in the 1940s, for example, Pearl Jephcott described the type of magazines commonly read by working-class girls of fourteen or fifteen as 'second-rate food', which would tend to make 'the mental and spiritual quality of the consumer [...] the same' (1942, pp. 109–110)

In the period under consideration here, reading magazines was becoming an accepted part of the teenage girl's life, but the content of those magazines, as with all girls' reading matter, still came under scrutiny. In 1960, at the obscenity trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, prosecution lawyer Mervyn Griffith-Jones advanced as an argument against the book's publication, 'girls can read as well as boys', drawing on the assumption that although it would be acceptable for boys to read such material, it was inappropriate for girls (Rolph, 1961, p. 17). Attitudes to girls and reading started to liberalise somewhat, perhaps foreshadowed by Griffith-Jones losing the case against *Chatterley*, but the content of girls' reading, and its presumed effect on their impressionable minds was still a concern throughout the period. In 1996, a Tory MP, Peter Luff, proposed a Bill requiring girls' magazines to advertise their target age, in order to protect younger girls from too much sexually explicit material (McKay, 1999). He was unsuccessful, but this led to the magazine industry forming the Teenage Magazines Arbitration Panel (TMAP), which attempted to set standards for the portrayal of sexual activity in magazines with a readership of at least 25% under fifteens. Their remit was ostensibly gender-neutral, but their guidelines and publicity exclusively referenced girls' magazines. There has been no corresponding moral panic about what kind of sexual education teenage boys receive from their reading matter, though the dearth of magazines for boys would make finding a target

more difficult: when magazines for boys do appear, they are usually short-lived, or focused on football or music, with only rare titles covering emotional and relationship issues.⁶

This concern about girls' reading habits presupposes an enormous potential power being wielded by the written word. If writing were not influential, there would be no need to fear its influence on impressionable young girls. Flint describes this power as an issue of authority:

reading was [...] perceived as a prime tool in socialisation; in moulding a conformist, or for that matter a questioning, member of society. It is therefore centrally bound in with questions of authority: authority which manifests itself in a capacity for judgement and opinion based on self-knowledge [...] and authority to speak, to write, to define, to manage, and to change not just the institutions of literature, but those of society itself. (Flint, 1993, p. 43)

My concern in this thesis is partly to demonstrate how broadly this idea of authority may be applied: to readers, even juvenile readers of magazines, as well as to those more usually conceived as authorities. If readers of magazines are authoring – however editorially altered – contributions to those magazines, then they are also exercising authority over their own stories, and, to a small extent, their own society.

Critical readers versus insidious patriarchy: existing magazine scholarship

This is a new approach to the study of girls' magazines, which has previously focused largely on either the messages conveyed by the magazines (e.g. Garner, Sterk and Adams, 1998), the intentions of magazine editors (e.g. Keller, 2011), or the extra-textual responses of the magazines' readers (e.g. Currie, 1999, 2001), with little attention paid to the interventions that readers make in the text itself.

⁶ For example, *Match*, about football; *Smash Hits*, about music, with a wide readership across gender lines; and *The Hit*, founded in 1985 as a 'music and lifestyle weekly for 15–19-year-old men', but quickly folded (Quinn, 2018).

Work in other areas of magazine scholarship has made use of the published interactions between reader and magazine to offer a fresh perspective, or to fill in a gap in conventional histories, such as Laurel Brake and Julie Codell's edited collection *Encounters in the Victorian Press* (2005) which aims to show a broader view of the relationship between the press and Victorian society, and Teresa Gerrard's use of the 'Answers to Correspondents' section in the *Family Herald* to provide information about the reading habits of the 'common reader', who had been neglected by previous research (2011). However, this approach has not been more widely adopted, and has not yet been applied to the teen magazines of the twentieth century, and to what we can learn from them about questions of girlhood.

This research follows in the tradition of feminist studies of girls' and women's magazines which has long debated the tension between these magazines as a force of indoctrination into patriarchal culture, versus magazines as a pleasurable site of female culture with critically-aware readers.⁷ Previous research can be plotted along a spectrum according to how much criticality the authors allow to the readers of the magazines. My work is situated around the centre of the spectrum, acknowledging the negative influence that these magazines can have, but also seeking to identify instances of reader criticality displayed within the magazines themselves. Both the patriarchal influence of the magazines, and the ability of readers to resist it are problematised at this point in the spectrum: the magazine readers are 'not simply "dupes" of capitalism' (Currie, 1999, p. 9), but neither are magazines a simple 'source of pleasure, escapism, and validation for their readers' (Keller, 2011, p. 1).

At the 'tool of patriarchy' end of the spectrum, critics such as Jenny McKay (McKay, 1999), Kate Peirce (1990) and Ana Garner *et al.* (1998) treat magazines as constantly re-inscribing readers' oppression, for example with their emphasis on particular heteronormative types of sex

⁷ This tension between the influence of the text and the ability of the reader to resist is not of course limited to work on girls' magazines; see for example work by Michele Paule on 'smart girls' and their representation within, and engagement with, media portrayals, which navigates a version of the same tension (Paule, 2017).

and romance. It is perhaps telling that this view is often particularly applied to *girls'* magazines (as opposed to women's), in reflection of the doubly-marginalised status of the girl as both female and young, and the assumed lack of agency and criticality she brings to bear on her reading matter; it also recognises the sometimes-explicit educational aims of magazines for girls.

By contrast, work by scholars such as Janice Winship (1985, 1987), Ros Ballaster *et al.* (1991), Joke Hermes (1995) and Margaret Beetham (1996) tends to give magazine readers credit for at least some criticality, and ability to question magazine content and reject it when necessary. Work in this tradition may also see magazines as a form of female culture, denigrated by the mainstream as trivial precisely because they are for and about women, but which serve as a vehicle of female pleasure, escapism, and celebration of 'women's culture'. Acknowledging the assumed greater critical faculties of adult women, this view tends to apply to women's magazines, perhaps avoiding the question of how similar they are to those for girls.

I have no wish to discount pleasure in my analysis. Girls clearly derive pleasure from their reading of magazines, as I did as a teenager, and indeed as I have in the writing of this thesis. I do, however, suggest that pleasure in reading is not cancelled out by dissent; it may even be enhanced by it. As shown in Michele Paule's research, in which self- or school-identified 'smart girls' critiqued TV depictions of smart girls: 'girls [...] appeared to take pleasure in displaying critical awareness' (2017, p. 61). This pleasure in dissent may be further enhanced by the performative aspect of writing letters of dissent for publication.

These positions mirror the dichotomy of magazines themselves: they simultaneously reflect and create the culture of the group they target. The 'tool of the patriarchy' reading posits magazines as creators, or at least as (re)enforcers, of a culture which oppresses women, while the 'critical readers' approach suggests that readers are aware of the cultural role of the magazines, and resist it. Some feminist views of magazines, then, may fail to account for the pleasure which they bring their readers, or to give those readers credit for the ability to critically engage with the magazines, while other feminist views may ascribe too much criticality to readers and underestimate the negative influence that the magazines may have. This has parallels with the

wider problem of free will in feminism: how much it is possible to resist the dominant ideology of patriarchy when one has been brought up within it?

Among the literature of the middle ground, we can find suggestions that girls and women may sometimes be critical readers, while also being subject to the magazines' patriarchal influence. Dawn Currie's (2001) research finds that teenage girls reading magazines may use their own lived experience as a tool to reject the 'textual constructions' they are offered, although Currie finds that many young readers simply reject their own 'self-construction in favour of those offered by the text' (2001, p. 277). Her close textual analysis of problem page letters and responses, and of girls' reading relationships with magazines shows up an alarming power relationship whereby the magazines 'define what is both typical and desirable' (2001, p. 264), and even when readers do practise resistance against these definitions it is by 'reject[ing] only specific texts which are deemed isolated instances of representational failure' (2001, p. 264). This assumption on the part of readers that the world portrayed in magazines is basically accurate, and that any evidence to the contrary is an isolated aberration is also sometimes visible in the actions of magazine producers, such as when advice columnists in *Jackie* magazine in the 1960s occasionally publish accounts of reader experiences which contradict the magazine's received wisdom, only to cast them as exceptions to the rule.⁸

Other researchers find more optimistic results. In their research on the way young people see themselves in relation to sexual media, including magazines, Sara Bragg and David Buckingham found that 'young people are often critical and reflexive readers' (2009, p. 144). It seems likely that the typical teenage magazine audience combines elements of Currie's readers who suppress their own experiences in support of those offered by the magazine, and Bragg and Buckingham's knowing, self-aware readers.

⁸ See chapter one.

Scholars of the middle ground also tend to emphasise the multiple pressures under which magazine producers are operating, seeking to achieve a complex and delicate balance of competing interests, such as that described by Penny Tinkler:

Magazine representations of [girlhood] were all products of negotiation. At one level this involved the editor mediating between a range of needs and interests. These included publishers' objectives, codes and cultures; readers' interests needs and fantasies; the concerns of parents and teachers [...] and the requirements of the government. (1995, p. 186)

Although Tinkler's work considers an earlier part of the twentieth century, the same sorts of pressures are at play in the magazines I discuss here, and although the necessity to follow government guidelines faded as the Second World War receded into history, government requirements once again became relevant towards the end of the century in the wake of moral panics about girls' sexuality.

Traversing the territory in the last three decades of influential work, Angela McRobbie's early research on *Jackie* magazine was a formative influence on the field (e.g. McRobbie, 1981, 1982), and in the 1990s she optimistically diagnosed teen magazines as having 'absorbed a sprinkling of feminist ideas' (1997, p. 195). However she has since recanted much of her earlier analysis in favour of a more nuanced one with acknowledgement of the operation of power relations in girls' magazines. She now criticises her early work, 'which sought to give value and meaning to the subversive strategies, the ways of "making do" which ordinary, often seriously disadvantaged people took part in' (2009, p. 2), suggesting that an over-emphasis on those strategies moves our focus from a serious critique of power to

celebratory connections with the ordinary women, or indeed girls, who created their own, now seemingly autonomous pleasures and rituals of enjoyable femininity from the goods made available by consumer culture. (2009, p. 3)

McRobbie suggests that this serves – or at least fails to undermine – the hegemonic processes of capitalist patriarchy. She positions herself as moving from the 'denigrated female culture'

reading, not precisely towards the 'tool of the patriarchy' reading, but to a broader critique of 1990s and early 2000s capitalism, the apparent demise of both socialism and feminism, and the failure of sections of the feminist academy to engage with these issues.

This thesis is in part a response to McRobbie's criticism of work overemphasising the resistance that readers can demonstrate to the overarching hegemonies of things like girls' magazines. I aim to avoid describing the tactics of resistance which I trace as if they are a simple way out of the insidious patriarchal influence these magazines can wield on their readers, while also giving due credit to the readers who wrote letters of dissent to their magazines. I do not wish to suggest that the ways in which these girls resist the messages of their magazines act as a thoroughly revolutionary strategy. By writing letters of disagreement, readers exercise only a small amount of influence over the magazine, and less over the society which produced the magazine. Nevertheless, this resistance does sometimes have the power to move beyond the individualised forms of resistance McRobbie now criticises, because the instances I explore appear within the pages of the magazines, and are thus visible to a wider audience. One reader writing a letter of resistance may support her own liberation from a tiny fragment of patriarchy, but a reader letter published in a magazine may offer the same support to many more readers. As I will show, even when the presentation of resistance serves a repressive function, its presence in the magazines must also, at a minimum, demonstrate the possibility of resistance.

The magazines' aims in publishing those letters, however, cannot be straightforwardly analysed as subversive. Editors of teen magazines, largely educated at university, and with an assumed commitment to girls' wellbeing, might be assumed to be feminists. However, McRobbie (2009) reflects on the limits of the university to radicalise its students, in contrast to her earlier beliefs about women educated by feminists at university going on to be feminists in work, including on magazines (1997). Jessalynn Keller's (2011) work examines the self-defined feminism of writers and editors who work on the magazines to arrive at an analysis of magazine content in which we can see both the feminist aims of editors, and the ways in which these aims are still subject to patriarchal control, for example by avoiding explicit mention of feminism or any overt politics. Even if editors wish to promote anti-patriarchal aims in their magazines, they

may not be able to do so. A particularly striking method of capitalist-patriarchal control over the magazines is the power of advertisers, all the more striking because it is often a largely hidden relationship.

The hidden magazine audience

Although it is not clearly visible to readers of magazines, around a third of consumer magazine income comes from advertising (McKay, 2006), and with that financial contribution comes some element of control; the magazine packages up readers to offer to advertisers, and simultaneously packages up advertisers to offer to readers. Magazine *content*, such as articles, fashion, advice, and so on, can be seen as merely the medium used to connect the two. Gloria Steinem vividly demonstrates the power that advertisers can wield over this apparently impartial content by reference to her own *Ms* magazine, though she is clear that it happens throughout the magazine market for girls and women:

If *Time* and *Newsweek*, in order to get automotive and GM ads, had to lavish editorial praise on cars and credit photographs in which newsmakers were driving, say, a Buick from General Motors, there would be a scandal—maybe even a criminal investigation. When women's magazines from *Seventeen* to *Lear's* publish articles lavishing praise on beauty and fashion products, and crediting in text describing cover and other supposedly editorial photographs a particular makeup from Revlon or a dress from Calvin Klein because those companies also advertise, it's just business as usual. (1995, p. 132)

Steinem reports that Proctor & Gamble refused to advertise in 'any issue [of *Ms* magazine] that included any material on gun control, abortion, the occult, cults, or the disparagement of religion' (1995, p. 156; emphasis original). Advertisers can thus effectively ban controversial topics from magazines which are dependent on ad revenue; that is, most of them.

The evidence is that magazine advertising works. Guy Consterdine's reports on the effectiveness of magazine advertising (Consterdine, 2005, 2009) draw on a range of research to find that readers strongly identify with the magazines they read, and are not simply receptive to

their advertising, but may actually enjoy reading it. He cites several studies from different countries showing that consumers find magazine advertising relevant and enjoyable, and that they pay attention to it, and make purchasing decisions based on those adverts.

The purpose of the magazines, then, is not actually to support and advise readers, but (in almost all cases) to be a commercially viable product; to make money. For the magazine producer, it becomes a delicate balancing act to avoid readers suspecting too much complicity between magazine and advertiser. On the one hand, 'the credibility of the magazine can be damaged if readers begin to suspect there is too close a liaison between advertisers and journalists' (McKay, 2006, p. 187), but on the other, '[w]ith magazines, the ads are expected to be relevant and there is a synergy between the editorial content and the ads; the ads gain from the brand value of the magazine, and they are seen to be endorsed by the magazine' (Consterdine, 2005). The line is often blurred, with editorial content sometimes nearly indistinguishable from advertising content in singing the praises of particular products. So although the individuals writing for the magazines may be working in support of their readers, the magazine itself is almost always a commercial entity, seeking advertising revenue, and profit.

Readers and texts

Outside of magazine scholarship, there is also a body of work on readers of other texts, and the productive use they may sometimes make of the resources they are offered through the texts they have available to them, in ways that mirror the interactions between readers and writers of teen magazines. Janice Radway, for example, in her work on the readers of romance novels, focuses on examining, valuing and validating the often trivialised cultural products offered to readers who are seen as passive, uncritical consumers of cynically produced texts. Her work shows the phenomenon of romance reading to be complex and indistinct, and finds a mixture of reasons for, and functions of, this reading, which encompasses both an attempted, temporary, rejection of heteropatriarchy, and an embrace of it; of finding *at the same time* both pleasure and a limited potential of subversion in what seems to be unpromising material (Radway, 1984).

In a related vein, Michel de Certeau's work explores the way that ordinary readers can act as 'poachers' of a text, making of it a use that was not originally intended by its producers. His concept of *la perruque*⁹ – the illegitimate use factory workers make of their employers' time, equipment, and spare material, to create their own objects (1984) – may be paralleled in the way that some of the readers of teen magazines take the material that is offered to them and make of it their own meanings, sometimes in dissent with the official meanings that they have been given. However, unlike de Certeau's wig makers, the writers of the letters I examine in this thesis then feed their own illegitimate creations back into the factory's own output. In some cases the magazine/factory then holds up the illicit creation as an example, and in others smoothly absorbs it into the official output so that the readers' voices merge with those of the official magazine writers.

Work by Mikhail Bakhtin also explores the way that texts create meanings which are necessarily derived both from the speaker and the listener. He says that we 'assimilate others' discourse', and this process of assimilation has a special 'significance in an individual's ideological becoming' (1998, p. 41). This is, of course, part of what happens with adolescent girls reading their magazines: they assimilate the discourse they are offered, they try it on, and while they mould the meanings of the words to suit themselves, they are in turn being moulded by the way that others have used those words.

My work in this thesis is both an addition to existing feminist magazine scholarship, and to the scholarship on relationships between readers and texts, and the sometimes unanticipated uses to which readers can put the cultural products which are available to them, to produce their own meanings and to resist those of others.

Not all girls...

The magazines do not make any attempt to depict and represent all of girlhood. To name only the most visible limitations of representation, the girls shown in their pages are overwhelmingly

⁹ French for 'wig'.

pretty, apparently-able-bodied, and white. By implication they are also heterosexual, living in biological nuclear families, going to school, college, or working their first jobs, and (especially later in the period, when opportunities open up for girls) have suitable social, financial and familial support systems to allow them a free choice in ambitions to education, career, marriage, and so on. Exceptions to many of these categories do appear, but are often treated as atypical, as requiring explanation, or some sort of special extra measures to overcome.

For a girl who fits most of those categories (as I did), the magazines can feel like a comforting place. For girls who differ on too many criteria, they may be alienating and disempowering. Fifteen-year-old Georgia Black, writing for Jane Waghorn's collection *A Message for the Media* (1999) (which aims to be a 'celebration of how much things have moved on' (p. 3) since Waghorn's own childhood in the 1960s), says: 'What is genuinely helpful advice for the 2 per cent of the population who fit the necessary requirements, becomes a source of endless disappointment, depression and feelings of inadequacy for the majority of us' (1999, p. 38), and, as we will see, this response to the magazines' assumptions about their typical readers has stayed with some of those readers well into their adulthood.

These issues may have been particularly stark for readers of different ethnicities, who only began to see themselves mirrored in the magazines later in the century, and in more progressive-tending magazines. For example, in *Just Seventeen* in the 1980s, there are occasional adverts for Black hair products, and sometimes an Asian girl in a makeover article (e.g. 9 November 1988). In *Bliss* a decade later, an article about makeup includes suggestions of different colours for different skin colours (March 1999).

So the teen magazines of the period 1955–2000 were operating in a difficult, contested time for girlhood, and scholarly readings of them, at the time and since, have been equally contested. In the rest of this thesis, I will add a new view of this reading, attempting to give due weight both to readers' ability to question what they read, and to the tremendous power of patriarchy to shape their interpretations. In the next chapter I will outline the theoretical underpinnings and methodologies of this research, introducing the critical lenses I use, the relevant sections of feminist, book history, and linguistic theory, and the practical methods I

have employed. This chapter also considers the limitations of those methods and methodologies. Chapters one to five contain the main findings and discussion of my research, organised into themes, and explored through the lens of the contents of magazines for teenage girls, and especially through their letters to the magazines. Chapters one and two deal with girls' approach to the adult world of (mostly) heterosexual relationships: chapter one about finding romance, and chapter two about consummating that romance through sex. In Chapters three and four, I explore the ways that girls push back against the structural limitations imposed on them by their age and their gender: chapter three looks at tensions in girls' relationships with their parents, and chapter four at ways to deal with sexism. Chapter five considers some of the issues around the transition from girlhood to womanhood, and about the types of woman girls might have available as options. Finally, the conclusion draws together the strands of my research, and points the way to future research. In an afterword, I also briefly consider developments in the early 21st century, in girls' lives, their magazines, the rise of the internet, and interactions between these issues.

The thesis, then, explores many of the key issues of teenage girlhood over the second half of the twentieth century, and the ways that these issues, and the changes in girls' lives, play out in girls' magazines, and especially in girls' interactions with their magazines. The methodology which follows discusses how I will go about doing that.

Methodology and methods

The three main critical lenses informing this work are feminist theory, book history, and critical discourse analysis. That is to say, I am conducting feminist research into girls' lives, as seen through publications directed at them, with consideration of the producers and practices of those publications as well as their content, and that my analysis operates partly at the linguistic level.

Feminist theory

Introducing her own research into girls' lives, Sue Sharpe discusses her feminist bias:

my account is intentionally feminist and as such is, of course, no less valid, and may help to counter the opposite bias contained implicitly in so much that has been written about girls and women in the past. (1994, p. x)

My research, too, comes from a feminist position, from the belief that women and girls should be equal to men and boys, but that throughout history, and still today, this is not the case.¹⁰ I take the 'nature of girls' to be largely a social construct which serves to keep girls in their place, rather than as some essential aspect of biology: girls are *taught* to be interested in boys and babies, in looking nice and being domestic. This idea is now so widespread and widely accepted among most contemporary feminists that it is hard to trace its origins; perhaps the most significant early statement is Simone de Beauvoir's 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (1949, p. 295), but versions of it also appear in writing by Monique Wittig (1981), Judith Butler (1999), and others.

¹⁰ A word about the problems with the term 'feminist' itself. It is not an unproblematic label to adopt: like any other non-centralised movement composed of individuals, many people acting under the feminist banner have stated opinions or performed actions with which I would prefer not to be associated. Sections of the movement have been accused of racism, transphobia, classism, ableism, and so on; as a white, cisgender, middle-class, able-bodied feminist I try to be aware of these traps and aim for an intersectional feminism which recognises the interlocking nature of oppressions and privileges.

Accordingly, although the subject of this study is girls, and their interaction with their magazines is often largely about boys, I am using these labels simply to represent the categories used by the magazines and their readers, and not as a 'natural' gender binary with any automatic – or necessarily possible – mapping of gender identity to biological sex. Only twice in any of the magazines I have read in the course of researching this thesis have I seen any mention of transgender identities, intersex conditions, or any of the other non-binary possibilities for gender and sex,¹¹ but this omission is a result of the social acceptability of such discussions at the time and for this audience, rather than a sign that everyone reading and writing the magazines had a conventional gender identity which matched their assigned sex.¹² In using 'boy' and 'girl' as labels, I do not wish to imply otherwise.

This view of gender as a social construct need not cause the collapse of feminism (Butler, 1999). If we treat 'girl' and 'woman' as shorthand for the groups of people who self-identify as such, and/or those who are identified as such by society, it allows us to discuss and evaluate the ways that those people are treated by society, the ways they are discussed within it, and the spaces and roles that they inhabit.

Any discussion of female space (whether physical or psychic) inevitably traces part of its lineage to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928), with its discussion of the freedom and opportunities which become more accessible to girls and women if they only have a private space in which to explore their own thoughts and ideas, and money to support them while they do it. My invoking of Woolf here is of course also indebted to Margaret Beetham's *A Magazine of Her Own?* (1996); girls' magazines, whatever the other opportunities and

¹¹ A letter to *My Guy* from a reader who 'desperately want[s] a sex change operation' (19 April 1980, p. 31), and a first person article about a trans man's experience in *more!* (17 June 1998).

¹² In fact, several of the responses to my survey make clear that readers of girls' magazines were not all cisgender girls, and that the magazines could be used as a tool to think about trans issues.

oppressions they may offer their readers, also offer a space which is dedicated to girls, and pays at least lip service to the idea of supporting girls' interests, desires and needs.

Many of the magazines which make up the primary source material of this thesis make some attempts to challenge assumptions about girls and their place; many of them reinforce these assumptions, and most do both at different times and in different ways. One of the aims of this thesis, then, is to view the magazines through the lens of present-day feminist theory, to unpick the ways that the magazines served varying conservative and progressive functions in their interaction with girls, and the ways that girls in turn enacted and discussed different aspects of their gender roles in their contributions to the magazines.

Reflexivity: the researcher in the researched

In contrast with more traditional social and cultural studies, feminist research holds the explicit presence of the self within the work to be unavoidable, and any claims of objectivity – disclaiming the relationship between researcher and researched – to be disingenuous:

all research is ideological because no one can separate themselves from the world – from their values and opinions, from books they read, from the people they have spoken to and so on. Thus, the product cannot be separated from the means of its production (Olsen, 1980) and feminists not only acknowledge this but celebrate it. (Letherby, 2003, pp. 5–6)

This thesis is one view of a story about how girls became women in the twentieth century; as one of those women, it is impossible for me to wholly separate my experience from my research. Between about 1988 and 1993, I was reading *Jackie*, *Just Seventeen*, *Mizz*, *more!* and others. I was lucky in both my problems and my support networks, and never needed to write to these magazines to ask for help, or to rely on the information they offered when no other source was open to me, but my friends and I avidly read the problem pages and the advice articles about all the different sorts of challenges which we might face. For us, the magazines were, as for generations of girls before us, and perhaps only one generation afterwards, a huge part of our learning about the social world around us, how we fit into it, what our rights and

responsibilities were, and the most all-consuming teenage question: whether we were normal. More than our other sources of information – parents, teachers, books, films, TV, playground gossip – the information in magazines seemed to be aiming to be true and helpful and relevant, all at the same time. It was tailored for us (or sometimes for the versions of ourselves we would be in a year, or two years, or five), and it was produced by adults who, we assumed, had access to the facts (about sex, and health, and the law, and schools, and universities, and everything else) and who also understood what our lives were really like, as distinct from what our parents and our teachers thought they were like.

So my own teenaged self – and those of the women I grew up with – is unavoidably present in the background of sections of this thesis. In remembering reading *Just Seventeen* with my friends in the 1990s, there is a hint of what we might have been like if instead we had read *Boyfriend* thirty years earlier; as a woman who was once a magazine-reading teenage girl, any discussion of other magazine-reading teenage girls is inevitably partly also about me and about anyone who has ever talked to me about her own teenage magazine-reading experiences.

Nevertheless, to avoid a too-direct relationship between myself as a former consumer of these magazines and myself as a researcher of them, and to maintain some critical distance from my material, I have avoided the period of my own magazine reading in my selection of case studies: the cases discussed in chapters one, three and five were published before I began to read teenage magazines, the one in chapter four after I had stopped reading them, and although I was reading magazines at the time of the examples discussed in chapter two, I was not yet reading *Just Seventeen*, the magazine they are drawn from.

Book history

The rise of book history as an academic discipline has been argued to owe its roots to the demise of the book: that the book is no longer the dominant cultural form in the Western world ‘in some way has licensed the study of its past’ (Finkelstein and McCleery, 2002, pp. 2–3). The relationship of the discipline to the study of magazines is more complicated. Although the print magazine industry as a whole has suffered from the rise of the internet, and girls’ magazines in

particular are now more-or-less defunct in the UK,¹³ the study of the history of the magazine industry has not always been adopted with the same enthusiasm as that of its less-ephemeral cousin, the book. The name of the discipline itself suggests that magazine scholarship need not apply. Nevertheless, if one wishes to move beyond a literary or sociological analysis of the words on the page, to an analysis which includes consideration of practices of publication, authorship and commercial viability, many of the same approaches may be applied to the study of the magazine as to the study of the book.

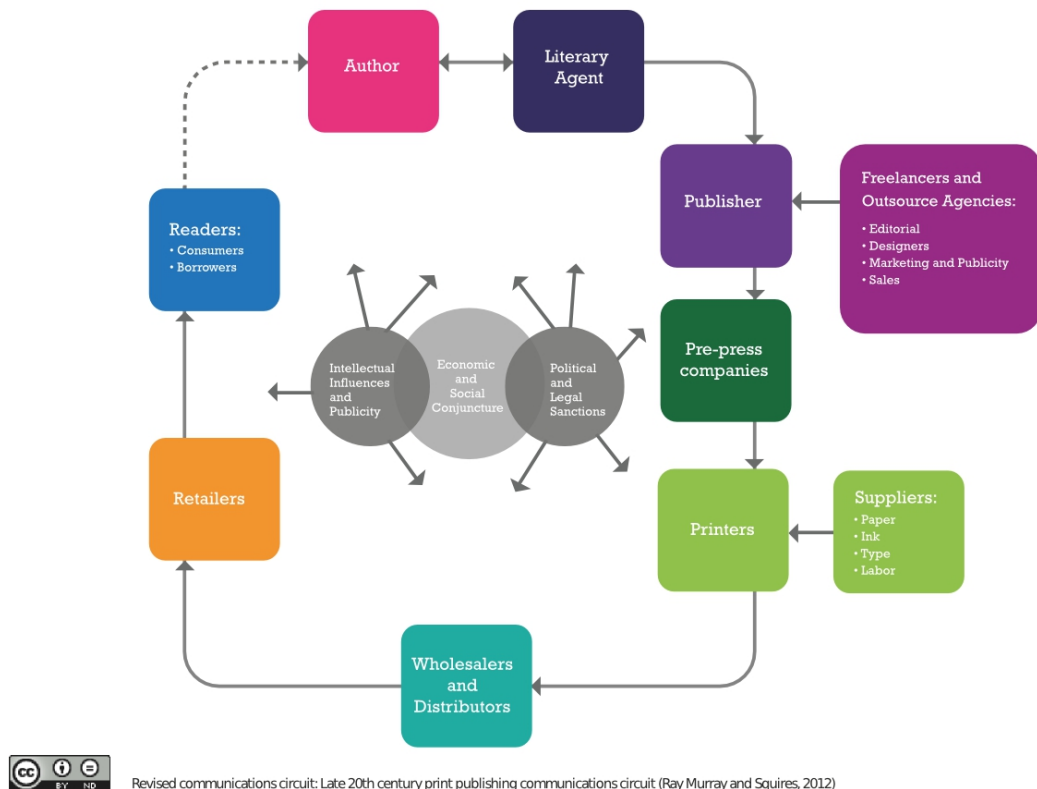


Figure 1: Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires' adapted version of Robert Darnton's *Communications Circuit*

If we consider Robert Darnton's *Communications Circuit* (or a version of it that has been updated to reflect the twenty-first century, such as that offered by Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires (2012), above) as defining the subject and scope of book history, my research focuses on the section of it between readers and author, the interaction between those actors

¹³ See further discussion in the afterword.

and the elements of wider society in the centre of the diagram, and on what happens when magazines publish some version of these interactions. Darnton identifies reading as ‘the most difficult stage to study in the circuit that books follow’ (2002, p. 17), but in magazines the link between reader and writer is much closer than in books, and evidence of that link can be traced through the magazines, as shown in my magazine ideas circuit in figure 2 below.

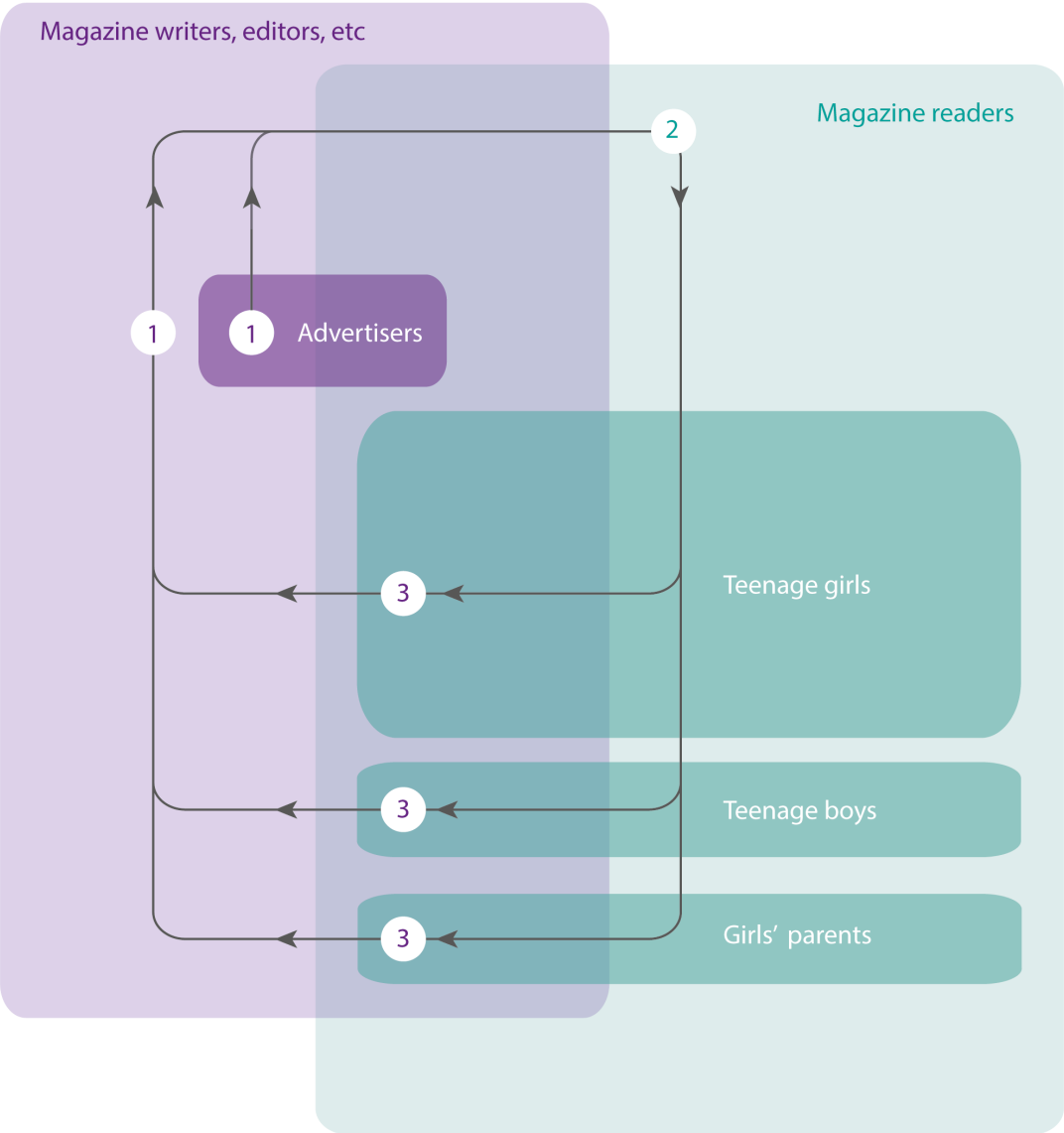


Figure 2: Magazine ideas circuit

The circuit starts with the publication of an article (or an advertisement) (1), which is then read by the magazine readers (2), some of whom may write letters in response, some of which are published (3), and which sometimes lead to further responses from the magazine itself (1, again). It is important to note the overlap between ‘writers’ and ‘readers’. This diagram does

not, of course, describe the entirety of the relationship between magazine and reader. As well as the intense private reading relationship that teenage girls had with their magazines, there is a shared reading experience that in some ways harks back to earlier relationships between readers and print, as described by Darnton of the early modern period: 'Reading [...] was often done aloud and in groups, or in secret and with an intensity we may not be able to imagine today' (2002, p. 21). He may not be able to imagine that kind of reading, but to the readers of the magazines I consider here, it was almost a commonplace: reading aloud the questions of a 'does he fancy you' quiz, or gathering to share the secret knowledge contained in a magazine permitted by a more liberal-minded parent, or obtained in secret, and without the knowledge of other, stricter, parents. To the readers of these magazines, like readers of banned books, some of their content could be effectively contraband, as vividly demonstrated by some of the results of my survey, discussed in chapter three.

There is little wider evidence of the details of girls reading their magazines, despite their popularity. The perception of these readers as unimportant, combined with the assumption that their reading matter is frivolous, has meant that this aspect of reading history has been largely overlooked. As an example, albeit from an earlier period, the coverage of girls reading girls' magazines in the Reading Experience Database is limited to two entries, both drawn from Kate Flint's work; other sources, even within a database which strives to include readers who have been overlooked by the historical record, do not mention girls and their magazines (Open University, no date).

Returning to the visible interventions that readers make in the published magazines, I am influenced by researchers such as Laurel Brake and Julie Codell, and their work on what they call 'encounters' in the press, which they define as:

any set of articles or letters to the editor in which the writer, whether journalist or reader, responds to a published article in a periodical, often as a reply to special topics or issues of the day, or to other articles with which the respondent agrees or disagrees. (2005, p. 5)

I use these encounters to examine the relationship between reader and producer, and between girls and society. As with Brake and Codell's work, using the relationships embedded within these encounters adds another layer to the analysis of the overall text of the periodical.

My work is also influenced by the approach laid out by Teresa Gerrard's paper 'New methods in the history of reading' (2011) which gives an example of the use of problem pages in magazines to research wider social issues. Her aim is to employ this method to 'construct a reading history that focuses more firmly on the common reader' (2011, p. 380), whereas the nature of the reader letters I discuss makes them exemplary of the *uncommon* reader: the one who not only argues back against what she is told, but writes her argument in to the magazine for publication.

My exploration of the relationship between readers and magazines mostly focuses on these instances of reader voices made visible within the magazines through their letters, though my analysis also sometimes touches on magazine content for which there is no published response from readers. In my analysis at these points, I use a reader response approach, drawing on the work of Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser, and especially Kirsten Drotner.

Exploring the action of sentences on their readers, Fish examines 'what does this sentence do?' as an alternative to the traditional textual analysis question, 'what does this sentence mean?' Like some of Fish's examples, what magazines *mean* is ever-changing, uncertain, shifting ground. They teem with internal contradictions. What they *do*, however, can be a more rewarding thing to explore: they construct their own ideal reader, and the *actual* reader must navigate this: she negotiates between the different positions the magazine places her in, and the positions she places herself in (Fish, 1980, p. 72).

Although Iser somewhat implausibly considers women's magazines an example of a text offering 'a harmonious world purified of all contradiction and deliberately excluding anything that might disturb the illusion once established' (1980, p. 59), his analysis of the way texts can provoke different responses in different readers, independent of 'the "reality" of a particular text' (*ibid*) is nevertheless a foundational assumption upon which much of my analysis relies.

Applying this kind of consideration to the *Girl's Own Paper*, for example, Kirsten Drotner shows the different ways the text is likely to be read by readers depending on their class, and on the other social and mental resources available to them as a result of their class position: the inherent contradictions of the magazine form 'would therefore have become catalysts to [the middle-class girl's] self-realization, more so than to her impecunious sisters' (1988, p. 162). Drotner uses this approach to look beneath the surface of magazines for children and teenagers, to find 'a covert history of resistance [...] beyond one-sided notions of popular reading as either pure entertainment or a clever form of moral or commercial exploitation' (1988, pp. 246–7). The magazines she examines are from an earlier period, 1751–1945, but many of the same issues, and types of analysis, are relevant in the period under consideration here.

However, despite these methods of analysing reader response, it is impossible to precisely describe the responses of readers to the content of the magazines: 'there will always be unanticipated, or unknown, factors that influence readers and reading experiences' (Halsey, 2009, p. 233); my analysis of the ways that this material might be read is therefore always only one possibility, and not a claim of universality.

Readers bring their various selves to the text, and interpret it (analyse it, argue with it, absorb it) in different ways accordingly. Mary Talbot gives a neat example of this action which draws on *Jackie* magazine:

A male adult reading *Jackie* [...] is unlikely to fit comfortably into the position of the reader constructed. He would have no difficulty in contesting the writer's notions of who he is and what interests him. For example, presupposed ideas attributed to the readers, such as the one carried in a text opening with the words: "When you're trying your hardest to impress hunks in the sixth form...", would fall on stony ground indeed. A 13 year-old girl on the brink of adulthood, on the other hand, might have the impression that trying to impress hunks in the sixth form is one of the things she should be doing. (1992, p. 176)

Talbot's work is primarily linguistic in focus, but she nevertheless provides an example of the overlap in analytical approaches between critical discourse analysis and reader response theory, which I engage in here.

Critical and feminist discourse analysis

I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a lens through which to engage with the material. The two main theorists whose work I draw upon in this area are Deborah Cameron (e.g. 1992, 1995) and Norman Fairclough (e.g. 2001, 2003), both of whom discuss relationships between the use of language and the exercise of social power of various sorts. Cameron focuses mostly on language in support of or in resistance to sexism, and Fairclough similarly in relation to what he calls 'new capitalism' (2003, p. 4). Both use linguistic analysis to seek to destabilise power relations and empower those who are disempowered by our current social structures. This attention to power makes them suitable approaches to draw on in analysing interactions between readers and producers of girls' magazines, since even the most equitable-appearing magazines operate a power imbalance between the magazine and its readers, and the readers are themselves disempowered in their everyday lives in various ways as a result of being both young and female. Power is not a major axis of analysis in this study, but the power imbalance between reader and producer is implicit in all of the interactions I analyse and therefore has an ongoing effect in all of my case studies, not least because the precise word choices in all parts of the interactions I examine are under the control of the magazine, rather than of the reader.

CDA concerns itself with the ways that language is used to reinforce social hierarchies and ideologies, and also the ways it can be used to conceal this reinforcing work. CDA thus works to reveal such instances, and destabilise them, in pursuit of a fairer, more equitable society. It has much in common with the linguistic arm of feminist research and activism, which has pointed out ways that sexism has been played out in language (e.g. Spender, 1980; McConnell-Ginet, 1989; Ehrlich and King, 1994; Pauwels, 2004, and many others). Both CDA and feminist linguistics often posit a two-way, mutually constructive, link between language and society, whereby for example sexist language is created by sexist society, and sexist society is in turn

supported by sexist language. Conversely, non-sexist language can help to destabilise sexist society, and an increasingly non-sexist society will begin to create non-sexist language.

This way of understanding language and its role in society is the foundation to the linguistic analyses which I use in this research to arrive at a deeper understanding of the work being done by the choice of words and linguistic structures in magazine content. For example by honing in on the connotations of particular word choices, in comparison with other words which could have been chosen in the same place, I can consider how these words are conveying an overall message, even if that message was not explicitly intended by the original producers of the text. Indeed it is impossible to determine the intention of the text producer, and even if it were possible, their choices are constrained by their own understanding of the world, as well as by the practical and commercial limitations of the magazine production process.

In my discussion of the way that readers of magazines relate the content of the magazine to their own existing life experience and beliefs, I draw upon Fairclough's idea of 'members' resources' (MR), that is, the beliefs and understandings about the world which each person has absorbed from their life experience so far, including what they have been told about how society operates (2001, p. 118). These resources are constantly drawn upon in texts, and much magazine content would be incomprehensible to readers who did not have this bank of knowledge to draw upon.

I am also influenced by John O'Regan's idea of 'Text as a Critical Object', which, drawing on other theorists such as Derrida and Adorno, uses CDA to analyse the descriptive interpretation, the representative interpretation, the social interpretation and the deconstructive interpretation of a text. This process thus examines the idea of itself that the text presents – what O'Regan describes as 'how the text seems to want to be read, the text's "dominant" or "preferred" reading' (2006, p. 185) – and, through close analysis of various features of the text, connects it with the 'social frameworks' it contributes to, and finally, uses aspects of the text itself to undermine that preferred reading (O'Regan, 2006). In particular, the questions I use in my analysis framework (see appendix two) owe a debt to O'Regan's work. My framing questions

about the magazine, topic, and initial voice (questions 1–3), as well as consideration of the text's 'ideal reader' (question 13), relate to O'Regan's descriptive interpretation; my questions about who in the text is progressive or conservative (question 12), and whether feminist principles are active (question 15) relate to the social values section of his representative interpretation. Question 16, about layout and design, corresponds with the image section of O'Regan's representative interpretation, and question 14, about language choices, with his vocabulary and grammar sections. Since all of my texts are of broadly similar genre, there is no section of my framework equivalent to the genre section of his representative interpretation. The social interpretation of the text appears in my questions 17 and 18, setting the contested issue in its context related to other contested topics and the society of the time. Finally, my analysis of the way that readers respond to the magazine, the way the relationship between magazine and reader is constructed, and the way this negotiation and argument operates (questions 4–11), corresponds to O'Regan's deconstructive interpretation. That is, I use the magazine content that sparks reader responses as analogous to the 'preferred reading', and the reader responses to perform the function he describes as 'contradict or undermine the text's preferred reading' (2006, p. 193).

The linguistic choices that the magazines make in describing and addressing their readers can also provide an insight into the ways they conceptualised their 'ideal readers' (O'Regan, 2006), those who most closely fit the reader that the magazine producers envisage in preparing the magazine and its content, and therefore help to shape the way that readers might think about themselves. Each magazine, in each issue, is therefore engaged partly in constructing its ideal reader. While all magazines are read by a broader group than just their target market, and most contain some explicit acknowledgement of this (for example by publishing problem page letters from boys, or from the mothers of readers), it is nevertheless possible to discern the magazine producers' idea of what a typical reader looks like. In interacting with the magazine, whether actively or passively, each reader must construct herself in relation to this 'ideal reader', and part of that construction includes the level of argument that she engages in with the magazine. For example, in the 1990s, the letters pages of both *Mizz* and *Bliss* encouraged

readers to write in with their responses to articles – the ideal reader of those magazines was therefore constructed as a smart, critical reader with her own opinions which she was willing to share. This did not necessarily mean, however, that those magazines encouraged all kinds of critical responses in their readers, or that their actual average reader necessarily fit into that mould, merely that this was the impression they conveyed of what their readers were like.

The majority of the material I analyse in this thesis is drawn from published letters to magazines, and is therefore reliant on a range of assumptions about the authenticity of those contributions.

Letters to magazines: all made up?

Hark ye, you Apollo, don't you make the questions and answers?

Not at present, really Sire; but should soon take that method if other people's questions were of no more consequence than yours.

(Question and answer from *British Apollo*, early eighteenth-century problem page, quoted in Kent (1979, p. 4))

The popular mythology about problem pages, and other sources of reader letters, is that their contents are fake, written by the magazine's editors or advice columnists, and intended to represent what they assume are the issues which preoccupy their readers, or the issues which they think *should* preoccupy their readers, or those on which they wish to offer advice, rather than the problems for which readers are actually requesting advice. I will therefore briefly examine the evidence for the veracity of the letters.

Before the rise of the internet, places for people to seek safe, reliable advice about issues which they might find difficult or embarrassing were extremely limited. In the introduction to his monumental research studies on sexual behaviour, Alfred Kinsey wrote that he was moved to begin his research by the stream of university students who came to him, as a biology professor, seeking information about sex which was otherwise unavailable to them, especially if they were unmarried (1953, pp. 4–5). Later in the century, children's author Judy Blume had

a similar experience: receiving nearly two thousand letters from her readers each month in the 1980s, she eventually published a book, *Letters to Judy*, drawing on some of these, as a resource to help adults understand some of the problems faced by the children and teenagers around them (1987, p. 11).

It therefore seems clear that without a convenient professor to approach in person, and with minimal chance of a reply from their favourite author, teenagers would have written to their magazines, and that the most the magazine might have needed to do to turn these reader letters into copy for the problem page would have been some editing, or perhaps some weaving together of similar letters.

The evidence of people who have been involved with magazine advice columns themselves backs up this reasoning. Nostalgic articles in the mainstream media featuring interviews with writers who worked for *Jackie* magazine,¹⁴ such as Nina Myskow talking to Caroline Foulkes in the *Birmingham Post* (2005), and to the BBC (2007), and Sandy Marks talking to Esther Addley in the *Guardian* (2007), make it clear that the magazine did receive genuine letters. Similarly, researcher Angela Phillips cites several newspaper agony aunts' statements about the authenticity of the letters they print: Claire Rayner, and later Deidre Sanders, in the *Sun*, and Marje Proops in the *Daily Mirror* all talked to Phillips about receiving hundreds of problem letters a day; Virginia Ironside, agony aunt for the *Independent*, described receiving fewer letters than she did when writing for the tabloid press, and admitted to sometimes canvassing her acquaintance for problems, but still denied making anything up (Phillips, 2008). In an article marking the tenth anniversary of Marje Proops' death, Ironside reviews the history of the agony column, and defines 'responsible' agony aunts as those 'who answered every letter that came in, not just on those pages' (Ironside, 2006, p. 68). Petra Boynton's discussion of advice columnists describes two different types of modern agony aunts: her first group coincides with Ironside's definition: advisers who tend to be older, more qualified, and to treat 'advice giving

¹⁴ *Jackie's* longevity seems to have made it peculiarly prone to nostalgic revisitings, even decades after it ceased publication.

[as] a personal and political act, something you do for love' (2009, p. 123). Boynton's second group are often celebrities, and tend to see themselves as columnists rather than advice-givers. Members of this group are not much in evidence in any of the teen magazines under investigation here; there are occasional appearances from celebrity guests on problem pages, but they tend to treat advice-giving seriously. See, for example, pop star Mark Wynter offering advice in *Boyfriend* magazine, discussed in chapter three. Like *Ironside*, one of the defining features Boynton sees in the first group is that they try to reply to all of the letters they receive, sometimes sending individual replies, even when the rules of the magazine officially forbid this (2009, pp. 123–124). That Boynton's study appears in a scholarly edited collection adds some useful veracity to the popular accounts of magazine journalists talking to the mainstream media: agony aunts receive so many letters which they believe to be genuine that they must resort to individual replies to feel they are doing justice to their work, and they talk about this not just in nostalgic newspaper articles but also to serious researchers.

This concern to ensure that each reader receives a reply, by personal letter if not in print, is a clear signal that the letters the advice columnists receive are genuine. A writer who fabricated letters and replies for entertainment or instruction purposes would simply point to the magazine rules that the advice columnist is 'unable to enter into personal correspondence' (*Mizz*, 1995, p. 44, although similar rules appear on many different problem pages).

Advice columnists did not always officially refuse to send personal replies to letters. Daniel Defoe, in his single-handed *Review* at the beginning of the eighteenth century, began to send personal replies to problems too sensitive to be handled in public: W. Clark Hendley quotes this notice from the *Review*:

The Gentleman who sent a letter, Sign'd A.F. is desir'd to let us know where to write to him, the Author supposing he cannot be willing to have his story made public. (*Review*, 20 February 1705, quoted in Hendley, 1977, p. 349)

Advice columnists in women's magazines later in the twentieth century would also sometimes write personal replies; like Defoe, they did so when replying to letters which dealt with

subjects too sensitive to be covered publicly, such as sexual difficulties (Kent, 1979; Tinkler, 1995). As with the requests for advice received by Kinsey and Blume, people who were confronted with a problem they felt unable to take to friends, family members, or medical practitioners could instead seek advice from strangers whose public persona included suggestions of knowledge and wisdom. The help of such people was not available to everyone, however, and young girls were particularly likely to be denied access to information: as Carol Dyhouse demonstrates, before the first world war any attempt at sex education for girls was often seen as destroying their innocence (2013, p. 35), and the situation was not much improved by the middle of the century: magazines offering detailed advice to unmarried girls would have been seen as encouraging inappropriate sexual behaviour. Responses to letters about sex therefore usually received straightforwardly disapproving, or cryptic, responses, such as this one from *Peg's Paper* in 1940, which Penny Tinkler quotes: 'Yes; pregnancy can follow then just as easily as any other' (1995, p. 166). Many of *Peg's Paper's* readers are likely to have been over the age of consent, though unmarried; sex was legal, but heavily stigmatised for them.

Advice columns in magazines for other audiences may be subject to different pressures, and less scrutiny. For example, Lindy Wilbraham traces the movement of an apparently reader-submitted letter through different magazines, slightly repackaged with a different title and attribution, and with different aims. The purposes of advice columns for adults which she identifies are less focused on providing information than seems to be the case in the teenage magazines: these advice columns also provide humour and titillation, and therefore benefit from readers' assumption that the letters might not be genuine, to offer readers 'the critical distance to resist or ridicule information proffered' (Wilbraham, 2012, p. 52). Although these distanced, mocking readings are also available to readers of advice columns for teenagers, they are much less foregrounded, functioning perhaps mostly as a fall-back mechanism for readers who might be embarrassed by the material – for example those who are too young for it, or who are seeking a 'cover story' for their peers as a defence against accusations that the information contained is all too relevant to them.

This leaves the problem of whether the content of the letters is also authentic. James Hemming's research draws on the actual letters sent to a girls' magazine from 1953 to 1955;¹⁵ he is therefore in no doubt as to the physical existence of the letters, but he does discuss concerns about the authenticity of the content. He dismisses a small number of letters as 'obvious try-ons' or 'from adult neurotics or psychotics' (Hemming, 1969, p. 17), but compares the general spread of problems described in the letters to a controlled study in the US about problems of adolescence, and finds that his sample of problem page letters covers sufficiently similar topics to be assumed genuine. This is just a snapshot of letters sent to one mid-century girls' magazine, and although Hemming's findings cannot necessarily be generalised, they provide some reassurance, and confirm my subjective recollection that when I was a teenager reading the problem pages in these magazines, decades later, the subjects they covered never felt anything less than convincing, despite occasional suggestions by out-of-touch adults that they were unrealistic.

The present study looks only at published letters; I am therefore necessarily assuming that the process of editorial filtering will have weeded out the 'obvious try-ons', as well as selecting letters of interest for publication. Editorial interventions may also have included editing text and combining aspects of related letters into a new letter with, perhaps, broader relevance to readers, although this is less clear. There are occasional suggestions in the magazines themselves that this was not done, such as two letters on the same problem page in *Mizz* in 1995 describing slightly different domestic violence scenarios, in which the response to the second letter, as well as containing personalised advice, directs the letter's writer to read the response to the first letter (12 April 1995, p. 56). If it was common practice to combine similar letters, these two could easily have been merged. The fact that they were not suggests also that the problem page considered its service to the individual readers who wrote the letters, as well

¹⁵ Hemming does not identify the magazine, but his description of it beginning in 1951 as a sister paper to a boys' magazine begun a year earlier suggests it is *Girl*.

as to the general readership: merging the letters could have reduced the usefulness of the agony aunt's replies to each of those two readers.

There is, therefore, a fair body of evidence in support of the authenticity of reader letters magazines publish, despite popular assumptions to the contrary.

Search: which titles and why?

My research began with getting to know the material, immersing myself in the magazines of the period in order to be able to make an informed decision on which ones were suitable for this research: which ones aimed at the right target audience, covered the types of content I was interested in, and so on. Having identified suitable titles, the next step was to read them more closely for selection of suitable content within those titles, and finally to move onto the analysis.

I constructed a list of British magazines for teenage girls between 1955 and 2000 from a combination of the press directories of the period,¹⁶ personal recollection, conversation with friends and colleagues, mentions in the secondary literature about magazines, girls or related topics, and the Magforum website (Quinn, 2018). The press directories were invaluable as sources which intend to be exhaustive, although searches of these often involved making assumptions about the target market of magazines based on the periodical's name, frequency, price and so on, since not all titles include descriptions of content or audience. The British Library catalogue served as a guide to the lifespan of each magazine.

I thus collected a list of thirty-nine mainstream, national magazines for teenage girls published in the UK in the second half of the twentieth century. I read sample issues of every magazine, to confirm from their typical content whether they were suitable for this study. Magazines for teenage girls cover a wide range of ages, maturity levels, and types of content, as well as often overlapping with other magazine-reading audiences such as teenage boys, and, at either end of

¹⁶ The *Newspaper Press Directories* before 1976, *Benn's Press Directory* 1978–1985 and *Benn's Media Directory* after 1986.

the age range, both pre-teen girls, and young adult women. For the purposes of this study, I was seeking magazines aimed at girls who were exploring their own independence, but most of whom were still living with their parents or guardians. Many of those girls will have been at school or college, with some working, though the balance between school and work for this age group changed as the century progressed. In 1955, the school leaving age was 15, and most girls left school at that age to start work; only about 20% of 16-year olds were in full time education. By 1999, the school leaving age had been raised to 16, and nearly 60% of 17-year-olds were still at school (Bolton, 2012)¹⁷. Thus the distinction which Penny Tinkler notes as producing a segmentation of the post-war magazine market for girls, with separate magazines targeting the ‘schoolgirl’, aged 11–15 years, and the older ‘working’ or ‘modern’ girl of 15–20 years (2000, p. 99) For my purposes, I consider the ‘working girl’ magazines to be ‘teenage magazines’, but usually not the ‘schoolgirl’ ones.

The top end of the ‘teenage’ age band can be argued to flex around the age of marriage and/or otherwise moving out of the parental home. Mark Abrams, for example, in his work on the teenage consumer of the 1950s, defines ‘teenagers’ as unmarried people between the ages of 15 and 25, emphasising this period of relative freedom and independence between the childish concerns of school days, and the adult concerns of married life: in his terms, a married 16-year-old is an adult, whereas an unmarried 24-year-old is still a teenager (Abrams, 1959). At the lower end of the age range, one of my survey respondents complained that:

“teen” mags surely weren't for teens? At 11/12, you're reading *j17* and *more!* then by 16 I had an adult boyfriend [...] so we were more into porn mags than teens talking about maybe doing it, since we actually were. (Respondent 46)

¹⁷ Though changes in the way these statistics were measured and recorded between 1955 and 1999 mean that these numbers are not directly comparable; I quote them here to give an overall impression of the clear increase in rates of children staying on past compulsory schooling.

However, this complaint must be set against the several other respondents who commented that with hindsight, some of the content of teen magazines was actually too old for themselves as teenagers.

The concept of the teenager, then, is slippery, and may include at different times girls who are younger than 13, or older than 19. The more formal or medical term, 'adolescent', while seeming to offer more certainty of definition, is also troublesome and unclear (Curtis, 2015). So I use 'teenager' throughout, while acknowledging the fuzzy edges of its definition. And since the magazines do not usually declare their target audience in explicit terms, my identification of suitable magazines was dependent on inferences about target audience drawn from the content of the magazines. The ones I was interested in typically include fairly extensive content about boyfriends, and usually some discussion of sex (although this is one of the subjects where coverage changes across time, with sex appearing more frequently in later decades than in earlier ones). Articles and letters in these magazines were about problems of adolescence and about the beginnings of the process of becoming an adult. The magazines tended to be those which focused on features and fashion, rather than the focus on fiction often seen in magazines for younger girls. Such fiction as there was tended to be photo stories, or occasionally prose, and about romantic relationships, rather than the comic strips about adventures and activities seen in titles such as *Jinty* and *Misty*. Other common topics included makeup, celebrities, and sometimes coverage of education and careers.

I have described this as a search for a target audience, and the use of content to identify this audience, but I could equally have presented this as a search for content, and an assumption about target audience based on that content. In truth, the two aspects, audience and content, are deeply intertwined, and it is never clear which is the originator and which the result.

Whichever aspect takes precedence, it is sometimes difficult to precisely identify magazines, because they often include 'aspirational' content acting as a preview of what the next age bracket up looks like. This phenomenon is perhaps most visible in the names of the magazines *Just Seventeen* and *19*; in both cases the typical reader may be two or more years younger than

the title suggests, although the two-year age gap between them which their titles imply seems accurate.

My selection of which issues to read was an attempt to cover the period closely enough to be able to draw on several different roughly contemporary titles at each point: I aimed to read issues of at least one title for each year of the period, although in some cases library access to the targeted title proved impossible, for example, the 1989 issues of *Oh Boy!*, which the Bodleian does not hold, and the British Library catalogue lists but will not allow access to: a reminder of the ephemeral nature of these magazines, and the inherent messiness of research on them. Where possible, and for magazines which seemed relevant, I read in blocks of at least three issues at a time, one block for approximately each five-year period it was in publication. For those titles which contained the most interesting and relevant material, I read more issues.

Some magazines proved to be unsuitable for my purpose. For example, I excluded most of the content of *Girl*¹⁸ as too young, because although there is evidence of teenage readers, for example in the ages of readers who write letters to the magazine, these are at the top end of *Girl's* readership: the magazine also publishes letters from girls aged 9 or 10. *Girl's* occasional coverage of boyfriends is very much at a 'friends who are boys' level, rather than a romantic or sexual level, and most of the magazine's page count is filled with comic strip fiction.

The letters published and answered on magazine problem pages help to focus and define the community of the magazine's readers. As the section of the magazine most closely linked to the concerns of its readers, it defines a readership – a reader's selection of a magazine being partly based on the relevance and utility of its content, with the problem page as perhaps the most utilitarian content of all. As Kristen, a 15-year-old participant in Dawn Currie's research on magazines, described her favourite magazine:

¹⁸ The 1951–1963 version; there was another magazine of the same name in publication from 1981–1990.

All the questions – they aren't too young, and they aren't too old or anything.

They are kind of right for me. (Currie, 2001)

Kristen is thus selecting the magazine she will read based on her recognition of herself and her age group in the questions appearing on the problem page.

For several of the most relevant and useful magazines I have read them at several points in their history. All of the longer-running magazines are subject to the usual changes across time: different editors and writers, different popular celebrities, careers, fashions, and changing acceptability of, for example, sexual topics. Some magazines merged with each other, taking composite names in various combinations, such as *Boyfriend*, which merged with *Trend* to become *Boyfriend and Trend*, then *Petticoat Trend*, then *Petticoat*.

This approach of reading magazines throughout the fifty-year time span, and across their individual publication lives, and several different magazines at each point in the period means I benefit from both the lateral and longitudinal view of the magazine market for teenage girls (Tinkler, 2016).

Having identified suitable magazines, the next stage was to read them in search of suitable content.

Selection: which content is relevant?

In reading the magazines I excluded fiction and advertising. Both of these do sometimes perform an instructive function, but that function is less directly attributable to the magazine's overall message, and it is less accommodating of reader response. Both also represent an entirely different set of aims, techniques, and relationship between text and image, in addition to those found in articles. These types of magazine content are, of course, worthy of study in their own right,¹⁹ but they are beyond the scope of this work.

¹⁹ See for example work by Dawn Currie (1997), Ellen Gruber Garvey (1996), Kate Peirce (1993) and others.

I looked in particular for contributions from readers, and responses by the magazine to these contributions. These types of content usually take the form of letters pages and advice columns; within this area, my reading was particularly focused on instances of readers using the magazine as a venue for negotiation of some sort. These negotiations took several different forms, including disagreement with the magazine writers, as in the examples from *Jackie* in chapter one, where readers disagreed with the magazine's advice on how to acquire a boyfriend, or the letters about why women want children in *Honey* in chapter five; readers talking directly to other readers, as in the examples from *Just Seventeen* considered in chapter two; or areas where readers disagreed with other parties to their lives, such as the parental disagreements in *Marilyn* explored in chapter three, or the disagreement with boys in *Mizz* which is covered in chapter four.

Some of these individual instances of disagreement acted as signposts towards wider issues, and areas where readers were contributing to their contested nature: finding these clusters of disagreements was my overall goal in my reading of the magazines. In particular, I sought contested issues around what constitutes appropriate behaviour at any given time, and other related messages about how to be a girl, how girls and women should live their lives, and how they should interact with aspects of the social and material world.

To identify the topics which have become my major case studies, I traced instances of reader disagreement through consecutive issues of the magazine. This sometimes took the form of reader responses which were unconnected with each other but on the same topic, and sometimes a chain of ongoing dialogue between magazine and readers on an explicitly connected topic. In both types of case, I collected the original magazine content, the reader response to it, and, when there was one, the magazine's reply to the reader feedback, repeating as necessary to the end of the chain of conversation.

As well as this gathering of reader interaction with the magazines, I collected non-contested examples of content which related to a contested issue elsewhere, to demonstrate the different treatment of issues at different times and in different magazines. For example, the statement in *Boyfriend* in 1960 that '*intercourse before marriage is wrong because it can only lead to deceit*

and misery' (30 January 1960, p. 25; italics original): sex was not yet a topic it was easy to publicly disagree about, so this claim remains uncontested, but this text nevertheless works as a contrast to shed further light on the way that sex was negotiated in later decades.²⁰

In my reading I was also looking for signals about the relationship between magazine and reader, for example how authoritarian the magazine was in its advice, and how formal or informal were interactions between magazine and reader. Evidence of these relationships also included the portrayal of the personas of magazine writers, and how they were positioned relative to readers.

The case studies examined in subsequent chapters were selected from this material on the basis of demonstrating interesting interaction between readers and magazines. Of course, these are not the only case studies it is possible to draw from this research topic. Other researchers reading with their own priorities and interests would no doubt see and select different case studies. Similarly, these case studies are simply the most interesting of the ones which were visible to me in the magazine issues I read: if I had read different issues, it is likely that different case studies would have emerged.

Process of analysis

Once I had identified a cluster of reader negotiation with a magazine around a particular issue, I began my analysis by working through a series of carefully designed prompt questions (discussed in the section above on 'Critical and feminist discourse analysis'), to help me to focus on what was happening in and behind the interaction on display, and to pinpoint interesting features of the topic. These questions evolved as the research progressed: I added some of them later in the project, and went back to reanalyse earlier material after new angles were showcased by later material. In this way, my analysis has moved back and forth between eras and topics, constantly recalibrating my approach to maintain consistency, and to keep

²⁰ This example is discussed in more detail in chapter two.

each topic fresh in my mind while working on another. The list of questions is in appendix two.

These questions guided me through a description of the magazine, the topic, and the actors within it (questions 1–4), and then moved into analysis of how the interaction between magazine and reader operated in each example (questions 5–8). In this analysis I was also looking for clues to the way the magazine is constructing the relationship between reader and magazine, including how the authority to speak is bestowed or assumed by the different parties.

Considerations of the structure and values of the argument or negotiation between reader and magazine were prompted by questions 9–13. Are there two clear-cut sides to an argument, how are they presented, and who is positioned on which side? What is the magazine assuming about the readers of this content, or the beliefs and values they hold relative to the presentation of the topic? How does this relate to other issues in girls' lives, and elsewhere in the magazine?

I also paid close attention to a variety of linguistic features, using this as a lens to deepen my textual analysis, and an aid to looking beyond surface meanings (question 14). For example, I considered the particular connotations of word choice, alternative words that might seem to have a similar meaning, but would subtly change the overall tone of the text, and whether the words chosen serve to strengthen or soften the message. Also relevant is the 'voice' the text is written in: is the text portrayed as being 'by' an individual, and how are they positioning themselves in relation to the reader? Or is it the magazine as a whole speaking, perhaps on behalf of adult authority? (Drawing on questions 3, 8 and 10, as well as the linguistic elements prompted by question 14.) Analysis of the grammar of the text can reveal issues of agency, which actors in the text have autonomy, which are constrained, and who or what is responsible for the textual message, or actions described. This will be made clearer with a brief example.

In the editor's letter at the beginning of the relaunched *Bliss* magazine in April 1999, editor Kerry Parnell speaks in the first person plural, although the letter is accompanied by her photograph

and a handwritten 'Kerry', to imply her signature; this emphasises both her individual status in charge of the magazine, and her ability to speak on behalf of the entire organisation. She describes the magazine's intended reader:

The new *Bliss* is for girls who want a bit more from their mags – for girls who want to be treated like a person, not a teenager – for girls who have something to say about the world and want to get their voices heard – and we're listening. (April 1999, p. 6)

Also of linguistic interest in this sentence is the opposed pair 'person/teenager', and its association with readers who are identified as 'girls'. By opposing 'person' to 'teenager', and using non-gendered terms for both halves, the magazine implies that 'person' means the non-gender-specific *adult*, although this message is undercut by the repetition of 'girl': both young and female,²¹ and by the fact that even though the magazine is claiming it will offer girls 'a bit more', the magazine nevertheless looks much like other magazines for teenage girls. The overall effect of this introduction to the new-style *Bliss*, then, is to provide a personal welcome from an authority figure, allowing readers to congratulate themselves on transcending the limitations of their age and gender, while still keeping them within the box those limitations construct. This linguistic analysis allows us to hone in on the ways this editor's letter simultaneously makes promises and breaks them.

Drawing on the changing status of women's rights, and discourses about them, as the century progressed, I also examined the text for evidence of feminist (or anti-feminist) ideas (question 15). This takes various forms, from implicit ideas about the status of girls and women in society, to outright claims of equality or inequality, or explicit references to the women's rights movement.

²¹ Although note that it is a point of feminist contention that 'girl' is frequently used to infantilise adult women (Doyle, 1995, p. 153).

For the most part, I concerned myself with the text and the actors within it, and the relationships between them, but from time to time the arrangements of the words on the page, and their interactions with images, colours, and so on, were relevant to the overall analysis (question 16). This might be said to be part of what Gerard Genette named 'paratext' (1997), but in the magazine context, it is in fact a part of the text itself, inseparable from the words which constitute the article on the page. A magazine which constituted a plain, black and white typesetting of the words contained within an issue would be a different entity entirely from the brightly coloured object with its interesting layout, illustration and photography. My analysis considered the effects of magazine design decisions on the readers' perception of the content; for example: how is the content laid out within the page grid? Is the page in black and white or full colour, and how does that compare with other content in the magazine? What images have been chosen to illustrate an article, and which sections of the article do those images relate to? What is the magazine's physical form – binding, page extent, paper type, and so on? How do these design decisions interact with the meanings of the words within the magazines?

Finally, questions 17 and 18 contextualise the topic at hand by relating it to wider societal issues at the time, and to magazine discussion of other issues, at other times, as appropriate.

I have not applied these analysis questions to my material in a mechanistic way, rather as a means of balancing the line between a consistency of approach between different topics, and the ability to focus in on the areas of particular interest and relevance for each topic. They have guided my analysis rather than constrained it. The methodological note in each chapter explains which sections are of particular relevance in each case study.

This mix of approaches, paying attention to the text, the language choices, and the appearance of the magazine, as well as to the various voices found within it, and to a variety of supporting content within the magazine as well as my primary focus on problem pages and letters pages, provides a holistic view of the magazine (Tinkler, 2016), and therefore helps to offer a more nuanced analysis in which I hope to avoid the pitfalls of overinterpretation of any one feature of the magazines without balancing analysis from other aspects.

Reader survey

To supplement the textual analysis detailed in the previous sections, I also conducted an online survey of women who read teen magazines in the period.²² This offers a source of first-person reader recollections of the relationship between reader and magazine, and although it is subject to the usual limitations of recollection and bias,²³ as well as being inherently anecdotal rather than statistically significant, it provides a useful extra dimension to this view of negotiation between magazine and reader. This material adds personal recollection and individual understanding of the reader/writer relationship, as an addition to the edited text which appeared in the magazines themselves, allowing me to include individual recollections of the ways that some of these issues played out in the magazines, as illustration or context for the wider discussion.

Participants were asked to anonymously complete a nine-question online survey through Google Forms. The survey used open questions, prompting respondents to consider aspects of their engagement with magazines, but leaving the topics unspecified. I tested an earlier survey design with just one open question (with several example topics), but changed this after pilot discussions with colleagues suggested splitting those aspects into different questions would lead to richer results. The survey is at appendix one.

Primary recruitment was via my own Twitter, Facebook and Google+ feeds, through which I asked my contacts on those platforms to complete the survey, and if appropriate, to forward the request on to their own contacts. Twenty people shared or retweeted the request. I also placed a notice in *Onstream*, the Oxford Brookes staff newsletter. These recruitment messages are in appendix one.

²² Approved by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee, registration number 150888.

²³ Most commonly discussed in research on health care survey design, for example that by David Sackett (1979).

I hoped to receive at least 50 responses, age range 27-83 (i.e. those who were aged between 13 and 19 in the period 1950–2000, which was at the time my intended timespan for this research). I received 109 responses, 93% of which were from people aged below 50. No one older than 70 completed the survey. Unsurprisingly, 94% of respondents identified as female; of the remaining six respondents, four gave their gender as ‘other’, one did not answer the question, and one said they ‘prefer not to say’,²⁴ though went into more detail in one of their text responses:

I was assigned male at birth, present mostly but not exclusively as male, and tend to freeze up like a rabbit in the headlights when asked what I _am_. (Respondent 95; punctuation original)

This survey data adds a different representation of the reader voice to my research, to allow those readers to speak more directly than they had through contributions to magazines. However, this voice, and these feelings and recollections it speaks, is also mediated, in this case through time rather than through the magazine’s editing processes. Adults looking back on their teenage experiences may be looking through a haze of nostalgia, painting their teenage selves as more, or less, critical than they actually were. Many of my respondents commented on the disjunct between their adult view and what they thought at the time, for example:

I feel angry for the things I ‘learned’ and how they changed my ideas. I came away thinking I should be coiffured and manicured at all times, and have sex with every man I dated. I was in my 20s before I challenged those thoughts.
(Respondent 55)

They acknowledge that their teenaged selves may have overestimated their own critical faculties, although none of them acknowledge that their adult selves may be underestimating

²⁴ From a choice of ‘female’, ‘male’, ‘other’ and ‘prefer not to say’.

their teenage selves. Several also mention their attitudes to their own (possibly hypothetical) children, for example:

I would definitely question my daughters reading the sex tips in magazines like *more!* at the age I was reading them. But they were not age restricted at all!

(Respondent 27)

Self-reporting is of course also unreliable, even of present-day attitudes and behaviours, without the distorting effect of time. Furthermore, survey results of this kind can only offer a snapshot of the subjective recollection of individual magazine readers, rather than generalisable results. The recollections of my survey respondents are therefore to be treated with some caution.

In quoting survey responses, I have corrected survey respondents' spelling where necessary, but have not otherwise changed them. Additions or elisions for clarity or brevity are marked with square brackets.

What I didn't do; what this thesis is not

This is not a statistically rigorous content analysis. The case studies do not need to be statistically significant: most of them are by their nature outlying events, the border skirmishes at the edge of the acceptable limits of girlhood, defining the boundaries as those boundaries move. The process of finding these case studies is necessarily manual rather than automatic, and the decision-making subjective. As discussed above, I note each case of reader resistance as I read, and observe which issues tend to prompt clusters of resistance; these issues become case studies.

Exhaustive cataloguing of contradictions within magazines would only be possible by keeping a detailed log of all positions taken by all writers throughout the entire relevant span of issues; since such producer-generated internal contradictions are supplementary to reader-producer contradictions within this project, this is not a practical option.

A content analysis conducted with more quantitative methods would merely demonstrate that contradictions exist in magazines for teenage girls, and perhaps document the scope of contradiction. My treatment of 'the magazine' as the author of most of the content I discuss may obscure this, but in the multi-author environment, contradictions are commonplace. My project here is to identify some of the published interactions which arise between reader and magazine and to look at how they operate, which is inevitably a more subjective, qualitative, process.

Problems and limitations

My research plan for this thesis originally spanned the whole twentieth century. The present narrowing of that focus to the latter part of the century is partly a response to the extremely limited reader interaction which appears in the girls' magazines of the interwar and World War II period, and partly a response to the appearance of *Marilyn* in 1955, heralding a new kind of teen magazine. During wartime, of course, economy and restrictions on paper would tend to suppress the practice of writing to magazines, but there was already an absence of reader participation in girls' magazines before the start of World War II. Furthermore, the 'new teenager' who emerged in the UK after the Second World War, with increasing freedom, more money to spend, the rise of rock and roll, and the approach of the sexual revolution (Todd and Young, 2012), heralded also a new kind of magazine to act as a guide through and reflection of a new kind of adolescence. Along with their focus on pop music and photo romance stories, this new kind of magazine encouraged interaction from its readers, and started to cover the new ways of being a teenager that the second half of the century promised to offer.²⁵

There were some issues with the final survey design which neither I nor my test readers noticed. Firstly, the absence of a question asking if I could contact the respondent with follow-

²⁵ Though, as with all such neat time periods, this is in part simply a convenient boundary; as Penny Tinkler has shown, the emergence of the teenager and her magazine was not chronologically straightforward, having roots in earlier magazines which began to address themselves to the 'teenager' in the 1940s, and perhaps not being fully formed until the launch of *Honey* in 1960 (Tinkler, 2016).

up questions left me wanting to unpick some of the responses, but unable to do more than speculate. Secondly, some respondents commented on my exclusion of other kinds of teenage magazines, such as those for boys, or those specifically about music. Being deeply immersed in my own project, and therefore in this project's definition of 'teenage magazines' had led to me failing to notice that this definition might not be straightforward for all respondents, and although the majority of responses do clearly refer to the lifestyle magazines for teenage girls which are my topic, some are about this broader definition, and others may be about several different kinds of magazine. Several respondents commented on the ambiguity of my question 'Did you share your magazine reading with friends or family members?': the question could refer either to actively reading magazines in the company of friends or family (my originally intended reading), or it could be about hiding or disclosing the fact that the respondent reads magazines. Both interpretations of the question are interesting and relevant, but it could have been more usefully phrased. Similarly, separating out friends and family in the response might have produced useful results, although in practice it is clear in most cases whether the respondent is referring to friends, family, or both. Finally, the result of twice as many respondents as expected meant that I received much more data than I was prepared for, and have not been able to do justice to its analysis in the context of a project which is largely focused on the magazine text. Such use as I have made of the survey results merely scratches the surface of the data.

I had planned to supplement my data with interviews with people who had worked as writers or editors for the magazines I discuss, but it proved impossible to make contact. I sent out requests for interviews via public social media posts, asking contacts to pass the message on to their own networks. My tweet was retweeted thirty-two times, receiving a total of 8,699 impressions, as well as seven shares of the Facebook post. This resulted in two email contacts, neither of whom responded to my interview questions, despite a reminder message.

My ability to identify girls' magazines, especially in the earlier part of the period, was limited by the need to manually scan the newspaper press directory; it is possible that some magazines targeted at or largely read by teenage girls were not clearly identified as such within its pages,

or that I failed to notice them, and they were not mentioned in any of the conversations and readings which helped me to form my list. Similarly, my searching the magazines for relevant content relied on actually reading them; as none of these magazines have been digitised, my primary access to source material has been through library holdings of physical copies of the magazines; no automated digital searching was possible.

As mentioned above, different researchers, even using the same questions and the same methods, and perhaps even reading the same magazine issues, would light upon different magazines as being of interest, and find different topics being contested within their pages. I do not claim to have discovered all such topics, or to have analysed them in the only possible way.

The ability to read, and write letters to, magazines is linked with issues of class and privilege. Magazine readers must have money available to spend on non-essential ephemera (or friends who do), they must have the luxury of time for reading and writing, and the ability to both read and write in private when necessary. Although these freedoms were available to most teenage girls in the period, there were also many to whom they would not have been available. Similarly, my attempts to contact the present-day adults who were previously magazine-reading teenagers have been almost exclusively through the internet, thus excluding the decreasing minority who have no access to it. That this contact has been through my own extended online and offline social circles also has implications for the reach of my survey, tending to privilege educated, middle-class residents of southern England, and to disproportionately reach those in their thirties and forties²⁶. I have used 'snowballing', that is, asking people to forward on my request to their own circles (for example in the 'Pls RT' used on Twitter to ask recipients to retweet), to try to mitigate this limitation.

²⁶ Although since the only demographic data the survey collected was age, these other restrictions of audience are assumptions, rather than based on data.

A final word about identity: all of these actors – magazine writers and editors, and their readers – are of course also whole people in their wider lives around magazines. The fragments of themselves which they project into the magazine pages will not be accurate and complete enactments of their personalities; the adults working on the magazines will have other layers to their lives which their work personas may not express, and the teenagers writing to magazines will also have been writing from within their own changing conceptions of who they are. However, the purpose of this work is to trace the way these debates and these voices were represented within the magazines, in a way that was accessible to every reader who encountered the magazine. These voices, in this context, are represented entirely by the content of the magazine, and any mitigating or enhancing information which might have been known to the friends of the writer has no place in the analysis of the content as presented. Other work, such as that by Petra Boynton (2009), Jessalynn Keller (2011) and Liz Nice (2007), examines the actual people behind the words on the page.

My research, then, uses a variety of theoretical lenses, and practical methods, to arrive at a detailed analysis of the textual interactions between teenage girls and their magazines, and what those interactions can tell us about their lives. In my next chapter I will examine that most pressing of magazine preoccupations, how to go about finding romance, and how readers of the magazines negotiate contradictions in their romantic lives.

1. Finding romance

You always say that running after a boy gets you nothing but breathless. But my pal offered to show a boy where the new bowling alley in our district was. That was six months ago and they've just got engaged. How about that? (29 February 1964, p. 23)

This girl, writing to *Jackie* magazine's problem page in 1964, challenges the advice columnists' insistence on old-fashioned female passivity in interactions with boys; she receives this response:

How about that indeed! Honestly, though, she must just be the exception that proves the rule. (29 February 1964, p. 23)

The magazine stands firm, resisting any suggestion that it might be possible to generalise from such experiences, or that they might represent a problem with the advice the magazine offers about how girls can find romance. This chapter asks how tensions inherent in finding romance are played out in the magazines throughout the period, and I return to *Jackie* magazine, and its portrayal of 'exceptional' cases to perform a more in-depth analysis of negotiations between magazine and reader around romance, using methods which pay particular attention to linguistic features of the text, and to issues of the different actors in the text: their voice, their relationships with each other, and their authority, especially as this relates to the rights of different people to speak or act, for example by the tendency of the magazine to shut down, trivialise, or ignore dissent.

The contradictions and difficulties of the subject may be said to begin with my chapter title. 'Finding romance' is presented by most of the magazines, most of the time, as the primary aim of all teenage girls, apart from those who have already 'found' their 'romance', whose aim is keeping it. My choice of 'find' (rather than, say, 'build' or 'nurture') is intended to emphasise the way the magazines portray romance, once found, as a binary state – possessed or not – that

merely requires a reader to locate a suitable boy,²⁷ and agree when he asks her to be his girlfriend. Even in their discussion of problems within romantic relationships, magazines sometimes seem to imply that the ideal romance will simply run itself, a perpetual motion machine with no care and maintenance required. 'Romance' itself is also a difficult term, with the magazine version of it taking specific conventional heterosexual, patriarchal, Western-Christian, forms (albeit changing somewhat in their precise details through the period). As well as the term's use as a general description of boy-girl relationships, it also describes specific actions within those relationships, which tend to be framed as something a boy does for a girl along predictable lines, including such gestures as gifts of flowers or chocolates, surprising her with 'romantic' notes, or offering back rubs (with no expectation that this will lead to sexual activity). Girls are not expected to offer romantic gestures to boys, and in fact are often required to teach their boyfriends about what constitutes 'romance'. The word is also sometimes used as a somewhat sarcastic euphemism for less pleasant aspects of relationships with boys, as in this reader letter, which is followed with a recipe for chewy toffee:

If you're at the pictures with a back-seat Romeo who's getting a bit too romantic, here's a recipe to make sure you get peace to see the film next time. (*Jackie*, 14 March 1964, p. 2)

In this case, readers draw on their 'members' resources²⁸ to understand that 'romantic' means not the romantic gestures discussed above, but that the boy is more interested than the girl in kissing, and that chewing toffee will prevent him from doing so.

²⁷ Lesbian relationships are much less visible in these magazines. Even late in the century when they started to become more socially acceptable, they mostly appear on the problem pages rather than within the mainstream content, and the assumption remains that the vast majority of readers will find boyfriends and eventually marry one of them. Other sexual identities, such as bisexuality and asexuality, are even rarer. There is more discussion of lesbian and bisexual romance later in this chapter.

²⁸ See discussion in the methodology chapter.

Throughout most of the period under discussion, magazines for teenage girls are dominated by discussion of romance, in all its shades of meaning. Even content which is not directly about romance is often indirectly focused on this most important goal, for example fashion and beauty advice is to help girls to attract a boy, and articles about celebrities tend to prioritise personalities and relationships over the music, films and so on which the celebrities are known for. This obsession reflects the expectation that the “‘entrance” into heterosexual relationships on the path to marriage and motherhood’ (Tinkler, 1995, p. 3) is one of the changes that characterises adolescence for girls; indeed, as Penny Tinkler points out, the position of girls within the heterosexual career is one of the categorising principles which magazines use to segment the market of teenage girls into different groups of magazine readers (1995, 2016). Guiding readers through this transition therefore offers a rich vein of potential content for the producers of their magazines, with articles educating them about how to achieve this ‘entrance’, and how to conduct themselves within their heterosexual career.

Even the occasional gestures towards the idea that boyfriends are not always the most important thing in girls’ lives may seem merely to emphasise how boy-focused the magazine is the rest of the time, as in this example from *Mizz*:

“You’re chucked” – the words every girl dreads to hear. But for these five MIZZ readers being dumped was a blessing in disguise as it meant they discovered what was really important to them. (12 April 1995, p. 34–35)

The special status accorded to these five readers, rather than undermining the overwhelming message of the importance of boys, may actually reinforce it: their stories are so unusual that they deserve a whole feature devoted to them.

The magazines’ focus on finding and keeping boys was remarked on with disapproval by many of my survey respondents, for example:

Disagreed with the way that they only ever seemed to feature getting a boyfriend, having a boyfriend, keeping a boyfriend – more to life than that surely!!
(Respondent 67)

This respondent, like several others, claims that she disliked this boyfriend focus at the time, although in response to a different survey question, she also says:

I still enjoyed reading them and I still miss the excitement of getting a new *Jackie*.
(Respondent 67)

So her disapproval is probably mediated through her adult eyes, rather than being a genuine recollection of her feeling as a teenager while reading the magazines. This tension between recollected disapproval of the focus on romance, and overall enjoyment of the magazines is a common thread in my survey responses, and perhaps links in with the changes in the dominant cultural narratives about romance. Towards the end of the twentieth century, and continuing into the beginning of the twenty-first, these narratives are no longer so overwhelmingly about girls and women finding their best fulfilment through romantic relationships with men, but for most of the period under discussion here, the search for romance, in its changing forms, was all but all-consuming in girls' magazines.

But although it dominates the magazines, this search for romance has been somewhat neglected in research on girls' lives. Although there is a great deal of research on teenage girls' sexuality, especially from the perspective of health and risk, there is relatively little work on how teenagers operate their romantic relationships. B. Bradford Brown *et al.* offer several reasons for this neglect, including the over-emphasis on teenage sexuality, the perception of adult researchers that teenage relationships are trivial, and logistical difficulties around the speed of change in adolescent relationships and culture: 'Studying adolescents' romantic ventures is something like chasing a greased pig' (1999, p. 9).

What we do have abundant research on is the kind of romantic relationships girls have waiting for them in adulthood. When they become adult women, readers of these magazines will be expected to bear much of the responsibility for the emotional maintenance of their interpersonal relationships, perhaps especially their romantic relationships (Daniels, 1987; Strazdins and Broom, 2004; Erickson, 2005); this will have been in clear view for the readers of these magazines, especially for those early in the time period, or for those reading the 'older'

magazines. There is a glimpse of the ways that teen magazines prepare readers for this adult duty in research by Ana Garner *et al.* Their survey of sexual narratives in US teen magazines from 1974, 1984 and 1994 found young women educated by their magazines into moulding themselves to suit the needs of their (potential) boyfriends, and taking on responsibility for the emotional and sexual well-being of their romantic relationships, and the emotional and sexual education of their boyfriends: 'it is the job of women to teach men how to be good lovers and to adapt themselves to male desires and needs' (Garner, Sterk and Adams, 1998, p. 71).

In the UK across roughly the same period, Sue Sharpe's study of working-class Ealing girls' aspirations and interests in 1976, and again in 1994, shows a clear difference in the two groups' feelings about marriage, from the 1976 cohort's 'preoccupation with men and marriage', to the 1994 group who 'still have some level of preoccupation with boys and boyfriends, but many are aware of other issues and activities, and are less preoccupied with thoughts of marriage' (Sharpe, 1994, p. 68). This change is mirrored in my own findings about the content of magazines, and the way readers relate to it.

The rise and fall of teenage marriage

In the mid-century, although the ultimate intention was still, as in earlier decades, to find a boy to marry, the intermediate stage of 'boyfriend/girlfriend' offered both boys and girls the chance to conduct auditions for the role of spouse. The expectation became that a couple who liked each other would become boyfriend and girlfriend, sometimes after a stage of non-exclusive 'dating', and would proceed to fall in love from there. Having fallen in love, they might eventually go on to marry, or to fall out of love, and begin the process again with another partner. Or, of course, fail to fall in love at all.

Talk of marriage in magazines for teenage girls continues quite late into the century and across class distinctions, with magazines of the 1960s often discussing it as the entire purpose of having a boyfriend. Writing to predominantly working-class *Roxy* in 1960, Pauline complains of her parents 'getting a bit fed up' that she and her boyfriend are forced by lack of money to spend most of their time together at her home. The magazine's agony aunt advises that:

mum and dad will just have to grin and bear it. After all, they were young once. Tell them they'll never get you off their hands if they won't give you a chance to do your courting! (*Roxy*, 16 January 1960, p.23)

The magazine assumes that Pauline is not spending time with her boyfriend simply for fun, or because she enjoys his company, but on a clear path towards marriage, independence, adulthood, and moving out of the parental home. Furthermore, this is a path which her parents are expected to support, as the natural and desirable progression of her life. This sentiment is echoed by a girl writing to the much more middle-class *Honey* magazine in 1967, who says:

I suppose every girl is searching for the right man before she gets married. That's what life's all about. (*Honey*, September 1967, p.41)

In 1960, *Boyfriend* magazine ran a series of articles on young marriages, introduced with:

Boyfriend believes that weddings between people who are young in years as well as in heart are the stuff of romance. Each week here you will read a story of courtship and all the love that blossoms... (*Boyfriend*, 23 January 1960, p.24)

Boyfriend, like the other new magazines of the 1950s, attracted a mostly working-class audience, though perhaps an aspirational one, since some of the young married couples it features are at college, or working in middle-class occupations, such as Eric, who was training to be a quantity surveyor (*Boyfriend*, 6 February 1960, p.24). Across class boundaries, then, this focus on marriage as a necessary next step for girls to become adults (Spencer, 2005) continued through the 1950s and 1960s.

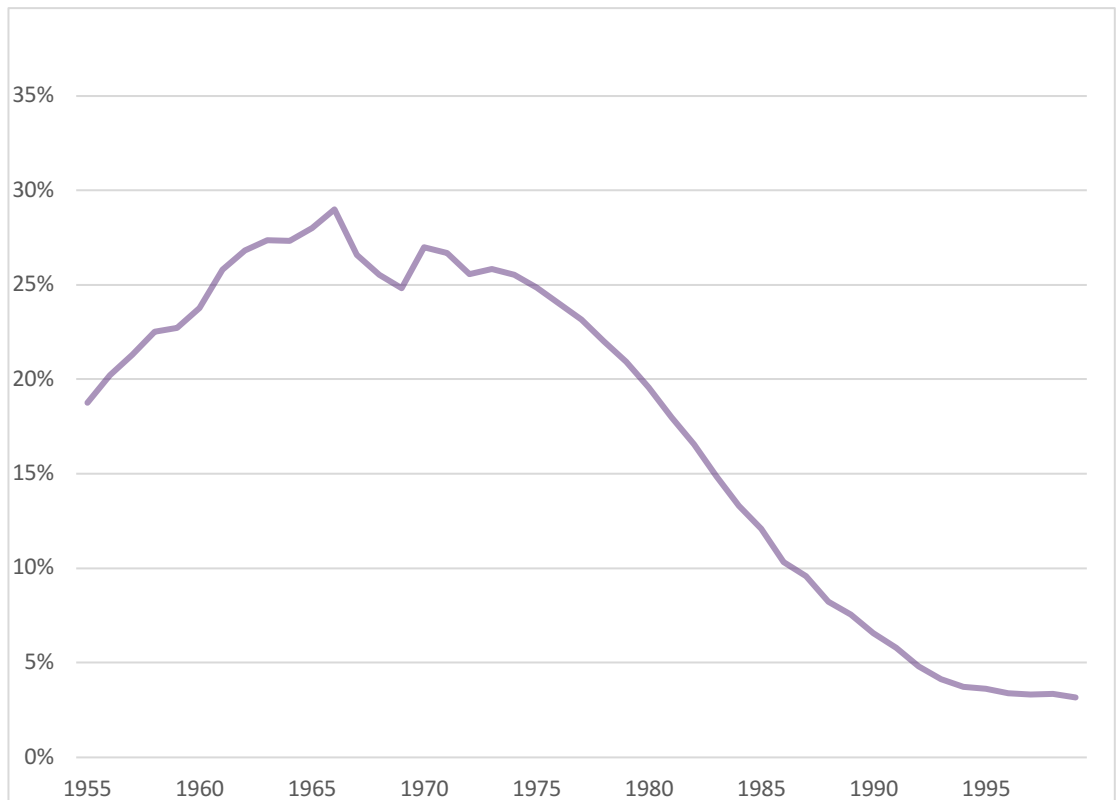


Figure 3: Proportion of teenage brides 1955–2000

In 1900 only 8% of brides were under 20. By 1955 it had risen to 19%, on its way to a peak at 29% in 1966, but the number dropped dramatically from about 1975, and by the end of the century, this figure was down to 3% (Office for National Statistics, 2014), partly because increasing freedoms for women gave them more options for work and education, so marriage moved away from being a default career option that most girls expected (Dyhouse, 2013). In the 1960s, even while teen marriage was at its height, ‘girls’ magazines began to discuss the pros and cons of “trial marriage”, or just living together’ (Dyhouse, 2013, p. 173), and conventional ideas about what marriage involved started to be challenged by magazine readers, especially by older teenagers and in more progressive magazines, as in this discussion of reader letters in *Honey*:

A lot of very firm opinions were aired on domesticity v. career-marriages. One girl said it was a woman’s duty to do housework, but all the others were outraged by the idea. Carole Pedley said she has recently married and is ‘appalled by the cosy haze into which I’m supposed to sink.’ She is intent on keeping her pre-marriage

personality, but finds herself under a lot of pressure to change. 'Why,' she asks, 'is a sort of baby-wanting mist expected to descend on me?' (July 1967, p.23)

In 1979, *Oh Boy!*, with a younger and more working-class readership than *Honey*, included a short article on its problem page warning against the dangers of teenage marriage, with the claim that numbers were increasing (they weren't). They acknowledged the mixed messages teenagers received about their relationships, but painted a clear picture of the unhappy life of a teenage bride as an attempted antidote to this:

It seems like a vicious circle. One minute you're told to settle down with a steady boyfriend, and the next minute a new report comes out telling you it would be disastrous to marry that boy, because you're too young [...] A young, teenage wife feels she's missing out. She sees her old school friends still having fun while she's stuck with a pile of dirty nappies. Worse—her husband's out at work all day.

It's no life for a teenage girl. (*Oh Boy!*, 12 May 1979, p. 26)

The magazine need not have bothered: not only were teen marriages falling, they were receding from the pages of teen magazines, including from the published letters that girls wrote to the magazines, and by the 1980s, marriage had disappeared into the mists of adulthood as far as magazine coverage was concerned. Relationships with boys, while still of vital importance, become transitory, no longer mostly a testing ground for a future husband; the closer goal became cohabiting, rather than marriage,²⁹ although even that was not as commonly discussed in the later magazines as marriage had been in the earlier. By the 1990s, marriage had almost entirely disappeared from the pages of magazines for teenage girls.

²⁹ Cohabitation rates among single women increased from 8% in 1979 to 26% in 1995 (Rowlands *et al.*, 1997).

So while marriage became a possibility for the distant future rather than an immediately pressing concern as it was in the 60s and earlier, the increasing importance of the boyfriend led to negotiations around exclusivity.

Dating or monogamy?

The question about whether a girl should go steady or play the field is always cropping up. Some girls think it's 'loose' to play around, others think it's wise. We try to help, as much as we can. (*Boyfriend*, 8 January 1966, p. 24)

While teenage monogamy is well accepted throughout the period (albeit with variations on whether it is expected to lead to marriage), non-monogamous relationships vary in their acceptability, as the above line from *Boyfriend* shows. Sometimes 'dating' is considered a normal way to audition boys for the role of 'steady boyfriend' (itself sometimes a form of audition for 'husband', as noted above), and sometimes 'stringing boys along' is considered the bad behaviour of a girl who doesn't know what she wants or can't make her mind up.

However, even when such behaviour was accepted, it was still fraught with difficulties. A reader of *Honey* in 1967 writes to the magazine asking what she should do at a party where three boys she has been dating will all be present. She begins her letter with the confession 'I'm a flirt', and the magazine endorses this interpretation with a response beginning 'You want everything, don't you? Still, the fact that you have realised you are a flirt is probably the first step to settling down a bit'. *Honey's* advice columnist is clearly positioning 'settling down a bit' as a good thing, as a step towards the selection of one boy, although she encourages the reader to take an initial step back as part of this path, by simply avoiding the party entirely, with perhaps an implication that this is a just punishment for the crime of 'want[ing] everything' (*Honey*, September 1967, p. 78).

Three years later in *Honey's* stablemate, *Petticoat*, with a similar, albeit perhaps slightly younger readership, 'four girls of ages eighteen and nineteen' are dismayed that although they 'want to have a good time and enjoy life with more than one male', the men who are interested in them all 'either want to get engaged or at the least are very possessive' (an attitude

they describe, perhaps sarcastically, as 'romantic'). Despite the fact that these girls are of prime marriageable age, the magazine's response is entirely supportive of what the writer calls 'play[ing] the field', and straightforwardly endorses the idea of trying out boys to see if they suit:

I don't see how you can find out whether or not boys are likely to be as casual as you want them to be if you don't go out with them. Go on accepting dates if you like the look of the boys who ask you, and as soon as one shows signs of getting too involved, be honest and say you don't feel the same way. This gives the boys a chance to break away. (*Petticoat*, 10 January 1970, p. 39)

This freedom to accept dates, or not, is the girls' power in relationship selection, as a counterpart to boys' power to propose a date or a relationship. By this model, which appears widely in the magazines (though somewhat less frequently as the century progresses), girls are the gatekeepers to all stages of the relationship.³⁰ Boys must apply for entry; girls may not invite them in.

The magazines do, mostly, support girls' rights to entertain offers from several different boys, as long as they are clear about their intentions, though this is sometimes a function of age, where it is more acceptable from younger girls, who aren't yet thinking of marriage. Gill, writing to *Oh Boy!* in 1979, to complain that the several boys she has been seeing have 'got together and compared notes' about her, is likely to be two or three years younger than the girls writing to *Petticoat*, and is given a lecture on honest dealings in her relationships:

But it could be *your* fault. Are you sure you made it quite clear to them all that they were just one of a crowd? Boys do have feelings too, you know. Could be that now they're getting their own back. They may feel they've been taken for a ride. In future, let them know in advance that you're not ready to settle down.

³⁰ This applies especially to the decision to have sex, as I will discuss in chapter two.

And tell them that you *do* date other boys. That way, if they object, they needn't take you out.

Finally, make sure you don't treat any of them as a proper steady. (*Oh Boy!* 12 May 1979, p. 27)

While the magazine supports her right to go out with several boys, as long as they all know the position, it is also implying the superiority of a 'steady' relationship over casual dating, with the comment that Gill is 'not ready to settle down', perhaps suggesting immaturity, and especially with the phrase 'a proper steady', which calls to mind its opposite: an *improper* casual date.

At the very end of the century, these pitfalls around dating still exist. A sixteen-year-old girl calling herself 'In-a-spin' writes to *Bliss* in 1999 after assuming that a 'brilliant date with a lad' meant an automatic promotion to exclusive relationship, only to be confused when 'he denied it and got really frosty'. Called on to arbitrate the rightness and wrongness of the situation, *Bliss* is explicit about the purpose of dating: 'Dating's a sign you're interested in each other, but it's also a chance to suss out if you want to take the relationship further' (*Bliss*, April 1999, p. 67). This is a solid endorsement of the dating-as-audition approach, but unlike earlier advice which suggests a 'state your intentions and make your choice' type approach, *Bliss* advocates a more egalitarian approach of discussing feelings, and negotiating a position that respects the desires and feelings of both parties; at least in this example, the power is equally assigned to both parties, although 'In-a-spin' has perhaps misunderstood the extent of hers.

This rising acceptance of discussion as a tool for navigating feelings is put to use by the magazines in advising those readers who they assume are particularly in need of delicate negotiation in managing their romantic relationships: girls who are interested in other girls.

Lesbian and bisexual romance

It is not until late in the century that any suggestion appears that some girls might look to other girls in the necessary search for romance. Even when the idea begins to appear, it is sometimes encoded rather than overt, and often portrayed as problematic, a difficulty to be navigated.

Only towards the end of the century do we see the message that being a lesbian is perfectly normal.

A rare early demonstration that girls might not be united in their desire for a boyfriend is this letter from *Jackie* in 1964:

I can't bear boys to kiss me. I've dated fellows I've been keen on, but I still shudder and tense up when they come near me. (11 April 1964, p. 10)

The agony aunts' response includes 'please don't think there's anything wrong with you [...] Wait until YOU feel you want to—and don't worry. The day will come' (11 April 1964, p. 10), which can easily be read as code for 'don't worry, it doesn't mean you're a lesbian': an early example of the 'it's just a phase' narrative which becomes fairly common later.

Heterosexuality, then, was treated as a given until very late in the century. The magazines assumed that all of their readers were romantically interested in boys; any apparent deviation from this expected interest was treated as a result of the wrong choice of boy, or a too-early entrance into the heterosexual career. Most of the magazines contain no acknowledgement of lesbian, bisexual or asexual alternatives, assuming that their readers merely need instruction in how to appropriately express their romantic interest in boys.

By the 1980s, although heterosexuality was still the assumed, unmarked position for readers of teen magazines, lesbians and bisexual girls were occasionally discussed, albeit mostly on the problem page, the groundbreaker of acceptable content (Gudelunas, 2005; Phillips, 2008), rather than in more mainstream features. Being lesbian or bisexual is treated as unusual, but acceptable, although not to be encouraged in the same way that interest in boys is still encouraged.

Advice columnist Nick Fisher writing in *Just Seventeen* in 1988 offers this reassurance:

Your sexuality is something over which you have little choice or control. Some people are homosexual, some are heterosexual and some fluctuate between the

two. It isn't really a question of normality. You are what you are and we should all try to make the best of what we've got. (16 November 1988, p. 52)

But in disclaiming any question of 'normality' he is being disingenuous, since the normality presented in the magazine is almost entirely heterosexual. Where homosexuality is addressed, it is typically the sexuality itself that causes it to be worthy of coverage, in contrast to coverage of heterosexuality, where the sexuality remains unmarked and the subjects that require discussion are around what might be termed problems of implementation. In particular, Fisher's exhortation to 'make the best of what we've got' has the suggestion of 'making do' with something substandard, something less than what was wished for, which further problematises non-heterosexual identities.

While lesbians gradually start to appear within the magazines, bisexual people appear much more rarely, and without benefit of the reassurance that bisexuality is normal. Trish from Edinburgh writes a calm, non-panicky letter to *more!* asking if she is bisexual because, although she enjoys sex with men, she also fantasises about women. The advice columnist responds:

You *could* be bisexual or it could just be that – like loads of other women – you have perfectly harmless dreams and fantasies that you'd never actually want to act on in real life. As for fancying your friends, I wouldn't worry about that too much, especially as you don't get the hots for them when you're sober [...] The important thing is not to panic over this too much. Why don't you just let things ride for a while and see which flavour you eventually become more attracted to? (*more!*, 26 October 1994, p. 90)

This seems to be responding to a different letter-writer entirely, one expressing more worry about her sexuality than Trish actually does. This response in fact implicitly characterises bisexuality as harmful, by comparison with the 'harmless dreams and fantasies' of someone who isn't bisexual. The overall effect is to dramatically downplay the chance that Trish might

be bisexual, or that any of those 'loads of other women' might also be, and to expect that Trish will eventually choose a 'flavour' and stick with it.

Bisexuality is also treated somewhat ambivalently in *Mizz*. A rare feature on the subject tells the story of a girl whose boyfriend two-timed her with another boy, and ends with these lines:

I could understand it if he was gay, but fancying boys and girls seems so confusing and a bit unfair on whoever he's going out with [...] I sometimes think that I should have stuck by Rob, but it would have been a nightmare wondering when he'd want to go off with a boy. I could compete with other girls, but how could I compete with boys too? (*Mizz*, 7 June 1995, p. 55)

Tellingly, this article has no final word, or indeed any other comment at all, in the voice of the magazine; the whole article is presented in the reader's voice. There is therefore no mention of bisexuality being perfectly normal, and nothing to worry about, no softening of the reader's portrayal of the doubly-threatening need to 'compete' with both girls and boys, or her complaint that bisexuality is 'unfair'. Unusually for *Mizz*, there is also no sidebar with information about what to do or who to contact if readers are worried about bisexuality, and no suggestion that bisexuality may be anything other than a threat to watch out for in their relationships with boys. This omission is particularly striking given the hints of doubt in the reader's voice: it is 'a bit unfair', and she 'sometimes think[s] that [she] should have stuck with Rob' (ibid; my emphasis). This represents a missed opportunity for the magazine to reassure her, and others in her position, that bisexuality is not a problem.

Another common problematisation is, of course, the idea that teenage lesbianism may be 'just a phase', a necessary exploratory step on the way to the 'norm' of heterosexuality.³¹ This idea seems to underlie some of the advice, as with this letter from *Mizz* in 1995:

³¹ For a careful and nuanced discussion of the harm done to women by the promotion of heterosexuality, see Adrienne Rich's essay 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence' (1980).

I'm 13, nearly 14, and started my periods about four months ago. I'm really worried as I haven't had one since. It can't be that I'm pregnant, as I've never snogged a boy, let alone anything else. One thing that worries me is that I'm very close to my girlfriend. We often lie on top of each other and stuff like that. But her periods haven't stopped. Are we normal doing this and what's happened to my periods?

which receives this response:

Lots of girls mess about doing things like this, mainly because it feels nice and also helps satisfy their curiosity (a bit, anyway) about making love. This kind of touching and rolling about is usually just a passing phase and isn't a problem, although I don't expect you'd want anyone to walk in on you while it was going on! (*Mizz*, 18 January 1995, p.48)

The response to this letter, which according to the colour scheme of the problem page is coded purple for 'censored',³² clearly implies that this activity only 'isn't a problem' *because* it is 'just a passing phase'; there is no comment on what it means if it is not a phase, and whether it is still not a problem in that case, and therefore there is little reassurance available to lesbian readers. That the advice columnist says 'I don't expect you'd want anyone to walk in on you' emphasises that lesbian proto-sexual activity is not as acceptable as the heterosexual equivalent: presumably those involved with heterosexual experimentation of a similar type would also prefer not to be walked in on, but advice columnists do not feel the need to point it out.

The problems with this type of reply from the magazine are clearly articulated by this respondent to my survey:

³² Other letters coded purple on the *Mizz* problem page include 'What is an orgasm' and 'I'm so embarrassed about my periods' (2 August 1995, p. 56).

I always thought the relationship advice was pretty daft, and didn't feel particularly catered to as a lesbian – the magazines always resorted to the line that feeling attraction to female friends was perfectly normal, but also emphasised how much it was just a phase everybody went through... That line seemed bizarre to me, since older lesbians clearly existed! (Respondent 71)

A common theme in the responses to my survey was the sometimes after-the-fact disapproval of how heteronormative the magazines were, although some respondents also talked about using the magazines to learn how to 'pass' as straight:

I really don't have much recollection of the non-fashion content, other than being told which boys to fancy which, for a teenage lesbian, was actually quite helpful, in a strange way. (Respondent 25)

This was also, however, the era of the infamous Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act, which banned local authorities from doing anything which might count as 'promoting homosexuality', and although magazines were not subject to its restrictions, it may nevertheless have represented the spirit of the times in some ways, and was not repealed until 2003.

The portrayal of lesbians in *Bliss* at the end of the century, while still treating the sexuality itself as the subject under discussion, becomes distinctly more supportive and perhaps genuinely reassuring to readers who might be struggling with their sexuality. Seventeen-year-old 'Confused' writes that she has 'wondered for a while if [she's] a lesbian [...] [and has] become attracted to [her] best mate's sister', but isn't sure how to talk to her friend about this. The magazine's response acknowledges, somewhat euphemistically, that 'not everyone is tolerant of ideas different from their own', and suggests a trial conversation about 'gay issues' in general, to test her friend's reaction. The response ends with a referral to the Lesbian Youth Support Information Service. It is perhaps an indication of progress that the advice columnist does not feel she needs to reassure the reader that this is normal, and that being a lesbian is nothing to worry about (*Bliss*, March 1999, p. 109).

A similar message can be seen two months later in *Bliss's* response to reader 'Concerned', who is worried that her friend is a lesbian. The magazine cautions Concerned against jumping to conclusions based on evidence that might merely mean that her friend is 'very comfortable with her body and is an affectionate person', and advises Concerned to examine her own prejudices 'against those who think or act differently from you' (*Bliss*, May 1999, p.65).

Taken together, these problem page letters and their responses give the impression of a magazine that, when called for, opposes heteronormativity (although of course the magazine does not put it that way), and encourages readers to examine their own attitudes to issues of sexuality. However, even this relatively enlightened attitude from *Bliss* is still only demonstrated on occasions when readers specifically request it, and still in ways which implicitly frame lesbians in opposition to the 'norm' of girls who are romantically interested in boys. After all, romantic interest in boys is associated with expected differences in gender roles and abilities, and therefore offers a much wider field of possibilities for the magazines to explore. Girls who are romantically interested in other girls might need much less support in understanding an apparently alien gender, and less instruction in their appropriate role in the finding of romance.

Balancing active and passive

Throughout the earlier part of the period under discussion, magazines contain the suggestion that girls let boys make all the moves towards establishing romantic relationships, but in parallel with this, they attempt to advise girls of how they can make the moves themselves without the boys realising that this is what they're doing. Girls must only be *seen* to be passive, and as long as the boy thinks he is doing all the work, the girl is still within the realm of acceptable behaviour:

Petticoat's Anne Wilson says the object of the game is to make him think it was all his idea to chat you up anyway [...] you've got to be daring enough to make him notice you, but also subtle, so he's not quite sure. (*Petticoat*, 17 January 1970, p. 31)

The magazines' position is that concealing this balancing act from boys is 'an important feminine skill': the ability to be active while appearing to be passive (Ballaster *et al.*, 1991, pp. 141–2), and it appears repeatedly throughout romantic advice for girls, little changed in the 1950s, 1960s, and into the 1970s from the type of advice published in the earlier part of the century (Tinkler, 1995). It is occasionally possible to see a list of actions girls *are* allowed to perform in pursuit of a boy, such as in this example:

Play it cool and crafty, with a touch of mystery to keep him guessing, and you'll have that fish swimming happily into your net. (*Jackie*, 4 April 1964, p. 11)

However, the permitted actions are so abstract that they hardly constitute useful advice, requiring girls to already know what 'play it cool and crafty' means. Girls are, after all, seen as wily and duplicitous, an image which is reinforced by this advice on how to flirt without seeming to do so. Nevertheless, what concrete advice can be distilled from these articles is sometimes contradictory. The 'Boy's point of view', a column in *Jackie* which claims to be written by a man, advises that 'if you really like him, some sweet gesture like straightening his tie will let him know you care' (22 February 1964, p. 10), but a few issues later, in a discussion of flirting techniques – which readers must assume to have been written by a woman – we find that the successful flirt 'doesn't go in for such corny manoeuvres as straightening his tie' (14 March 1964, p. 14). Readers must negotiate this contradiction for themselves. Is the difference to be explained by the difference between male and female writers? Or does tie straightening 'let him know you care', but simultaneously disbar you from the ranks of the 'successful flirt[s]'? I do not mean to suggest here that magazine readers typically scoured the magazine for contradictions like this, but in the ongoing quest for techniques to attract the attention of the desired boy, unclear or metaphorical advice and shifting boundaries – for example about what counts as 'corny' and what not – all serve the magazine's commercial aims by keeping readers guessing, and bringing them 'happily swimming into [the magazine's] net'. If the finding of romance is so complicated, requiring rules that cannot easily be understood, girls are more likely to continue to return to the magazines over and over again for advice in navigating this difficult territory.

This shifting ground over how direct girls are encouraged to be continues through the period. In *Mizz* in the 1990s a quiz called 'Have you got sex appeal?' offers an active, passive, and middle-ground response to each question. The quiz results for readers who selected mostly active answers read:

Ask any boy and he'll probably say 'the chase' is the best part of any romance, and that's exactly what you're depriving boys of! None of those fluttering eyelashes from the other side of the room for you, it's straight in for the kill. That's great because you've always got boys interested in you, but how many of them think you're sexy as well as a good mate? (*Mizz*, 18 January 1995, p. 43)

Girls, presumably, are expected to enjoy the rest of the romance, and letting boys enjoy 'the chase' is intended to make up for their lack of enjoyment otherwise. On closer examination, this seems extremely unlikely, at least as a basis for any relationship which lasts beyond the thrill of the chase; both boys and girls must get something from these relationships such that it is worth pursuing them, but the dominant narrative is still that girls want romance and boys want sex.³³ There is also some uncertainty here about what it means for boys to be 'interested in you' if it doesn't also mean they 'think you're sexy': a girl going 'straight in for the kill' on a boy she fancies seems an unlikely beginning for a 'good mate' friendship.

However, this endorsement of old fashioned passivity is followed in the next issue by an article entitled 'Real-life love: "You won't believe how I won his heart!"', which endorses unusual direct approaches, and showcases some girls who found 'success' with them:

The last thing you should do when you fancy a boy is sit and wait for him to make a move on you. Ask any of these girls – they know! That's why they hatched some weird and wonderful plans to bag their ideal boyfriend, and why every one of them is now dating the lad they fancied! (*Mizz*, 1 February 1995, p. 23)

³³ See further examination of the issues around sex in chapter two.

‘[E]very one of them’ implies a 100% success rate, obscuring the carefully selected sample.

Although two of the boys explicitly say they enjoyed being chased, they do so in terms which clearly imply that this is an unusual pleasure for them. Both their responses, and the fact of the magazine publishing the article, makes clear that girls pursuing boys is a rare event.

In order to extract any useful information from these different portrayals of varying amounts of action in pursuit of boys, readers must negotiate between contradictory advice before they are able to assimilate it into their own worldview. Rather than presenting the magazines as contradictory and unable to make up their minds, this difference helps to support the idea that girls *need* magazines, to help them deal with these different options and choose between the available contradictions.

The rest of this chapter will examine romantic coverage in *Jackie* in 1964, to explore how reader dissent was handled as part of these contradictions around appropriate behaviour in pursuit of romance.

‘Chase him till he catches you’:³⁴ how to get a boyfriend in *Jackie* in the 1960s

Jackie was founded by traditional Scottish family firm D.C. Thomson in 1964, as an attempt to capture a share of the market previously occupied by *Valentine* and *Boyfriend* (Lee, 2007), and ran until 1993. At launch its cover price was 6d³⁵, and in its heyday, it was enormously popular, outselling all of its competitors³⁶ and it is still spawning a range of nostalgic annuals and CDs in

³⁴ *Jackie*, 29 February 1964, p. 9.

³⁵ Equivalent to approximately 44 pence in 2017 (National Archives, 2017).

³⁶ In the latter half of 1968, it sold on average 451,000 copies per week. Its nearest competitor in the teen market was *19*, selling 196,000 copies per monthly issue (White, 1970, pp. 325–326). Audit Bureau of Circulations figures are not available for any period earlier than 1985.

the twenty-first century. For its first decade, it was edited by a man, Gordon Small, before Thomson's first female editor, Nina Myskow, took over in 1974.

When *Jackie* was launched, it was into the by then well-established idea of what Bill Osgerby describes as teenagers who transcended class boundaries, and 'whose vibrant, hedonistic culture seemed to be a symbolic foretaste of good times waiting around the corner for everyone' (1998, p. 37). However, as Osgerby, Elizabeth Roberts, and others show, it wasn't actually that simple. Class still had a huge impact on teenagers and affected their ability to engage with this new way of being: some could now look forward to the chance at university, as a result of greater prosperity and the availability from 1963 of university grants, while some of the poorest working-class teenagers were still constrained by family poverty (Roberts, 1995). *Jackie* was keen to portray the possibilities of fun and freedom, but still in a very gendered way: girls' teenage years (or at least, the years between childhood and the attainment of adulthood through marriage) were distinct from boys', characterised by the fun to be had in playing with clothes, hair and makeup, and in the enjoyment of music and dancing which was a major way of acquiring a boy to marry. Girls' sexuality was still controlled by the threat of rumour and gossip as a punishment for going 'too far' (Roberts, 1995, p. 65), and although feminist ideas about, for example, the sexual double standard, were beginning to appear in public discourse, they had not yet filtered through to the pages of *Jackie*.

The content of the magazine in its early years is almost entirely in support of the aim of catching a boy, albeit usually indirectly. Fashion and beauty advice is about improving one's appearance in order to attract a boy, a message which is often explicitly stated, as in the fashion spread title, 'Scarves are eye catchin'—and guy catchin'!' (8 February 1964, p. 18-19). Coverage of pop music mostly takes the form of obsession with male celebrities, with the music itself 'silenced and in its place the reader is offered the "star"' (McRobbie, 1981, p. 126). The Beatles and Cliff Richard are featured most often in the issues under examination here, having their own long-running articles – the Beatles photo story, and the 'Alphabet of Cliff' – both of which concentrate on the personality rather than the music, and which treat them almost as anthropological specimens of 'boyhood' paraded for the education of the magazine's readers.

More directly, there are also frequent advice articles about getting a boyfriend, and a regular column called 'Boy's point of view', written by a man, and which is mostly about dating.

The two areas where readers contribute to the magazine, the problem page and the letters page, both tend in *Jackie* to be dominated by readers talking about their boyfriends or lack thereof. The main difference between these two reader-contribution sections is in the responses, since the letters themselves do not necessarily vary in tone, content or length between the two pages: submissions to the letters page sometimes seem to be more suited to the problem page, leading on one occasion to a response from letters editor 'Samantha'³⁷ of 'It's [agony aunts] Cathy 'n' Claire you ought to write to. I'm out of my depth!' (4 April 1964, p. 2).

On the letters page, the magazine's response to readers is usually limited to a short, jokey comeback from the letters editor, such as her reply to this letter:

I've always been jealous of slim girls. But, at dances, I never find myself off the floor and glamour girls are often left at the side. Maybe boys like a good, old-fashioned armful after all...

(Nobody can say they're not getting good value.—S.) (25 January 1964, p. 2)

On the problem page, replies are usually a little longer and more serious, tending to be practical, unsentimental suggestions for ways readers can solve their problems, and usually

³⁷ Both letters editor 'Samantha' and advice columnists 'Cathy and Claire' were fictional entities rather than real individuals, which Nina Myskow, who worked as Samantha, and later as editor of the magazine, put down to problems of 'continuity [...] people move on to other jobs, and so there was no way we could put their name to it' (Foulkes, 2005). Cathy and Claire in particular were a composite construct, their replies written by various *Jackie* journalists, as well as 'five or six [...] quite sensible Scottish ladies' (Addley, 2007).

written in the first person plural, from both of the magazine's advice columnists Cathy and Claire. Only occasionally are Cathy and Claire portrayed as two distinct personalities.

The most obvious problem of girlhood which *Jackie* is wrestling with in the 1960s is how to resolve the boyfriend conundrum. On one hand, we have the assumed overwhelming need for a girl to catch a boyfriend, and on the other, the prevalent social norms which forbid girls from chasing boys, and which *Jackie* is invested in upholding. So what is a girl to do? She wants a boyfriend – of course, all girls do – but is forbidden from taking any action which might assist in achieving her goal. *Jackie's* advice, in its very first issue, is simply to 'go where the boys are' (11 January 1964, p. 16) and wait, looking pretty. The magazine offers repeated injunctions of the type that 'obvious chasing always does more harm than good' (29 February 1964, p. 9), sometimes involving detailed lists of forbidden behaviour, such as in an article called 'Flirting's fun', which says:

he will run from girls who chase. A skilled flirt can make a boy think he's doing all the work. She shuns aggressive techniques, such as besieging him with phone calls, repeatedly asking him to parties if he never returns her invitations, stalking him on his daily rounds. (14 March 1974, p. 14)

This advice is interesting for its extremes: 'besieging', 'repeatedly asking', 'stalking' are clearly characterised as bad simply by word choice. Their milder alternatives – one phone call, one invitation – rarely appear, and when they are mentioned, they are still ruled out:

Remember, 'When can I see you again?' is his line. Never force him to say, 'Don't ring me, I'll ring you!' (21 March 1964, p. 6)

Again, the choice to use the word 'force' locates these milder possible actions with the above examples – besieging, stalking, and so on – at the extreme end of a spectrum, leaving a gaping hole in the centre where permitted actions might be found, if there were any. At the other end of the spectrum, we find that stereotypically feminine passivity seems to be the only permitted behaviour. Note that although the actions of the 'skilled flirt' mentioned above presumably occupy some of that unexplored territory in the centre of the scale, there is no mention of *how*

she achieves her effects. If she is employing some tactics more active than attending to her appearance and being in the right place, these never seem to be detailed.

With the role of 'chaser' thus reserved entirely for boys, there are serious limitations on the advice the magazine can offer to assist its readers in achieving their heart's desire: only indirect and passive behaviour can be recommended. This introduction to an article about the first date demonstrates the ideal way to achieve such a success:

You've seen him, you've dreamed about him, you've hoped. Then suddenly it's happened. He's talked to you. He's asked you for a date. (11 April 1964, p. 8)

Even 'seen' is a more passive description than alternatives like 'looked at': girls, like women, are not expected to be active observers, except of themselves, just as boys and men are not expected to be objects to be viewed (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1998). If a girl has observed a boy, she must – so the dominant social order asserts, and *Jackie* encourages – have done so passively, and he must have been merely incidentally observed while otherwise engaged in active masculine pursuits of some kind, without regard for any hypothetical observer. Moreover this seeing, dreaming, hoping is all happening entirely within the girl's own head, with no outward effects that might be visible to the boy concerned; if he has eventually asked for a date, it is not a result of any action on her part.

This officially-permitted distribution of labour does not, however, absolve the girl of all responsibility; catching a boy is often still presented as her achievement, as here:

You must have the know-how. He's roly-poly, head-over-hairstyle crazy about her! How did she manage it? If you've got two spare minutes, we'll give you the low-down. (7 March 1964, p. 9)

Although she is not permitted to actually *do* anything, it is still the girl who has 'managed' this great achievement, even though the boy is supposed to make all the moves. The advice in the rest of the article is merely a description of a stereotypical femininity, accepting and forgiving

of all masculine 'childishness and unfairness'. Girls are advised that they must at all costs protect the ego of any boy they wish to catch:

Better to have your coffee black than to get the white you want if it costs your escort even a teeny bit of his self-esteem. (7 March 1964, p. 9)

It is an ironic paradox that the boy described as belonging to 'the stronger sex' needs to have his delicate self-esteem protected at all costs, while the girl described as 'gloriously fragile' must bear all the sacrifices (7 March 1964, p. 9). Boys have the power in the relationship, because as proto-men they hold the social power, and because girls are assumed to be more invested in having the relationship, so it is girls who must sacrifice to keep boys' interest, and who must disguise these sacrifices. Perhaps this is intended as the *quid pro quo* for the boys in recompense for the insecurities of their position as the askers, but no recompense is offered girls for their lack of permitted action.

What a girl is always permitted to do, however, is to try and catch a boy through decisions about her physical appearance: choice of clothes, hairstyle, perfume, and so on. The problem page in *Jackie's* first issue says the way to get a boyfriend is to:

Get with a swish hairdo and a snazzy dress, slosh on lots of perfume and go where the boys are. (11 January 1964, p. 16)

Tellingly, this advice is followed up with a throwaway remark that although it takes an appealing physical appearance to initially attract the boy, a girl will have to rely on her 'charm and lively personality' to 'really floor an unsuspecting male!' (11 January 1964, p. 16) though no advice is offered in support of girls who might wish to work on developing these traits.

The girl who fails to follow *Jackie's* advice, who insists on leaving the house without the regulation hairdo, dress, perfume, and so on, is offered the sometimes-explicit message that the fact she doesn't have a boyfriend is *all her fault*. For example, from an article called 'He's got his eye on you' in February 1964:

Fact: Boys like girls—especially pretty ones.

Fact: Most girls have what it takes to be cute 'n' eye-catching.

Q: So why doesn't every girl have a boy?

A: Because some girls don't look after what they've got. (29 February 1964, p. 5)

And, from a fashion spread the following month:

Any girl can be a whistle-worthy date bait—if she knows how to make the most of herself. In the dresses on these pages a girl just can't help it. (14 March 1964, p. 18)

Once again we see that the girl is considered to be responsible for her success or failure in attracting boys, even though her range of permitted actions is extremely limited.

This general message of doing something wrong is also applied to individual readers who write in with specific problems, such as those who complain that they followed the rules *Jackie* has presented to them, but somehow failed to acquire a boyfriend, as in this example:

I read the article on getting a date from the boy you want. I tried it on a boy I dance with. I've shown interest in his hobbies, &c., but no go. He just won't date me. (28 March 1964, p. 14)

Which receives the response:

You can make the spark catch fire, but it takes two to make the spark! If he doesn't want to be your "match," you'll have to try your tactics elsewhere. (28 March 1964, p. 14)

Cathy and Claire accept no criticism of the magazine's suggested tactics; indeed, they restate their supposed effectiveness, but place responsibility for their failure on the wrong choice of boy, and so, indirectly, onto the girl herself. The rules, they imply, are only foolproof *in general* – if they are tried on enough boys, one will eventually succumb. On closer examination, this response therefore becomes less of an unmitigated endorsement of *Jackie's* rules of boy-catching, but there are few options available within the framework of the magazine's accepted

vision of boy–girl relationships. Admitting that the rules might be flawed is not possible, so when readers write in with complaints about the way the rules work in their own lives, the magazine’s writers adopt various tactics to deflect criticism.

Sometimes this deflection takes the form of a more overt implication that the fault lies with the girl who has failed to find a boyfriend, as in this example:

What’s the point in hoping for real love when it only happens to other girls? I’ve been disappointed a few times, but kept on hoping.

I’m beginning to think Fate’s trying to tell me something—like stop wishing for something you’re not gonna get! (18 April 1964, p. 20)

Cathy and Claire offer this unsympathetic answer:

Ouch! You’ve got the blues bad, haven’t you? Please don’t think you’re the only one to feel like this. Thing is, not to let it get you down. Nobody’s going to love you if you’re sour! (18 April 1964, p. 20)

‘Sour’ carries with it a whiff of spinsterhood, of ‘sour old woman’; it is a gendered description, and suggestive of the failure to attract a man in time. This vicious circle, of being ‘sour’ because one does not already have a boyfriend, leading to being too ‘sour’ to attract one, implies that the reader was already insufficiently cheerful for a boy to notice her, but it also seems to be exaggerating the unhappiness of a reader who does say she ‘kept on hoping’, and is only ‘*beginning* to think Fate’s trying to tell [her] something’ [my emphasis]. There is, again, no attempt to respond to the reader’s implied criticism of the magazine for encouraging her to think only of attracting a boy, or of the ways that Cathy and Claire, and the magazine’s other writers, encouraged her to go about attracting one.

On the letters page, where readers write in to share their experiences rather than to request advice, letters editor Samantha is free to avoid engaging with readers’ complaints even to this limited degree, as demonstrated when another reader who has been unable to successfully follow *Jackie’s* guidance on getting a boyfriend writes:

[T]he advice is always to be a good listener. That's all very well. But what I want advice about is where to find a boy who will actually sit and talk to me! (1 February 1964, p. 2)

But since this is a letter to the letters page, rather than the problem page, the only response she is offered is one of Samantha's typical jokes: 'Only talk!?!—S' (1 February 1964, p. 2).

These readers are all questioning the received wisdom about the existence of one boy for each girl, and all she needs to do to find him is be in the right place at the right time, with the appropriate hair, clothing, and accessories, and without too much unfeminine chasing. Other readers go beyond complaining that they've had no success in following the rules, and adopt behaviours that *Jackie* disapproves of, and manage to somehow acquire a boyfriend despite such unfeminine behaviour, as in this example:

A few weeks ago, you advised a girl against going on a blind date. Well, I met my boyfriend on a blind date. I didn't want to go, but I'm glad I did! We've been going out for over two years and are really serious about each other. (11 April 1964, p. 10)

And again, the agony aunts fail to engage with the reader's criticism:

Good for you! We're glad things turned out so well for you. We did say, though, that, PERSONALLY, we thought blind dates a drag. Afraid we still feel that way, too. Yours could be a happy exception. (11 April 1964, p. 10)

This resort to claiming that contrary evidence is merely an exception is fairly common throughout the magazine. It serves to represent those girls who write to express their resistance to the status quo as simply lucky if they have found success by ignoring the advice in *Jackie*, or simply unlucky – or not trying hard enough – if despite following advice they are still unsuccessful. Success or lack of success with boys, that is, since no other kind of success is seen as relevant.

Even when readers directly challenge the magazine on the double standards in dating which it endorses, the response is merely to uncritically agree that it's unfair. A reader writes:

Isn't it awful that a girl has to wait to be asked out, yet a fellow can ask any girl he fancies? Don't you think it's unfair? (7 March 1964, p. 15)

Cathy and Claire's response, in its entirety:

Frequently! (7 March 1964, p. 15)

This is a response much more like those on the magazine's letters page: short, jokey, without engaging with the substance of the letter. There is no suggestion that this system of inequality might have anything to do with wider societal issues, or that readers might wish to do anything more radical than grumble about it and continue on as before, following the advice of *Jackie* to make themselves pretty and wait for a boy to express his interest. No one mentions the possibility that the magazine itself is complicit in enforcing this unfairness, despite claims to be in support of girls.

Again, the different feel of the letters page means that letters editor Samantha is less obliged than Cathy and Claire to engage with criticism, as in this example:

For ages I'd wanted to go out with a boy who lives near me. I always tried to look my best when he saw me, in the hope he'd ask for a date, but no go.

I was out in the garden, playing with my young brother and dressed in my oldest clothes, when he came along and—yes, asked me out that night! (22 February 1964, p. 2)

Samantha's response is just:

All's well that ends well.—S. (22 February 1964, p. 2)

Since this is the letters page, Samantha does not need to bother framing this event as in any way exceptional, as it is likely to have been framed if it had been addressed to Cathy and Claire on the problem page.

This freedom from serious responses is also evident when a reader writes to complain that her friends are behaving in an insufficiently feminine manner, with an implied resentment that this seems to be successful with boys:

Maybe I'm just old-fashioned, but I always thought it was the boys who asked the girls for the dates, proposed to them, &c.

My girlfriends literally run after boys and ask to be taken out. Some of them even go and make up quarrels. I think this is a terrible state of affairs. It's time we started a campaign to make men out of these pampered boys.

Meanwhile, wouldn't ANYBODY like to meet a sweet, old-fashioned girl? (8 February 1964, p. 2)

Samantha's response is a non-committal 'Well, come on boys. Speak up!' This is perhaps a strange response from a magazine which endorses this 'old-fashioned' view, but read in light of the other, jokey, frivolous replies to readers on the letters page, there is little evidence of a willingness to hear boys express a preference in either direction, and indeed the letters pages in the following weeks contain no responses from boys speaking up, although boys did read the magazine.³⁸

The characterisation of boys as 'pampered' by the girls who run after them makes an interesting contrast with the magazine's suggestions, discussed above, that girls pamper their boys by meekly acquiescing to the boys' suggestions in all things. This reader believes her friends to be doing the boys' share of the work, and thus pampering them. Presumably her friends will also continue to perform their own share of the work, in performing the emotional maintenance the relationship requires; indeed we can see a suggestion of this in '[s]ome of them even go and make up quarrels'. This reader's categorisation of making up quarrels as boys' work cannot be

³⁸ As seen for example on the Cathy and Claire page, which in one issue in February 1964 contained four letters from boys, all of whom receive responses to their problems which are solidly in support of the girls they write about (22 February 1964, p. 8).

seen elsewhere in the magazine, and may be an example of the reader's 'old-fashioned' values: as emotional labour, this generally seems to be considered as belonging to the female half of the relationship.³⁹

The relationship between *Jackie* and its readers seems to offer readers the chance to engage with apparently-specific individuals, in a friendly, chatty way, but this obscures the fact that there is only limited potential for actual interaction. Lessons are relayed from on high, but the didactic style is disguised by the performance of informality. Readers are evidently intended to feel as if they are sharing a genuine chat with the writers of their magazine, but the chat is only minimally two-way, and, as I have shown, when readers argue with the magazine's rulings, the response is to minimise the criticism and shut down the critics.

Jackie was conservative in its editorial policies, and the voices which make up its content stand firm in defence of this position. Responses to both readers' problems and their letters offer only the barest validation of their reported experiences, such as the 'Good for you!' offered to the girl who met her boyfriend on a blind date (11 April 1964, p. 10), but at the same time they do their best to avoid encouraging other readers to expect such non-standard experiences, or to use their knowledge of these 'exceptions' to prompt a wider questioning of the social status quo which *Jackie* endeavoured to support. However even in the face of this particularly prescriptive and traditional view of life, there are occasional examples of *Jackie* readers who continue to push back against the messages they receive, pointing out unfairness when they see it, and contrasting their own lived experiences with the view of teenage girlhood the magazine presents.

Conclusion

Training towards girls' adult role in romantic relationships begins young, and performs a key role in the commercial positioning of magazines for teenage girls. Magazines spend a lot of time talking about romance: how to get it, how to maintain it, and what to do when it ends. As

³⁹ See discussion above, and in Garner *et al.* (1998), and Cancian and Gordon (1988), for example.

well as teaching girls these emotional skills, magazine coverage teaches girls to be interested in the management of emotions and relationships, and teaches them that these are complicated areas, where they need the support and instruction of magazines. All of this serves to reinforce the idea that it is girls who have emotional skills, and to enable these skills to be portrayed as a natural feminine talent, which, paradoxically, nevertheless requires support and education.

This supposedly 'natural' division of emotional labour is reinforced by the absence of equivalent 'lifestyle' magazines for boys. Since boys are not taught these skills or offered advice on these topics, they can continue to be characterised as unsuited to emotional labour: they are expected either not to care about finding romance, or not to need to do any work towards it (because girls will do it for them), or to already know how to perform the decision-making parts (who to date, where to go, when to call) which are their allotted role.

The distinction between boys and girls in who receives romantic instruction is one of the ways girls' magazines prepare girls to read women's magazines. In adulthood these girls will find that marriage advice in texts aimed at them reinforces what Francesca Cancian and Steven Gordon call the 'social division of labor that makes women responsible for family relationships' (1988, p. 311); those who have graduated from reading teenage magazines will already be thoroughly familiar with this requirement.

This position isn't always quite so starkly gendered, and does start to become somewhat more egalitarian as the century progresses, but these ideas are always present in the background of romance coverage. The continued presentation in magazines of the differences and difficulties inherent in the heterosexual dating market helps to reinforce the message that girls need this education. Indeed, even when readers question or push back against the way the magazines portray this, as we have seen readers doing in *Jackie*, they are supporting the magazine's commercial aims by problematising the issue: teaching the reader that romance is not straightforward, and that they should continue to buy the magazine to learn the secrets of romance and to disentangle its inherent contradictions. The romantic education the magazine offers thus becomes even more vital to the rest of the readership who are merely observing the interactions on the problem page. This may also account for the continuing emphasis on

heterosexual relationships, even after lesbian relationships became more accepted and were ostensibly portrayed as of equal respectability: boys can be portrayed in girls' magazines as strange and alien and needing interpretation, while girls cannot.

When the magazines publish the dissenting opinions of readers, or contradictory advice from their writers, they are in fact supporting their underlying message that romance is difficult. If there are exceptions, or different approaches to be applied to different situations, the message offered by romantic advice becomes more complicated, and readers more in need of help navigating the issue. The more complex romance seems, and the more vital it is to girls' hopes for their lives, the more important it becomes for them to continue to buy the magazines which help them to find and maintain romance.

This function of romance coverage in support of the magazines' commercial aims can be seen as a continually renewing cycle:

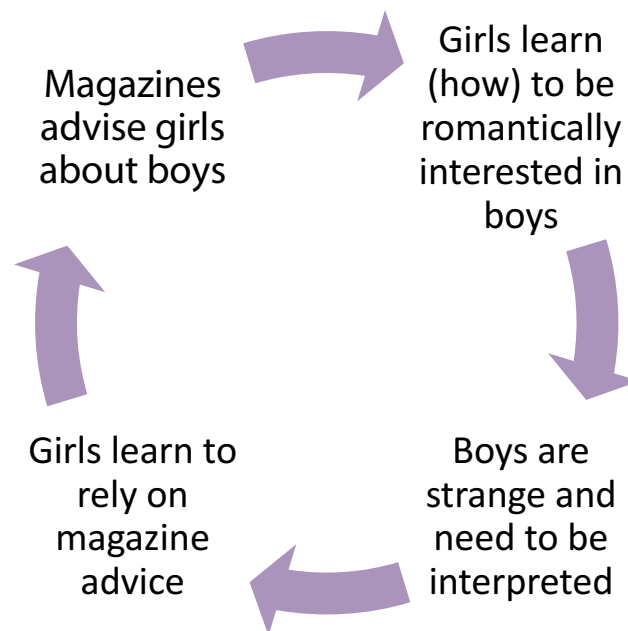


Figure 4: The magazine romantic advice cycle

The function of this cycle offers a partial explanation for the huge popularity of magazines for teenage girls in the twentieth century, and especially as a contrast with the dearth of equivalent magazines for boys. The search for romance is seen as such an important part of girls' lives, the boys with whom they are expected to find it are portrayed as being strange and difficult to

interpret, and the rules of engagement are complex, with worrying penalties for infractions which might affect girls' social standing, parental approval, and chances for future happiness. So the magazines which help girls to navigate these shark-infested waters are a crucial tool, and romantic advice, as long as it's heterosexual, is a big part of the strategy to keep girls buying magazines. Within this context, publishing dissenting views from readers can be seen as a strengthening of the portrayal of romance as complicated.

These findings are a useful addition to the understudied field of teenage romance, and the ways girls navigate their feelings around it; they also mirror and expand upon Sue Sharpe's findings of the changes in girls' attitudes to romance between the 1970s and the 1990s. The available types of romance, as depicted in magazines and their interactions with their readers, changed in several key respects over the second half of the century. These changes in magazine portrayals of romance happened alongside changes in social standards and expectations around romance; as always in magazines, they are both mirror and catalyst of social change.

The next big dilemma for readers of girls' magazines who have found a boyfriend is what to do – and how far to go – with him. That is the subject of the next chapter.

2. Going all the way⁴⁰

I wrote the book *Forever...*, the story of Katherine and Michael, seniors in high school, when [daughter] Randy was fourteen. She asked if I could write about two nice kids who fall in love, do it, and nothing terrible happens to them. Randy had read a number of books that year that linked sex with punishment. If a girl succumbed she would wind up with a grisly abortion, abandonment and a life ruined. I think Randy was bothered by the message of those books in which boys never had any feelings and were only interested in using girls. And neither boys nor girls ever felt responsible for their actions. (Judy Blume, *Letters to Judy* (1987, p. 207))⁴¹

In this chapter I will ask how – and what – girls learn about sex from reading magazines, and how their own contribution to the magazines in the form of reader letters and first person articles interacts with the magazines' aims. I will consider the confusion of messages about how to say no and when to say yes and particularly explore the ways that the reasoning behind the recommendations changes over time. The chapter concludes with a case study from *Just Seventeen* which explores some cautionary examples of the type complained about by Judy Blume's daughter, and some others which are somewhat more forgiving. My methods in analysing this case study include the examination of the appearance of the magazine, and how design and layout decisions interact with the content of the text. In this case study, there is no debate demonstrated: readers and magazines are on the same side, working together for the

⁴⁰ I have chosen 'going all the way' as the chapter title because it is an interestingly teenage term for 'having sexual intercourse', implying a journey with many intermediate, ordered steps, each of which will probably be visited in its own right before eventually taking the journey towards the one unambiguous end point, or goal. It is also, like the coverage of sex in these magazines, heteronormative, since that end goal is always assumed to be penis-in-vagina sex. See chapter one for further discussion of heteronormativity.

⁴¹ *Forever* was published in 1975.

support of other readers (and sometimes in opposition to readers' boyfriends). My analysis considers the operation of those voices, and how that 'working together' functions, and how it illustrates the general relationship between reader and magazine. There are also underlying issues of authority: who has the right to speak, or to pronounce on the experience of others, and of how that authority is portrayed.

How do girls relate what they learn about sex from the magazines to their own lives, and how do they re-present it back in their letters to the magazines? I will argue that it is not a simple matter of learning objective facts about sex, but that girls relate the content in the magazines to their own lived experiences of sex and sexuality, and draw connections between how they experience their own sexuality, how they see the sexuality of others portrayed in magazines (both by the magazine and by other readers), and how ideal or normative sexuality is presented by the magazines.

The permissible sexual content in the magazines changed across the period, with the problem pages at the forefront of these changes. Research by David Gudelunas (2005), for example, traces the increasing acceptability of masturbation as a topic in American columnist Ann Landers' advice columns. He shows that words which would be unsayable by the columnist herself are more acceptable when spoken by readers, and that each use of a contentious word or coverage of a taboo topic renders that word or topic marginally easier to address the next time. Thus controversial magazine material first appears on the problem page, and becomes gradually more acceptable over time, and then eventually appears in the mainstream content rather than in the fenced-off enclave of the problem page.

In 1962, in the US, Helen Gurley Brown published *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962). Brown's message of casual sex and no commitment took time to reach mainstream acceptance and to cross the Atlantic, but she was of her moment: marriage was starting to decline for young women,⁴² but the availability in the 1960s of the contraceptive pill and legalised abortion

⁴² See discussion in chapter one.

made sex outside of marriage a much less risky proposition than it had been previously, and gradually these new possibilities filtered down into magazines for teenage girls.

By the end of the twentieth century, with the need to educate girls about sexual health in the age of AIDS, sexual content increased, and then was constrained within the Teenage Magazine Arbitration Panel guidelines, which required magazines to remind their readers of the age of consent, discourage underage sex, and support safer sex and the seeking of advice from adults; the organisation also established a process of annual review to ensure magazines adhere to the guidelines, although it is not clear what sanctions they could bring to bear on magazines which broke them (Teenage Magazines Arbitration Panel, no date).

But although later magazines may sometimes be open to conservative accusations of being too sexually explicit for the age of their readers, they are not necessarily being irresponsible; full and frank information about sex was vital to these readers to enable them to make decisions about their own lives, such as the response to a reader question in *Mizz* in 1995 asking 'what is oral sex', which as well as explaining the basic facts, includes the warning that some boys like to pressure girls to give oral sex, and then boast about it afterwards (*Mizz*, 4 January 1995, p. 47) – potentially just as useful advice as the definition of the term.

This dual role of sexual content in the magazines, of both defining terms and providing social education, is an example of the recurrent dichotomies in the discourse around girls and sex. Much of the discourse is characterised by tensions between opposing and unresolved influences, for example in constructions of how much sexual knowledge teenage girls have, how much they need, and how much is 'too much'.

As well as keeping sexual information carefully rationed for girls, who were seen as easily corruptible, keeping details out of the pages of their magazines may have helped support the view that sex was just not something girls were (or should be) interested in. Throughout the history of magazine advice columns, this has been a difficult balancing act for advice columnists: to counter the dangers of misinformation, without too widely sharing unnecessary knowledge which might encourage immoral, illegal or dangerous behaviour. The people who

are considered to be corruptible by such information are an interesting demonstration of society's values: it is, for example, rarely suggested that adult men need to be shielded from dangerous information. There are echoes of Mervyn Griffith-Jones pointing out at the *Lady Chatterley* obscenity trial that 'girls can read as well as boys', as an argument against the publication of sexually explicit material (Rolph, 1961, p. 17). Presumably if there was a way to ensure that such material was only accessible to boys and men, more would have been available, although girls would still have been sexually under-educated.

In the period I explore here, magazines were a major source of what sex education girls were able to obtain, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. A theme which repeatedly emerged from my survey results was respondents talking about having no other way of accessing information about sex. They described being unable to talk to their parents, having no siblings (especially those who have no brothers needing to learn about boys), and about the inadequacies of the school curriculum in covering these topics. For example:

[I learned] Far, far more about sex and relationships than I would otherwise have known; safe sex, healthy relationship advice that no-one else was giving.

(Respondent 1)

This emphasis on the problems for girls of getting enough information is also reflected in work by Rachel Thomson and Sue Scott, who surveyed young women about the way they learnt about sex, finding widespread ignorance which only began to abate after the women were already sexually active (1991, p. 35). Balanced between the dangers of too little information, and social pressures opposed to magazines offering too much information, the magazines were performing the function of girls' magazines which is as old as the medium itself: giving girls as much of the information they want and need as is possible without unduly antagonising the gatekeepers who wish to prevent them having too much, or too 'advanced', information.

The magazines of this period, then, were operating against a background of increasing openness about sex. However, girls in particular were still under-educated, and seen as requiring protection from too much knowledge, or the wrong kind of knowledge, at the same

time as requiring protection against the predatory boys who could be assumed to be doing anything they could to persuade girls to have sex with them; a difficult task for their magazines to navigate. So, whatever the limitations in magazine coverage of sexual topics, they played an enormously important role in the sex education of generations of teenage girls, and therefore can offer us a new view of this contentious topic.

The study of girls' sexuality

Riding the second wave of feminism, ground-breaking researchers sought to stake a claim for women's sexuality as a powerful force, and as defined by women themselves rather than in relation to men. Research by Nancy Friday (1975) and Shere Hite (1976) was influential in bringing to public notice women's own definitions and experiences of their sexuality, with data drawn from large numbers of women, building on the new climate of women's liberation, and expanding on earlier work by Alfred Kinsey (1953) and William Masters and Virginia Johnson (1966) on defining and describing sexuality.

The youngest participants in Shere Hite's research were 14, and 8% of the respondents to her original US questionnaires were teenagers (Hite, 2000),⁴³ though her discussion makes very little use of age as an axis of analysis, so it is not straightforward to unpick results about teenagers from her overall findings. This obfuscation of teenage girls' own experience of their sexuality is in fact quite common in work on sex, perhaps because research on teenage girls and sex is often mired in moral panics of various kinds, so it becomes potentially dangerous to acknowledge girls as sexual beings. They are popularly seen as having too much sex, being unwillingly sexualised at too young an age, getting pregnant while too young, or unmarried, getting into sexual relationships with inappropriate partners, and so on (all themes that we will see played out in magazine discussions of sex, later in this chapter). In the public eye, there may be no acceptable ways for teenage girls to be sexual, so it is better that they are not seen

⁴³ To the second and third of the questionnaires in her original research, since the first did not ask for age data (Hite, 2000).

as sexual at all.⁴⁴ This kind of moral panic is certainly not part of the tone of Hite's work, but its background influence may partly account for the way that the teenage experience is quietly subsumed into the adult. Recent work has foregrounded and problematised this: Carol Dyhouse, for example, traces the movements of these moral panics throughout the twentieth century (2013), and R. Danielle Egan unpacks the sexualisation narrative to show its roots in 'longstanding historical preoccupations, fears, fascinations, desires, and discomforts' (2013, p. 17), as well as its deeply classed, racialised nature.

Research looking at the portrayal of sex within girls' magazines also deals with many of these tensions, and in particular the way they interact with the public nature of magazine discourse; coverage of sex in magazines is not just about the sexual activity individual girls may or may not be engaging in, or about prevailing societal opinions and concerns about girls' sexuality, but about the performative interaction between these. While this consideration of the public nature of magazine content is part of most magazine research, it is particularly prevalent in that which focuses on girls' sexuality, as perhaps the most controversial topic that forms part of the typical teen magazine content, and one which is largely fuelled by girls' own letters to the magazines.

Work by Ana Garner *et al.*, for example, finds that problem page letters about sex serve to inform girls:

[T]hat others within their community were actively engaging in sex, and that others achieved success and status within their community through sexual intimacy. (1998, p. 69)

⁴⁴ Kate Clark's work analysing the depictions of male violence against women and girls in the *Sun* newspaper found that sexually active girls are one of the categories of victim whose attackers tended to be described by the newspaper as normal family men with normal jobs, in contrast with, for example, 'innocent' girls, whose attackers were described as monsters or fiends: by being sexually active, the girls had taken on some of the responsibility for any violence committed against them. (1992)

Similarly, Laura M. Carpenter's (1998) research examines twenty years of sexual scripts in US teen magazine *Seventeen* to explore the ways this influences teenage girls' attitudes to sexuality. Both these studies, as well as others (e.g. McKay, 1999; Jackson, 2005) focus on the way that magazine messages about sex, while often prompted by individual reader letters, serve a widespread educational function which normalises ideas about appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour for girls and boys. Indeed, Sara Bragg and David Buckingham claim that the significance of problem pages is precisely that 'they define certain kinds of behaviour as problematic' (2009, p. 142).

A common thread running through research on sexual content in magazines, as in much of the research on girls' magazines, is the tension between girls' status as passive recipients and knowing critical agents.⁴⁵ Bragg and Buckingham's research participants explicitly invoked this tension:

[E]mphasis[ing] that they were learning to become self-regulating sexual subjects, responsible for their own fulfilment, rather than being passively socialised into a moral code. (Bragg and Buckingham, 2009, p. 140).

However, the extent to which teenagers can be said to accurately assess their own critical faculties remains an issue, as highlighted by one of my survey respondents:

[N]ow I look back and think hmmm that was not helpful to my self image or my sex life / development of a healthy relationship with my body or my sexuality. But if you'd taken them off me as a kid I would have been insulted at the thought I couldn't make up my own mind. (Respondent 40)

This chapter, then, follows on from work on that performative aspect of magazine sex advice, and explores what the interaction between readers and writers in the magazine can tell us about the way this operates.

⁴⁵ As discussed in the introduction.

Saying 'no'

The sexual landscape of teen magazines changed quite dramatically over the period, but what was always a big issue was how to say no, as in this early example of a more-or-less explicit discussion about sex, from *Marilyn*:

Bill, my boy-friend, wants to make love to me in more ways than just kissing and holding me in his arms. I am so afraid I shall lose him if I keep saying "No!"—Jean M.

Losing him because of this, you won't have lost anything worth keeping. What's he taking you around for? Is he just out for what he can get? If that's true, then the sooner he gets his marching orders the better. If he loves you and looks forward to making you his wife, spending the rest of his life by your side, then it's his job to care for you and protect you, to show his strength by controlling those forces which are so powerful and dangerous when you are young and in love. You are wrong to spend so much time alone. Get your bikes out—join a club—play table tennis—go walking—swimming—learn to have fun together in more ways than one. (*Marilyn*, 2 April 1955, p. 9)

Jean's letter is a plea for support in saying 'no' to Bill's advances, which the magazine is happy to provide. There is no suggestion that it would be appropriate for her to say yes under any circumstances while they are unmarried, and no attempt to reconcile Bill's belief that it is worth asking Jean for more, with the belief that Jean and *Marilyn* share that it would be wrong for her to agree. His hope for sex is normal, natural and accepted, and it is her role to refuse. This, despite the fact that, given *Marilyn*'s readership, it is likely that Jean is at least 16, and therefore over the age of consent⁴⁶. It is not the legal, but the moral issue that the magazine is concerned with.

⁴⁶ Except in Northern Ireland, where the age of consent was 17 from 1950, and was only brought back into line with the rest of the UK in 2007.

The same message appears in this example from *Boyfriend* magazine in 1959:

Carol's problem is a pretty tough one. And it's a problem that's getting worse, not better. Everybody today puts the accent on sex. The films we see, the books we read, the records we listen to. And even – let's face it – the clothes you girls wear. It's no wonder we fellows get smoochy minded. That's when it's up to the girl to say NO. And she should say it as if she meant it. The trouble is, many girls say no and don't mean it, and how is a poor fellow to find out if he doesn't try?

(*Boyfriend*, 16 May 1959, p. 19)

The writer offers no acknowledgement of the possibility that those girls who 'say no and don't mean it' may be worn down by the pleading of those 'poor fellows' who continued to 'try' in the hope that the girls might change their minds. This emphasis on poor boys who can't really help themselves, and who rely on girls to stop them, is not of course confined to the 1950s. The advice sometimes seems to assume that boys will ignore the first 'no', and that girls need to be saying 'no' to more things than they actually want to refuse, as here, from *Jackie* in 1964:

Petting, like chess, involves strategy. Any chess player will tell you that you must be able to see three moves ahead, or you're beaten before you start. Wherever you are, conscience, instinct and common sense will tell you when to be gently disengaging. The time to start saying "No" is at least two moves before the one you think is really going too far. (*Jackie*, 28 March 1964, p. 7)

Note that this advice expects boys to ignore the first two times girls say 'no', and is also open to accusations that it encourages girls to say no when they mean yes, as a means of softening boys up for the eventual 'no' that they do mean. It is, then, unsurprising that the distinction between the 'no' and the 'yes' becomes blurred.

Whether this advice was effective seems doubtful. As linguists Celia Kitzinger and Hannah Frith (1999) show, in contrast to the 'no means no' slogan, normative refusals typically do not contain the word 'no' at all, and are certainly not the clear and direct refusals that sex

education programmes – and magazines – teach.⁴⁷ In all other spheres of life, we hedge and soften our refusals, and for girls, who are typically socialised to be polite and considerate, the ‘just say no’ message has to fight against the ingrained training to ‘be nice’, to try to preserve boys’ good opinions, to avoid hurting people’s feelings. *Jackie* magazine recognises this difficulty, in article called ‘How to play the love game’:

It’s a mistake always to be a yes girl, especially when it comes to petting and you have a strong feeling it would be wiser to say no—only you want to be nice to him! (*Jackie*, 21 March 1964, p. 6)

The magazine does not, however, offer any advice for how to deal with the problem, beyond acknowledgement that it may be difficult; the position is simply to say no, and hope the refusal is respected.

From the 1970s onwards, there is much less emphasis on the idea that girls should always say no, as demonstrated by this letter from *Jackie*:

I’m 17 and I have a boyfriend I love very much. I’ve been having sex with him for over a year and up until now I’ve been lucky, but one day I won’t and I’ll get pregnant. We usually use a condom, but I’m still worried. I mean to say ‘no’, but I love him so much I can’t. (*Jackie*, 9 May 1987, p. 25)

It is a sign of the changing sexual landscape that the magazine response entirely ignores the last sentence, and focuses instead on advice about contraception, advising the girl to see her doctor, or the Family Planning Clinic, for advice; the response ends with a warning about unprotected sex:

⁴⁷ Other researchers have made similar findings, sometimes specifically in the realm of rape trials (see for example Ehrlich, 2001; Cameron, 2007).

I hardly need to add how stupid it is to have unprotected sex – never rely on ‘luck’ because it’ll suddenly run out when you least expect it. (*Jackie*, 9 May 1987, p. 25)

However, this move away from magazines preaching that girls *must* say no does not mean the portrayal of boy-girl relationships is much changed when it comes to suggesting or refusing sex. Even at the end of the century, the magazines still often portray boys who want whatever they can get, and girls who must bear the brunt of refusing. This example, from *Mizz* in 1995, is part of an answer to a problem page letter which asks ‘what is heavy petting?’:

Heavy petting can be a bit of a game where boys see how far they can go or what the girl will let them do. The answer to this is always to say no or stop if you don’t feel happy about what’s happening. (*Mizz*, 7 June 1995, p. 57)

There is nothing in this to suggest any reason girls might want to engage in sexual activity, other than ‘want[ing] to be nice’ to boys. It also has the result of normalising this behaviour from boys: there is no suggestion that this is *bad* behaviour, or that girls might be justified in objecting to being forced into a role of gatekeeper. And although the *Mizz* response does allow the possibility of a girl who *is* ‘happy about what’s happening’, the ability to say ‘yes’ and mean it is still hampered by the prevalent message that nice girls don’t want sex, that boys cannot always be trusted, and that sex is inherently risky for girls.

Saying ‘yes’

Boyfriend magazine is clear that within marriage is the only appropriate time for girls to say ‘yes’ to sex. Not coincidentally, the magazine published a series of articles in the early 1960s about young marriages, with the strapline ‘*Boyfriend* believes that weddings between people who are young in years as well as in heart are the stuff of romance’ (*Boyfriend*, 23 January 1960, p. 24). So the message of the day is: wait until marriage, but do go ahead and get married early. In 1960, they published a letter from girl who’s had no sex education and is approaching the possibility of marriage:

When I asked my mother she said it wasn't necessary as my husband would teach me. Recently a young man asked me to marry him. We love each other but he complains I'm cold towards him when we make love.⁴⁸ Yesterday he said he thinks I'm frigid and should see a doctor as it will ruin our chance of a happy marriage. (*Boyfriend*, 23 January 1960, p. 24)

The girl's mother believes no sexual education is necessary; she subscribes to the idea that this is the business of a husband, and that a wife, and especially an unmarried girl, has no need of any information beyond what her (future) husband gives her. The letter-writer's boyfriend has moved on a little, in expecting some outside help in sexual matters, but without much suggestion that it's her pleasure at risk, so much as his, and the way *that* might impact on 'their' happiness. The reader seems stuck between these two angles, neither of which seem to care much what she wants, or to accord her much agency in her own sexuality, so she appeals to the magazine, which might be expected to be a disinterested but supportive supplier of more-objective information. The magazine's reply includes: 'We are sending you under separate cover a list of books that should give you some idea of the sexual side of marriage. But remember, there's nothing to be ashamed of in *real* sexual love' (*Boyfriend*, 23 January 1960, p. 25; emphasis original), which is a step on from either the mother or the boyfriend, although that italicised '*real*' encodes a whole warning about the dangers of the unreal kind. Again, sex within marriage is fine and appropriate, but sex outside marriage is wrong, and even publishing

⁴⁸ 'Make love' in the 'have sexual intercourse' sense is first recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1927. In the 'wooing' sense, the OED includes several citations spanning the twentieth century, so both meanings were in use throughout the period, which makes it sometimes hard to interpret where on the scale any individual reference lies (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008a). Another letter from *Boyfriend* (30 January 1960, p. 25), discussed below, seems to be using 'make love' to cover quite a wide range of sexual activity, not just intercourse, so this writer may have intended a similar meaning of actions somewhere between 'wooing' and 'having sexual intercourse'.

the list of books within the magazine would be too risky, perhaps encouraging unmarried girls to have sex, and lead to pregnancy, disease, ruined reputation, and so on.

From the following issue of *Boyfriend*:

Statistics show that more and more unmarried girls are having babies. What a shame this is. For it not only spoils the girl's life but it brings a baby into the world who is then usually put into a children's home or sent away to be adopted. Quite a lot of girls end up in the family way through too much petting which—in their ignorance—leads to this unhappy result. Though we appreciate that when a boy and girl are in love they want to *make* love, a line must be drawn between what is right and what is wrong. And intercourse before marriage is wrong because it can only lead to deceit and misery. A letter we had this week has brought us on to this subject. (*Boyfriend*, 30 January 1960, p. 25)

The letter referred to here is from a 14-year-old pregnant after a month going out with a boy.

The answer to her letter includes:

What it really boils down to is that *you* are pregnant and *you* have got to have the baby and the worry. How much better it would have been if you had exercised a little self-control and learned to say no. Saying no at the moment won't help you, but bear it in mind next time, or you'll ruin your life. (*Boyfriend*, 30 January 1960, p. 25; emphasis original)

This response is odd: being pregnant at 14 doesn't count as a life ruined, but pregnant for a second time afterwards apparently would, and having a baby who is 'put into a children's home or sent away to be adopted' still counts as 'spoil[ing] the girl's life', even though she won't be bringing the baby up herself. So it is unclear whether the letter-writer's life is already spoiled, but there does seem to be some hope: perhaps, after following the 'usual' course and giving up her child, she will be able to return to a life of morality, and forget that her lapse ever happened. Even though she has submitted to sex with one boy, and suffered the consequences, there is no reason for her to do so again. So readers of *Boyfriend* learn from this letter that they

can get pregnant from 'too much petting', and that the consequences of pregnancy may go beyond the physical facts of the pregnancy itself, or the possibility of raising a child, to a spoiled life. The mechanism by which the consequences might spoil a life even if the baby is given up for adoption are left unstated and implied, an approach which can also be seen in this example from *Jackie* in 1964:

I went steady with a boy for two years. I thought it was love and nobody could tell me different. I went too far with him, but I was very lucky, I got off scot-free, except for my conscience.

Now I'm going with another boy, who treats me with the greatest respect. I feel guilty about my first boy friend, but Dick would be very disappointed in me if he knew what I'd done. (*Jackie*, 25 January 1964, p. 10)

The letter writer here has absorbed the prevalent message about teenage sex, as parodied in the 2004 film *Mean Girls*: 'Don't have sex, because you will get pregnant and die' (Waters, 2004). For her to have gone 'too far', and neither got pregnant nor died makes her 'very lucky', though none of the possible consequences are made explicit: the magazine assumes its readers know the risks, and if they don't, that it's not the magazine's place to enlighten them. Also implicit in this letter is the idea that by having sex with her, her previous boyfriend was not treating her with respect. This despite her conviction that she was in love making it clear that she was a willing participant: if he respected her, he would not have asked.

Around the late 1960s and early 1970s, the rise of women's liberation, and the sexual revolution trickling into girls' magazines brings a turning point to the coverage of sex in these magazines. For example, in the response to a letter to *Petticoat's* problem page in 1970, where 18-year-old Claire complains that her long-term boyfriend, whom she plans to marry, is opposed to sex before marriage, and she's getting frustrated with sticking to petting. *Petticoat's* agony aunt replies:

In a way it could be said that you are one of the casualties of modern living, in that the pressures of society are creating your problem, not you yourself. You are

a perfectly normal, responsive, mature girl and your body is making perfectly normal demands [...] but because of financial and other reasons, you can't marry yet, and satisfy them in a socially acceptable setting [...] if Geoff's refusal to consider full intercourse before marriage is due only to a fear of unwanted pregnancy, go together to discuss the situation with a doctor who understands the problems of couples in your situation. Such a doctor may, after talking to you both, suggest contraception for you that will make it possible for you to cope with your needs in the way that you most need to. (*Petticoat*, 17 January 1970, p. 39)

This response is, implicitly, fighting back against the terms of that 'socially acceptable setting', in advising how the body's demands may be met despite Claire and Geoff's inability to marry.

By the late 1980s, the results of the sexual revolution had settled enough for *Just Seventeen* to say:

[T]he only reason why you should have sex [...] Because you want to. That means not feeling threatened or bullied and not having sex to appear mature [...] being a virgin is nothing to be proud of or ashamed of. You shouldn't feel inadequate if you're lacking in experience, or ashamed if you have had sex before [...] If you feel ready to have sex with your partner, there's no reason why you shouldn't make the first move. It doesn't mean you're "loose". Just that you're taking the lead. (*Just Seventeen*, 15 June 1988, p. 37)

Part of this message is one of the key aspects of magazine sex education that many of my survey respondents talked about learning from the magazines, as in this example:

[I learned] Never allow yourself to be pressured into sex. Anyone who tries isn't worth it. (Respondent 49)

So ideas about when to say no to sex were evidently influential on readers, but the idea that girls might want to say yes was less so: only two respondents made any mention of the idea that 'sex was supposed to be fun for both people' (Respondent 49). This is perhaps

unsurprising, given that this new spirit of sexual freedom is still limited, and fraught with demonstrations of how it can go wrong. In 1991, *19* magazine presents itself as taking a neutral position, for example by saying 'girls have as much right to do it as boys' in an article about girls who sleep around, but the introduction to the article asks:

What makes a girl want to sleep with lots of different boys? Is the thrill of one night's passion worth the discovery of waking up to a virtual stranger? We talk to the girls who know. (March 1991, p. 16)

Even before we read what 'the girls who know' have to say on the subject, this introduction is not the neutral question it presents itself as: it primes the reader to expect that the answer to the second question will be 'no'. Readers draw on their members' resources to know that 'waking up to a virtual stranger' may be awkward at best and dangerous at worst, and that 'the thrill of one night's passion' is a transitory feeling that will not last for long enough to make up for the subsequent discovery. We expect that if the 'girls who know' say otherwise, the magazine will not leave their interpretation to stand, but might instead suggest ways that they could be fooling themselves. Indeed, the voice of authority, represented by 'Psycho-sexual counsellor Tricia Kreitman' presents a negative view of girls who have casual sex:

But are they really happy? Tricia Kreitman thinks not. 'There is something missing in these girls' lives,' she says. 'They are looking for a sense of worth, to feel attractive and wanted, and they are hoping to find it through sex.' (*19*, March 1991, p. 16)

That is, it's no longer *morally* wrong for girls to have sex; the concern has shifted to being for their emotional wellbeing instead, though the end result is similar: a recommendation against sex, or at least too much of it.

At the end of the century, under the influence of AIDS, and the requirements of the Teenage Magazines Arbitration Panel, the reason shifts again, to emphasising physical and legal wellbeing. On the problem page section called 'Sex questions', *Bliss* displays a circular logo

which says 'BE SURE BE SAFE' twice around the circumference, and 'SEX UNDER 16 IS ILLEGAL' across the middle.

These messages are emphasised in the replies to letters, for example the reply to a letter asking 'how do you do it' ends with:

Of course, sex isn't legal for girls until they reach the age of consent which is 16 (or 17 in Northern Ireland), and condoms should always be used. (*Bliss*, March 1999, p. 105)

So from the mid-century, when it was only acceptable for a girl to say yes to sex if she was married, to the end of the century when it was acceptable for girls who were being emotionally safe (not sleeping around, know and trust the boy concerned), physically safe (using condoms), and legally safe (over the age of consent), there is always an emphasis on the various reasons girls should not be having sex.

The major exception to this message of caution around sex is the 1990s run of *more!* magazine, famous (at least among my survey respondents), for the 'position of the fortnight':

I remember that *more!* was really sex positive. Giving positions of the week and generally telling girls how to enjoy sex. (Respondent 11)

Indeed, every issue of *more!* in that period contained a double-page spread on sex, including the position of the fortnight, reader letters, mini articles and trivia, as well as the usual amount of sexual content on the main problem pages. But readers' recollections of this are coloured by their adult ideas about age-appropriate reading matter, for example:

In *more!* they had 'position of the fortnight' which I always thought was quite highly sexualized given the reading age. (Respondent 31)

The sexual content of *more!* was in fact closer to that of magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Company*, targeted at young women, rather than teenagers, although its format – saddle stitched rather than perfect bound – and fortnightly (rather than monthly) frequency meant it looked just like its more innocent teen counterparts. Apart from the emphasis on sex, its

contents are largely about fashion, beauty and celebrities, like the other teen magazines, so on the whole it is unsurprising both that it was read by younger teenagers, and that their adult selves report some reservations with hindsight.

In other magazines, the message about girls' right to enjoy sex mostly appears in the problem page rather than the articles, such as in a problem page reply in *Mizz* to a boy who has written in worried that he is unable to have sex for long enough. *Mizz's* agony aunt, Tricia Kreitman,⁴⁹ reassures him about his own performance, but also gives him sensitive advice in support of his girlfriend's pleasure (4 January 1995, p. 46). This is still, however, a fairly rare message throughout the period, and into the twenty-first century (Boynton, 2009, p. 115). Apart from in *more!*, it is a message which is mostly prompted by specific reader letters, rather than in general magazine content where the magazine would have to take more responsibility for it, with the commercial risks that would entail.

So this silence around more active and pleasurable aspects of girls' sexuality, as opposed to the passive sexuality which girls might exhibit when prompted by their boyfriends, is another of the commercial balancing acts required of magazines. As always, choices about the content are serving several somewhat contradictory purposes. The apparent primary purpose is to offer support, information and entertainment to the teenage girls who buy the magazines, but also present in the relationship between magazine and reader are the readers' parents and guardians, who must not be scared away by too much controversial content which might lead to them withdrawing support (financial or otherwise) for their daughters' purchase of the magazine. Finally, the advertisers who largely pay for the production of the magazines must be kept on side. Although readers might be best served by honest and complete information about sex, even when magazines may wish to provide this, they may sometimes be hampered by the needs of commerce. This is perhaps part of the reason that the most explicit information about sex is often found on the problem pages, which are somewhat separate from the rest of the

⁴⁹ Seen earlier as a 'psycho-sexual counsellor' in *19* magazine.

magazine content, and can be portrayed as responses to specific reader questions, rather than the magazine voluntarily covering sexual matters.

In the sexual content in these magazines, then, there is support for the social rules of the time, for example the earlier magazines discouraging girls from having sex at all, and throughout the period the use of cautionary examples of girls who did have sex and suffered consequences of various sorts. Even when the social rules are challenged, as in the case of Claire and Geoff in *Petticoat*, the advice is given in such a way as to encourage the appearance of following the rules. Later magazines, in the wake of moral panics about sexualisation, are also dealing with extra public oversight of their content, so devote a lot of attention to promoting the age of consent and supporting the use of contraception – condoms in particular, perhaps indicating that STDs are more to be feared than pregnancy. AIDS, after all, is irreversible, while pregnancy is not, though also, no doubt, influenced by the relative ease and anonymity with which condoms can be obtained, compared with other forms of contraception. In this, perhaps more than any other area of content the magazines cover, they are working in support of adult gatekeepers and authorities as well as the girls who actually read the magazine: even when the message about the acceptability of having sex relaxes, it is always portrayed as risky.

‘I[...] hope you print this to help other people realise how stupid it is to behave like this’:⁵⁰ cautionary tales in *Just Seventeen* in the 1980s

Despite its name, *Just Seventeen* was aimed at readers aged around fifteen, though its problem pages often also include letters from girls several years younger and older than that. It was published weekly by EMAP, and ran from 1983 until 1997, when it went monthly, and its name changed to *J-17*. It ended publication in 2004. *Just Seventeen* was the most-read magazine of the participants in my survey: 84% had read it at some point. In 1989, when many

⁵⁰ *Just Seventeen* 16 November 1988, p. 51

of the following examples were published, it had a cover price of 50 pence⁵¹, and was bought by an average of around 291,000 readers each issue (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2018). It included a two-part problem page in every issue: the main section offered advice from Maroushka Monroe, and the 'A boy's view' section advice from Nick Fisher, with the reassurance 'Nick will only answer letters addressed personally to him' (*Just Seventeen*, 18 January 1989, p. 17), so problem letters were answered by Monroe unless their writers specifically requested Fisher. Letters to 'A boy's view' come from boys seeking a man's advice, and from girls seeking male insight into their problems with boys; a few letters to Fisher seem to have just selected him because they prefer him, with no specific male perspective required by their problem.

Life was changing for teenagers in the 1980s. Where most of them had left school as early as possible and immediately found work in the 1970s, the second half of the 1980s saw the number of 16 and 17 year olds who were still in education nearly double (Osgerby, 1998). Combined with the sharply dropping proportion of teenage brides, from 20% of all brides in 1980 down to 7% in 1990⁵², this meant that the teenagers of the 1980s were arguably remaining more like children for longer. But the age of consent was still 16 in most of the UK, so although far fewer 16 year olds were getting married – the only way to acceptably have sex in earlier decades – they were still legally allowed to have sex, and ideas about their right to have and enjoy sex on the same terms as their male contemporaries had been sufficiently mainstreamed by the results of the second wave feminist movement that they often seemed to be taken for granted within the magazines. Class distinctions in the lives of young people were still strong, but Bill Osgerby suggests it was

⁵¹ Equivalent to approximately £1 in 2017 (National Archives, 2017).

⁵² See discussion of the changing number of teenage brides in chapter 1.

possible that a convergence of cultural preferences will gradually occur as young people from all social strata share the experience of an extended period of transition between the world of school and that of work (Osgerby, 1998, p. 223).

Indeed, perhaps foreshadowing this change, class distinctions were less visible in the magazines aimed at teenagers: the magazines of the 1980s presented an nearly unwavering view of middle class life and aspirations.

The main body of content in *Just Seventeen* in the 1980s talks only rarely about sex: it is more concerned with fashion, beauty, celebrities and entertainment, as the typical table of contents at figure 6 shows.

Most issues include just one serious article, rarely two, and occasionally none at all. What this means is that most of the discussion about sex appears on the problem pages, which include the usual collection of questions about whether to have sex, how to deal with pressure to have sex, and how to access contraception. However there is also a strong running thread featuring girls writing in with stories about the negative results of having sex, often explicitly positioning themselves as warnings to other readers, as in the quotation which forms the title of this section. These cautionary tales, and the advice columnists' replies to letters about sex, constitute the bulk of *Just Seventeen's* sexual content at this point in its history. In a magazine which is mostly full of bright colour, interesting page layouts, and text which is fun, light-hearted, and often irreverent, the problem pages form a stark contrast. They are black and white, in formal columns, and with a tone of address which is always serious, and sometimes – especially from Nick Fisher – verging on stern and authoritarian.⁵³ The magazine's scant other

⁵³ Fisher's harshest replies are to boys writing in with stories of sexually mistreating girls, as in the case of a boy worried his girlfriend might be pregnant after he 'got aroused and made her have sex with [him]', whose response from Fisher includes 'You have committed a very grave criminal act', and the instruction to 'acknowledge the disaster to both [their] lives that [his] sickening selfishness would have caused' (9 November 1988, p. 24).

serious content tends to also follow this visual pattern, printed in black and white, with a much more formal, subdued layout than the rest of the magazine. See figures 7 and 8.

Readers who contribute to the problem pages, then, are creating a high proportion of the magazine's serious and educational content, in telling their own stories, and in giving the magazine's advice columnists the opportunity to offer advice, reassurance, and direction to further sources of support, but also as a method of readers writing in support of each other on various topics including sex.

The problem page is thus not just the place where readers are able to communicate with the magazine, it is also the place where readers communicate with each other, with the community of other teenagers who share their problems, as well as sharing their magazine preferences. The performative nature of problem page letters means that even when letter-writers do not explicitly activate this function, it is always at work. Although the direct response letters often tell of a happy ending to a similar problem, and advice columnist responses reassure readers that they can reach a state of happiness despite their problem, the bulk of the letters are, of course, sad stories of one sort or another. Where we are more likely to see happy endings to reader stories are in the occasional 'It happened to me' features: first person stories by readers about difficult situations they have been in, and dealt with. However, even these happy endings still serve as cautionary examples, balancing their message of 'if it happens to you, you will eventually be OK' with '...but everything will be more complicated than if it hadn't happened'.

The cautionary tales in *Just Seventeen* where readers explicitly offer themselves as a lesson for others mostly revolve around pregnancy, with a more implicit running thread around the effects of unplanned or suspected pregnancies on readers' relationships with their boyfriends. There are occasional references to the fear of STDs, and of AIDS in particular (including a two-page article on 'AIDS the facts' in April 1989). However the issues I have read contain nothing about readers actually catching STDs: these are part of the background of sex in the 1980s, but are not portrayed in the magazine as an immediate, present threat, in the way that the risk of pregnancy is. The fear of pregnancy is demonstrated by girls at various stages: the girl who has

just had sex (possibly, though not necessarily unprotected) and is now worried she's pregnant; those who have been through that worry and want to share their experience to warn others; the girl who is pregnant and doesn't know what to do; and all the way to those who have had abortions, or decided to keep the baby.

In November 1988, Tricia from Edinburgh writes to share her experience with other readers. Under the heading 'I felt so cheap', she tells how she went to a party, and 'got drunk and ended up having sex without contraception'. This was her first time, and afterwards she felt 'cheap and dirty', later moving on to worrying that she was pregnant when her period was late. She contrasts this experience with how she had hoped to lose her virginity: 'with someone I cared for [...] a loving and pleasurable experience'. Her plea to the magazine to print her letter as a cautionary example to others, to show them 'how stupid it is to behave like this' forms the heading to this section (16 November 1988, p. 51).

The response Tricia receives from Maroushka Monroe reinforces the value of her experience for her own learning:

Although your problem has been resolved, I'm glad you see your experience as one you can learn from. Having a fright like this can really make you think about things, and it has helped to confirm to you that your original thinking is something you want to hold on to for the future. That sounds very good to me. (16 November 1988, p. 51)

This response makes no mention of Tricia's stated aim to help other readers, though it is of course also addressed to them implicitly, emphasising the value in Tricia's original aim to lose her virginity within a loving relationship, and, by implication, using condoms.

The boy with whom Tricia had sex is almost entirely absent from her account. Although she 'thought he was really nice', there is no suggestion that their drunken sex led to a relationship, or that Tricia considered how he might be able to support her if she had become pregnant.

This absence of boys in the fear-of-pregnancy narrative, or their uselessness if they are present, is a common theme in the cautionary tales. A girl calling herself 'Worried 17-year-old' writes to the 'Boys view' section of the Advice page in September 1989 because having had one abortion, she is worried about getting pregnant again, and has been told by her new boyfriend that he would leave her if she did. Her reply from Nick Fisher does mention the boy's responsibilities:

[Y]ou are already aware of the realities of having a sexual relationship; you are aware of the pitfalls and ultimate responsibilities. I think your boyfriend doesn't fully realise any of these things, nor does he appreciate his own responsibilities to you as a friend and lover. (13 September 1989, p. 22)

However, what those responsibilities are remain merely implied. There is no clear statement that a potential father should have as much responsibility for involvement in a child's life as a potential mother, nor that a boyfriend should be responsible for supporting his girlfriend's decision on what to do about a pregnancy which results from both of their actions.

Fifteen-year-old Louise, who had an abortion, and was featured in 'It happened to me' in February 1989, made her decision entirely alone, despite an apparently serious relationship with boyfriend Joe: 'He said, "Well what are you going to do?" – it wasn't even a case of what are "we" going to do?', and she later starts to blame him for 'let[ting] [her] have an abortion'. Louise tells her story mostly in the first person, but near the end she briefly changes to the second person for a section warning of the dangers of having second thoughts after an abortion. And although 'you' is the most flexible English pronoun, adapting to cover first, second or third person (Bodine, 1975), this example clearly encompasses both Louise herself, and the other girls who are reading her story and thinking about their own lives:

Looking back it would have been a big mistake if I'd had the baby – I realise that now. *You* do feel "what if?" but it's a very distorted and sentimental view, because when it's actually not a threat any more and it's not there, *you* can think, oh look, there's a pretty baby. *You* don't think, where am I going to live? How

will I pay for this baby? Do I really love the person who is the father of the child? Then it's a different story. I think it's easy to look at the situation through rose-tinted glasses after it's all over and I do feel that I definitely did the right thing. (8 February 1989, p. 36; my emphasis)

With those 'you's, Louise is positioning the reader alongside herself, looking with 'rose-tinted glasses' at the path not taken, as she reiterates the realities which led to her deciding to have an abortion, and setting them in direct opposition to the 'distorted and sentimental view' which might encourage keeping the baby.

In what is probably a deliberate gesture of even-handedness, two issues later the magazine publishes another 'It happened to me', this time about Kelly who got pregnant at the slightly more acceptable age of 17 and decided to have the baby (discussed further below).

Other boyfriends mentioned in letters to the Advice page are present in the girls' lives, but not supportive of their girlfriends' right to make a decision on whether to continue with a pregnancy. Two can be seen in letters published in the 11 January 1989 issue. Sixteen-year-old 'Anonymous' writes that she is pregnant and wants an abortion, and although she and her 18-year-old boyfriend 'have discussed pregnancy and he said he would always stick by the girl', he 'wouldn't let [her] have an abortion, as he is against them'. Given this limited message of boyfriendly support, as long as the girl does what he wants, it is perhaps not surprising that it is 'the girl' in general he would stand by, rather than explicitly Anonymous herself.

The magazine response, from Maroushka Monroe, is reassuring and practical, but the only comment on dealing with the boyfriend's objections to abortion is 'Maybe if you explain to your boyfriend that three people's lives could be ruined by you continuing with this pregnancy, he will understand why you have come to this decision'. There is no mention of the decision resting ultimately with 'Anonymous', or advice on how to deal with going ahead with an abortion if her boyfriend persists in his opposition to the plan. (11 January 1989, p. 32)

In the same issue, in the 'Boy's view' section, Nick Fisher offers a stronger response to a 17-year-old boy who, on hearing of his girlfriend's pregnancy, asked her to marry him, but then broke off the engagement '[i]n a fit of rage' after she had an abortion. Fisher's response begins:

I can't help feeling that you're being selfish in all this. It is your girlfriend's prerogative to treat her body how she wishes. If she feels that this was not a suitable time to see through a pregnancy then you have to respect her decision.

(11 January 1989, p. 36)

This is typical of Fisher's position on boys who do not show sufficient respect to the girls in their lives: his primary function on the problem page is to deliver stern lectures on boys' responsibilities towards girls, perhaps on the assumption that boys will be more receptive to such lectures from a man, although boys who are reading a girls' magazine may be at least theoretically prepared to accept advice from female sources.

On the other side of the question, we also see examples of boys who want their girlfriends to have an abortion. Seventeen-year-old Suzanne, four months pregnant, writes in March 1989 that she 'decided after much heart-searching to have the baby, much to the shock of my now ex-boyfriend, who wanted me to have an abortion', and now feels that if she had had an abortion, 'everyone would be rallying round me, but instead I am being ignored' (29 March 1989, p. 39). The ex-boyfriend is not mentioned otherwise, and we must assume that he left because Suzanne refused to have an abortion. Neither the letter writer nor Maroushka Monroe in her reply makes any mention of his responsibilities as a father-to-be, to support either Suzanne or the baby.

An 'It happened to me' article published in February 1989 shows a similar story, explored in more detail and across a longer time-span in the context of an article rather than simply a letter. Kelly, who got pregnant aged 17, describes her boyfriend's attitude:

Joel thought that I was crazy; he kept trying to make me have an abortion, saying that all my plans for university and a career would go out the window if I had a baby. I suspected that he was more worried about his future than mine, so in the

end I decided that I wouldn't ask him for any help. I'd have the baby on my own.
(22 February 1989, p. 31)

He makes one more attempt at being supportive after the baby is born, but again Kelly absolves him of responsibility:

Joel came to see us, but I could tell he was uncomfortable by the whole thing, so I told him not to bother coming back unless he wanted to. Most people thought that I was letting him off lightly, but to be honest I just couldn't stand seeing his miserable face when I was so happy. (22 February 1989, p. 31)

The only suggestion in the whole article that Joel has failed to take responsibility for his own actions is 'Most people thought that I was letting him off lightly', which Kelly immediately dismisses.

Alongside this persistent display of boys who are useless in the face of pregnant girlfriends, is an article from January 1989 entitled 'Young fathers: too much too soon?' Even though two of the three boys interviewed are involved and happy fathers, the tone is set by a combination of the subtitle, and an introduction which seems excessively forgiving of boys' difficulties with fatherhood:

[W]hen a young couple are suddenly plunged into parenthood, the experience can be as traumatic for the father as for the mother [...] Nervousness is only one of the difficulties a young father has to face. It's generally accepted that teenage boys mature at a slower rate than girls, so a young father might find himself bringing up a child before his own childhood has ended. Whether he loves his child or not, he may feel trapped by his situation. (4 January 1989, p. 28)

The claim that these 'difficulties' add up to as much of a potentially 'traumatic' experience for the father as the mother is disingenuous, letting boys off the hook of their responsibilities.

Again, we see that boys cannot always be expected to be helpful when faced with a pregnant

girlfriend. However, one of the boys interviewed, Alan, explicitly claims his share of the responsibility:

I never shirked my responsibilities and Debbie and I were fully prepared for the amount of sacrifice involved [...] To be honest, the responsibility didn't scare me because I'd always liked the idea of having a family. (4 January 1989, p. 29)

The other involved father, Mark, does discuss the disadvantages of early parenthood, though he includes his fiancée in the scope of these comments, rather than positioning himself as having had fatherhood imposed on him by her:

I do get the odd twinge of regret now and then about starting a family so young, and so does Elspeth. Neither of us feel like adults and it would've been nice to have enjoyed a few more years of juvenile delinquency. (4 January 1989, p. 29)

The other boy interviewed, Craig, does tell a story of having fatherhood imposed on him, by a girlfriend who deliberately stopped taking the pill, because 'she reckoned a baby could bring us together'. He makes clear that he accepts no responsibility, in general, by describing their relationship before she became pregnant: 'She was always nagging me about facing up to responsibility and she never understood that nobody tells me what to do' (4 January 1989, p. 29). He was on remand when the baby was born, so his refusal to accept anyone telling him what to do had led to the requirement of more 'tell[ing] what to do' than he would otherwise have been subject to. His probation officer, mentioned in the interview, had 'given [him] a lot of stick' over not being involved in his son's life, but Craig rejects her authority, too.

This coverage of the fear and reality of pregnancy as a cautionary tale echoes the words of *Boyfriend* magazine nearly thirty years earlier, discussed earlier in this chapter: 'What it really boils down to is that *you* are pregnant and *you* have got to have the baby and the worry' (30 January 1960, p. 25; emphasis original). While sex is portrayed as an activity that involves both boys and girls (as always, the magazines assume heterosexuality as a default), the fear or reality of pregnancy is almost entirely the business of girls, and the magazine does little to promote

the idea that boys *should* be expected to be emotionally supportive of their potentially-pregnant girlfriends, and to support their choices about pregnancy.

These stories, especially those published under the 'It happened to me' heading, are working specifically to challenge the background assumption of 'you don't believe it'll happen to you'. 'It' – pregnancy – *can* happen to an ordinary *Just Seventeen* reader, and with sometimes disastrous consequences including the breakup of relationships when it turns out that even the most serious and supportive boyfriends cannot necessarily be relied upon in a situation it is much easier for them to escape than it is for their girlfriends. That these type of stories constitute the bulk of *Just Seventeen's* coverage of sex in the late 1980s raises an interesting issue: these girls got pregnant (or feared that they had) anyway, despite having presumably read previous instances of just the sort of stories they write in with, but they nevertheless write in the hope that other readers will be saved from their experience, echoing one of the findings of Sharon Thompson's research, which compiled girls' stories about sex, romance and pregnancy, and in which she found that: 'Even the most antifeminist [girls] felt obligated to give other girls the advantage of their experiences. They wished they had had that advantage themselves' (1995, p. 13).

This community of girls who provide *Just Seventeen* with their stories as cautionary examples allows the magazine to present a relatively conservative message about teenage sex without having to perform the same sort of repressive lecturing that typifies some of the content of earlier magazines, discussed above. The 'don't have sex' message is seen as coming from readers, from real girls, just like any other reader of the magazine, leaving the magazine itself with its image of being fun loving and freedom-embracing intact.

Conclusion

So the role played by teen magazines in educating girls about sex was a vital one, even though there are many ways the content looks problematic to modern eyes. And while the information the magazines offered was undeniably not as complete, supportive and inclusive as the best of what's available to present-day teenagers – the website *Scarleteen*, for example – this carefully limited, carefully presented information about sex at least educated girls, to some extent,

according to the standards of the day. *Petticoat's* agony aunt in 1973, sums up what she is trying to do on her problem page when she talks about sex:

Going by the tone of many of the letters I receive, in fact the majority of today's young people are deeply aware of and concerned about the value of relationships. They don't want me or anyone else to preach at them about [sex]. But they do want practical information and help to pick up the pieces when they've made a mistake and suffered the painful results of sex without emotional commitment, and these things I try to provide. (*Petticoat*, 10 March 1973, p. 39)

This portrayal of thoughtful, aware readers, and the problems they nevertheless encounter with sex, which they then turn to the magazines to assist with, is – with the exception of the resistance to preaching, which is very historically variable – a good summary of the way sex advice in operates in teen magazines across the period. Through the process of publishing and responding to reader letters about sex, both the magazine and its readers have an influence on the way sex is constructed within the magazines. On the one hand, the magazine contribution operates to reinforce whatever social norms around sex the magazine wishes to emphasise, and on the other hand, the reader contribution serves to contextualise these social norms within girls' lived experiences, although not usually to challenge them. Reader letters around sex tend to inhabit the border regions around what is socially acceptable sexuality. By contrast, girls whose experience of sex and sexuality is perfectly in keeping with the current social norms have little need of advice on how to reconcile any contradictions between expectations and experience and are unlikely to be having sex yet, at least in the 'younger' magazines; by the time they transition to the 'older' magazines, these perfectly normative readers are likely to be having straightforward, loving sex, with one serious partner, in a way that is largely absent from most of the magazines.

As with earlier research on portrayals of sex in girls' magazines, we see sex advice that seeks both to serve the needs of the individual reader who writes in with her problem, and to produce her as an exhibit for the rest of the magazine's readership. However, this performative function is not only a key aspect of the way the magazines operate in this area, it is also a key

aspect of the way their readers operate, especially in *Just Seventeen*, offering themselves up as cautionary examples from whom other girls can learn lessons.

The next chapter will examine the way magazines portrayed, and responded to, girls asking for help in disputes with their parents.

3. Challenging parental authority

Jackie.—You have made it very difficult for me to answer your problem, dear, for you don't tell me exactly why your parents disapprove of your friendship with this boy. Have you tried talking to them and asking them what they have against him? [...] But, I can't help feeling that there is a very good reason for your parents absolutely forbidding you to go out with this boy and if you know really and truly that they are right, then I feel you should think very carefully before continuing the friendship. (*Marilyn*, 8 March 1958, p. 26)

In response to reader Jackie's complaint about her parents' disapproval of her boyfriend, *Marilyn* magazine's position is that, regardless of the reasoning behind the decision, girls should abide by their parents' decisions until or unless they are able to tactfully convince their parents otherwise; most of the magazine's readers will have been living in the parental home, whether they are working or still at school, and as such been treated as still-dependent children who must obey their parents' authority. The last line, however, offers Jackie a loophole: 'think very carefully before continuing' is a much weaker prohibition than the magazine could have used, and an acknowledgement of the perhaps limited power her parents might be able to bring to bear in preventing her from seeing the boy.

This chapter examines magazine interactions when teenage girls push against their parents' boundaries, decisions and values, and ask their magazines to negotiate or arbitrate in their skirmishes over parental authority. I will ask how magazine writers navigate this delicate balancing act, portraying varying amounts of support for both girls and their parents, across a variety of contested topics, and providing a place for girls to practice their interactions with their parents on these sometimes-fraught subjects. The chapter concludes by returning to examples of disagreements between parent and child in *Marilyn* magazine in the 1950s, using methods which focus on issues of authority and relationship. The magazine ranges itself alongside readers' parents, in opposition to readers, but my analysis explores the voice and tone of this opposition, and the way that relationships between readers and their parents, and

readers and the magazine, are presented. Also relevant is the way the magazine balances authority and support in the voice of its advice columnist.

The girls who read these magazines are engaged in working out how to make their way in the world, in forging their separation from their parents, and working out what kind of adults they will be. Disputes with their parents about how to go about these various tasks are therefore almost inevitable, and also cover girls' choice of reading matter, as some of my survey respondents described, for example:

[M]y father actually didn't want me to read [teenage magazines]. He thought I would learn unhealthy things from them. (He was right.)

(Respondent 13)

Many of my survey respondents talked about various tactics to avoid this parental disapproval, such as taking advantage of parents' lack of detailed knowledge of the differences between magazines ostensibly aimed at the same market, as in this response:

All of the magazines I've ticked above were marketed as being for young girls, when in fact there was a big difference in the content of *Mizz* to *Sugar* for example. As the readers we were aware of this but I don't think our parents were. I look back now and think that I read content that was age inappropriate.

(Respondent 106)

Respondent 15 was allowed by her mother to read *Jackie* as long as she also 'demonstrated "better" reading on a regular basis'; respondent 97 talks about tearing out the 'Position of the fortnight' pages in *more!* before passing it on to her mother, who also wanted to read the magazine (which she admits 'sounds ridiculous now'). Several respondents mention concealing their magazine reading from their parents to avoid their disapproval, as in this response:

I think I knew my parents would disapprove if they knew the content of the magazines. They really weren't suitable for a teenage girl.

(Respondent 55)

While others mention surreptitiously reading magazines of older family members:

My mum would only let me read *Bunty* and *Mizz* but I would steal *more!* and *Just17* from my older sisters to read.

(Respondent 31)

And:

Hi! magazine was the only magazine my Grandparents would permit because it was 'wholesome' but [I] secretly bought *J17*, *Mizz* and stole my Aunt's *more!* magazine!

(Respondent 54)

As these demonstrate, sometimes the mere act of reading a magazine can be a rebellion against parental authority, perhaps because parents consider a magazine too 'old' for their daughter, or disapprove of particular content it includes, or because magazines have been banned as a policy or a punishment. By writing to a magazine to ask for mediation in disputes with parents, a girl might have been enacting even more of a rebellion; certainly at least one of my respondents felt that writing in would have been an act of bravery:

I remember wanting [magazines] but my mum being v disapproving. She saw them as trashy I think. The agony letters were heartbreaking and I used to fantasise about writing in but never dared.

(Respondent 32)

Despite clearly identifying the act of writing a letter as a form of rebellion, it is unclear what consequences this respondent feared; perhaps that her mother's disapproval of the magazines would extend to her if she was found out.

These fraught boundary disputes between girls and parents over the girls' relationships with magazines also act as background to any intervention the magazines make in the relationship between girls and their parents. The magazines' usual need to avoid antagonising parents who might act as gatekeepers over girls' spending money and reading matter therefore becomes even more acute when the topic of magazine content is disputes between girls and their parents.

Changing views of the parent-teen relationship

The research on teenagers' relationships with their parents often has to navigate differences between the public perception of difficult teenagers whose parents are dealing with a generation gap, and persistent research findings that, in fact, most teenagers and their parents get along reasonably well, respecting and trusting each other (Coleman and Hendry, 1999; Steinberg, 2001).

Looking particularly at the post-war period, Selina Todd and Hilary Young find that, in fact, parents were supportive of their teenagers' education, aspirations and increased liberty (2012). Work by Sophie Sarre, looking at the teenagers of the early twenty-first century, finds that on the whole, teenagers willingly accept parental rules, especially on subjects such as getting home early on 'school nights', areas where parental worries about safety might be concerned, and about rules drawn from socioeconomic necessity, such as shared use of a computer (2010). That is, areas where the logic of the rules is obvious; in areas of a more nebulous 'it's just the right thing to do' nature, teenagers are less tractable:

Many of the matters that parents and teenagers argue about are seen by parents as involving codes of right and wrong—either moral codes or, more likely, codes that are based on social conventions. But these very same issues are seen by teenagers as matters of personal choice. To a parent, maintaining a clean room is something that people do because it is the right thing to do (after all, cleanliness is next to godliness); to the adolescent, how one keeps one's room is one's own business. (Steinberg, 2001, p. 6)

In these types of conflict, where teenagers feel that parental rulings are unfair, research finds teenagers lying to their parents to evade their restrictions (e.g. Sharpe, 1994; Sarre, 2010), and we also see tactics from teens which are used to soften restrictions, for example, “‘Being helpful’ could also be used to soften a parent up before a specific request about spending time’ (Sarre, 2010, p. 66). This combination of lying and strategic submission can also be seen in parent-teenager interactions described in the magazines, as I will show. Both tactics are a sign of the power that parents hold over their teenagers, an aspect of the relationship that Sarre returns to throughout her account. In particular, when discussing tactics used between teens and their parents in setting and changing rules, she says, ‘[n]egotiation can win concessions for teenagers, but may also disguise the degree of parental power’ (2010, p. 73). I will return to this consideration of negotiation and power in my discussion below of the ways that these issues play out within the magazines.

The kinds of parental disputes found in the magazines can, as usual with this type of magazine content, be seen as outliers. James Hemming describes the six most common parent-adolescent conflicts which arise from the correspondence he examines in a mid-century girls’ magazine.⁵⁴ ‘Ignorance of the adolescent’s inner feelings’, ‘Denial of self-determination’, ‘Undervaluing adolescent friendships’, ‘Disregard of status issues’, ‘Too little appreciation’, and ‘Fear of sex’, by which he means boyfriends and their consequences in general, not just sex specifically (1969, pp. 146–153). In connection with several of these points, he writes of the need for parents to resist the urge to hold an excessively strict line which will then encourage a vicious cycle of

[T]he girl reacting by being more and more resentful and rebellious, and the parents reacting by being more and more critical and repressive. (1969, p. 149)

Hemming also identifies the 1960s problem that parents no longer act as ‘the mouthpiece of society’: that the ‘ideas, values and standards [...] manifest in society as a whole’ have to some

⁵⁴ Likely *Girl*; see discussion in the methodology chapter.

extent broken down as 'society is very much less consistent and conformist than it once was' (1969, p. 144), causing problems both for parents seeking to impose discipline, and for children in their response to that discipline.

The teenagers who wrote the letters Hemming discusses may have bought into the idea that society is moving towards greater freedom, combined with their own movement towards greater independence, and may therefore find it difficult to accept parental rulings, especially if they feel that these rulings are not in fact backed up by societal standards. In 1970, Anne Nightingale writes in *Petticoat* on the new lack of societal rules, and the consequences of this lack:

No one, unfortunately, can lay down a code of behaviour. The Church used to, mothers and fathers used to. But now we are on our own. It's sad to think that though at last we've got the freedom that we've been screaming about for so long, most of us really don't know what to do with it. (*Petticoat*, 17 January 1970, p. 35)

However, the new freedom is not as widespread as Nightingale believes. In Sue Sharpe's 1970s research with Ealing schoolgirls (perhaps slightly younger than *Petticoat's* audience), she discovers that 'Despite the so-called permissiveness of society, girls are still kept under quite a strict family control' (1994, p. 254). She attributes this to an increase in violent and sexual street crime, echoing more explicitly the concerns implied in letters to *Marilyn* and *Heiress* twenty years earlier, when girls are warned about the 'corner boys' and 'Teddy Boys' who may present a unspecified threat to them on the street (discussed later in this chapter).

As with Hemming's work, my material here represents outliers in the parent-teen relationship, exploring the way the magazines offer an outlet and a support to the minority of cases where there is conflict, rather than the relatively-peaceful majority. This landscape of shifting boundaries of authority, and the contradiction between popular accounts and research findings about the prevalence and seriousness of conflict between teenagers and their parents, is nevertheless the background against which girls seek advice from their magazines about how

to deal with their parents. I am particularly concerned in the rest of this chapter with the ways that the magazines strive for various forms of balance between support for the girls who are their readers, and support for the parents who may control girls' continuing access to the magazines, as well as their role in support of wider societal norms, of which readers' parents are often the mouthpiece. This chapter will, then, offer a new view of the way the public perception of the teenager–parent relationship is constructed, in the way that magazines present this relationship, and intervene in it.

Shifting balance of power

In the letters teenage girls write to their magazines, their relationship with their parents sometimes seems particularly fraught because the power balance between parent and child is shifting, and both sides may feel powerless in their interactions with each other. Responses from magazines show interesting reflections of this shifting balance, sometimes assuming that parents have the power to force girls to comply, and at other times, and in other magazines, assuming that girls have the freedom to do as they wish, and must merely seek to help their parents come to terms with their new-found independence.

This letter and response from *Date* implicitly acknowledges that the parents' behaviour is inappropriate, but nevertheless advises Dawn to comply with it:

I don't often receive a letter but, when I do, there is always a row. My parents ask to see it, ask questions and go on about it when I refuse to show it them [...].

Once or twice they have opened a letter addressed to me before I got home. Is it fair?—Dawn M.

No, a letter is a private document and should only be opened by the person to whom it is addressed. A tug-of-war seems to have developed over this question of letters in your family. I never believe in pulling, if you can help it. Without being asked, I should show them the next letter you have. (*Date*, 21 January 1961, p. 22)

This response betrays an uncomfortable contradiction between the status of letters as ‘private document’, and the advice to pre-emptively show these private documents to parents. The *Date* advice columnist, ‘Doctor Paul Allan’, while seeming to agree with Dawn that her parents are unreasonable in their demands, is also furthering those demands by backing them up. This may be advice which helps Dawn to have fewer arguments with her parents, but it doesn’t help her with maintaining the privacy of her correspondence, which is the problem about which she was actually seeking help.

This advice recognises that there is little that Dawn can do to stop her parents from opening her letters if they insist on it, but it is also typical of the magazines of the 1950s and 1960s, which usually advise girls to submit to their parents’ rules and decisions, often simply because of the parent-child relationship, with little reference to whether the parental rulings are fair or appropriate.⁵⁵ However, this is not an assumption that children must do as adults tell them in general, as seen in this example from *Jackie* of a girl rejecting the requirements her boyfriend’s mother seeks to place on her:

I’m fed up of being ordered around. My steady, Dave, is having a birthday party. I’ve been invited by his mother.

It’s going to be a family affair, and I’ve been TOLD to lower the hem of the dress I’ll be wearing and how to wear my hair. I’m not to put on nail varnish as his mum doesn’t like it. (*Jackie*, 7 March 1964, p. 15)

The magazine is clear that she is under no obligation to do as her boyfriend’s mother insists, and indeed frames this as an issue between her and Dave, with his mother mostly incidental to Dave’s implied position that she isn’t good enough as she is: ‘If he’s not happy with you as you are, we advise you to send him for a long walk on a short pier’ (*Jackie*, 7 March 1964, p. 15). From a magazine which is usually supportive of parental restrictions, this is an interesting view:

⁵⁵ See below for more discussion of this issue applied to *Marilyn* magazine in particular.

parental restrictions over their own offspring are to be followed, if reluctantly, but adults should not extend their rules to the behaviour of other teenagers.⁵⁶

There are other examples in *Jackie* of limits to how far the magazine supports parental rulings, such as this one:

I am about two stones overweight.

All of the boys I know are friendly—and brotherly. Yesterday one of the nicest boys I know said to me, ‘You’d be a doll if you’d lose some weight.’ I decided then and there to go on a diet.

The problem is my mother. According to her, if a boy was the right kind he’d take me out no matter what I weighed. She says dieting will make me nervous.

To which the magazine replies:

Mother’s wrong—for once. We hear from more girls who are nervous because they haven’t got dates than because they are dieting.

Go to a doctor and let him put you on a diet. (*Jackie*, 25 January 1964, p. 10)

It is noteworthy here that the magazine encouraging the reader to go against her mother is likely to produce more conflict, rather than less, an unusual position from the magazines in general, and from conservative *Jackie* in particular. The opening of the response, ‘Mother’s wrong—for once’, is perhaps the most important, carrying the dual load of the expectation that mother will, in general, be automatically right about such things (or at least that her daughter must behave as if she is), and at the same time the evidence that occasionally she will be wrong. This is in some ways typical of many of the teenager–parent conflicts discussed in this chapter: the move from the omnipotent, omniscient parent of the child, to the merely advisory parent of the young adult. The magazine’s response also assumes that the mother has no power

⁵⁶ A similar example, rejecting the authority of an uncle, is discussed later in this chapter.

to prevent the reader from visiting her doctor and going on a diet, despite the likelihood that the mother will be buying and preparing her daughter's food.

This tension is ongoing in magazine attempts to mediate between readers and their parents: parents hold most of the power in the relationship, and whether they are well-meaning or otherwise, girls have little recourse in trying to change their parents' minds about rules they see as unfair. Janet, writing to *Blue Jeans* in 1977 makes this position clear when she writes 'I think I'll have to run away' because her parents have forbidden her to see or speak to her boyfriend. Advice columnist 'Dave' dances a careful line between 'they must have some grounds for their attitude' and 'their action has been a bit drastic', advising Janet to negotiate with her parents, and to give them more of a chance to get to know the boy, but he remains firm on the subject of running away as a solution:

Running away won't solve any of your problems, it'll just get you in a bigger mess, and will destroy any trust your parents have in you. So forget it. (*Blue Jeans*, 15 October 1977, p. 18)

Stuck in a situation where they can sometimes exercise little or no control over the circumstances of their lives, these teenagers can feel as if running away might be the only solution available to them. One of the major tasks of the advice columnists in the magazines, then, is to find ways of helping readers to negotiate different solutions, or to make peace with the decisions made by their parents. Those teenagers who wish to follow parental rules in general, but would just prefer that those rules could be relaxed, have few or no bargaining chips, and they know it. Conversely, as they get older, their parents' ability to actually prevent them from doing whatever they want declines.

One of the approaches the magazines take to mitigate this position is shown in this example from *Just Seventeen* in 1988:

If there are certain things your parents want you to do [...] get in first by actually offering to do it. And if they can't resist making a snippy comment about how unusual it is, don't rise to the bait. Just shrug and smile. This isn't giving in. This is

good tactics. You'd almost certainly have ended up doing it anyway, and by offering your services you'll surprise your parents and take away some of their ammunition. (*Just Seventeen*, 15 June 1988, p. 31)

From an article called 'No way out', this writer is close to explicitly acknowledging the lack of power of the girls in their relationships with their parents, with 'You'd almost certainly have ended up doing it anyway', but offering advice on how readers can at least benefit from this position by pre-emptively giving in, which also echoes Sarre's findings about methods teenagers use to 'soften up' their parents (2010, p. 66). Mention of 'tactics' and 'ammunition' position this as a battle, with the parents as the enemy. Combined with the article's title, this produces a somewhat threatening aspect: girls are trapped in battle with a more powerful foe, against whom they have few weapons. The only option they have is to do their best to appease the enemy.

This battle occasionally becomes less metaphorical, as in this letter to *more!*:

I'm 18 but due to financial restraints I still live with my parents. The big problem is that I don't get on with my mum. We don't agree on anything and to make things worse she sometimes hits and slaps me when we argue. She's always threatening to throw me out and keeps telling me how grateful I should be. I can't take this much longer.

Zena, Buckinghamshire (*more!*, 20 May 1998, p. 94)

However, even here, the magazine advises appeasement if possible. The answer includes:

[B]eing slapped because you disagree with another adult sounds pretty abusive to me. But before you do anything drastic, have one last try at resolving your differences. She is, after all, still your mum [...] Tell her you're sick of her hitting you and that it's got to stop, or ask your father to intervene. If that doesn't stop the abuse, then leave as soon as you can. (*more!*, 20 May 1998, p. 94)

These are oddly mixed messages for something which appears to be a fairly straightforward case. First the magazine characterizes Zena's situation as '*pretty abusive*' (my emphasis), and then recommends 'resolving [...] differences' as a solution. Although the response does go on to list places to seek practical help, including the Samaritans, as 'Physical and emotional abuse isn't something to get over just by moving out', the tone has nevertheless been set by the opening of the response, and its recommendations to start with negotiation to solve the problem. The magazine is explicitly positioning Zena as an adult, by referring to her mother as 'another adult', and assigning her equal power in the relationship by suggesting she tell her mother 'it's got to stop', with the assumed expectation that this might have any effect at all. The way in which Zena herself introduces her situation – 'I'm 18 but [...] I still live with my parents' – implies a partial positioning of her as an adult; the 'but' makes her living situation seem somewhat unusual, not what would be expected of someone who had reached the age of legal majority, although in fact around 75% of 18-year-old girls lived with their parents in 1998 (Berrington, Stone and Falkingham, 2009). The hierarchy here is a complicated one where Zena's status is unclear, and her 'financial restraints' may be keeping her in an artificially reduced position, not yet fully adult though the magazine, and the law, treat her as one.

These battles between parent and teenager, then, can seem like complicated bluffing schemes, dependent on goodwill, and with the actual stakes not always clear to either side. Girls do not necessarily have any power to resist their parents' rules, even when the magazine agrees they are unfair, as with Dawn and her letters, but implicit in the background of all of these discussions, especially later in the period, is the threat of teenagers leaving home. Although the magazines consistently advise against this – even for Zena, whose mother hits her, leaving is a last resort – once again the magazines are caught in the trap that by mentioning a course of action, even to advise against it, they may be nevertheless putting the idea into some readers' minds. The way these struggles play out seems to change very little across the period, although the precise topics might shift (for example, later parents no longer seem to be reading their daughters' letters, judging by the problem pages).

The power of parents to dictate what happens in their own homes, and the power of teenagers to leave those homes for the evening, is another common area that girls seek advice about.

Going out, staying in

This letter to *Heiress* is typical of the type throughout the period, although the early curfew and the fear of Teddy Boys are more specific to its time:

My parents will not allow me to go dancing and, although I am fifteen, I am not allowed to go to the cinema after half-past-five because my mother says there are Teddy Boys hanging around. What can I do about it?

Frances Vaughan, *Heiress's* advice columnist, responds:

I do sympathise with you, but fifteen is rather young to go dancing [...] It is difficult to advise you about the cinema but if there are rough boys⁵⁷ in your neighbourhood, you could be the victim of a very unpleasant experience. I do recommend patience. Another year will make a lot of difference – so try to be philosophical. Perhaps you could have friends home sometimes then your parents will get to know them and will not mind so much when you suggest going out with them. (*Heiress*, February 1956, p. 46)

In her reply, Vaughan squarely takes the side of the reader's parents, although, unusually, she offers this as independently-derived opinion, rather than simply backing up parental rules on principle. Her suggestion of how to improve matters while waiting the year which 'will make a lot of difference' seems oddly tentative, and not directly related to the reader's letter, since her question is not about going out in general, but going out for a specific activity or at a particular time; this may be merely an attempt to avoid an entirely negative response.

⁵⁷ The previous edition of *Heiress* contains a debate about the pros and cons of Teddy Boys and their appearance, so Vaughan's equation here of Teddy Boys with 'rough boys' is not as clear-cut as it may seem. (January 1956, p. 28)

Bringing friends home to socialise instead of going out may, in any case, also be fraught with difficulty, as in the next two examples from the 1960s.

Dad's always moaning at me because I don't take my friends home very often. Yet when I do he moans again because we make too much noise and play records. What does he expect—for me to ask my friends home but tell them they must be quiet as mice?—Tina (Camberley).

[...] If you and the gang could hear a tape-recording of yourselves, I bet you'd have a fit. He's probably afraid the neighbours will start banging on the walls. Ask your friends not to kick up quite such a racket, then I'm sure dad won't mind having them around. (*Roxy*, 16 January 1960, p. 23)

This response from *Roxy* fails to address the problem that playing records is inevitably noisy, and in fact tends towards Tina's hyperbolic suggestion that she ask her friends to be 'quiet as mice', while ignoring the issue of Tina's father's inconsistent approach with a justification for his opinion, in the shape of the neighbours, and the blithe reassurance that if her friends are quieter her father will not mind their presence. None of this is necessarily helpful to Tina in negotiating her father's conflicting requirements for her to both bring friends home, and be quiet.

In this example from *Romeo*, the reader's at-home socialising goes a step further, and again, meets with objections from her father:

Mum is O K, but Dad is so square. Every Friday night a bunch of us girls take turns to invite our boy-friends to our home. There are six couples and we are all the same age. We play records, dance, and have lemonade and sandwiches.

The problem is my dad won't let us turn off the lights when we're dancing. We are in the sitting-room and he is in the living-room, so we don't annoy him at all. Occasionally he 'looks in' on us, and if the lights are out—I get what for.

Nobody else's parents object, and I'm embarrassed that my dad is so old-fashioned. What do you think?—Pat.

Dear Pat—Your dad sounds like the only parent in the bunch who has a working brain cell. He knows that dancing in the dark can lead to nothing good.

Besides, it's his house, and you must accept his decision. (*Romeo*, 13 July 1963, p. 9)

Romeo's response⁵⁸ uses both an appeal to an allegedly objective standard of appropriate behaviour in its first paragraph, and the assertion that Pat's father must be treated as automatically right, in the second paragraph. That the house is also that of Pat's mother, who Pat describes as 'O K', is apparently irrelevant; evidently as a woman she is also expected to be subject to Pat's father's authority.

Both these examples of girls doing their socialising at home seem to involve the same problem recurring: week after week Tina and her friends are noisy, and her father objects, and Pat and her friends dance in the dark, and *her* father objects. The disagreement seems neither to have driven Tina and Pat to change their socialising behaviour, nor for their fathers to forbid them from entertaining their friends in the house. This is a reminder of the delicate power balance in operation here: although the fathers object to their daughters' behaviour at home, they may prefer to tacitly accept the problem instead of sending their daughters off to socialise elsewhere, beyond their fathers' ability to supervise.

⁵⁸ The *Romeo* advice column at this point bears the name Ann Landers, suggesting that it is a syndicated version of a portion of the now-famous American column, although readers at the time may be unlikely to have heard of her, so were probably unaware of this. It means that the writers of advice letters are not *Romeo* readers, but the presentation of the letters and replies will have the usual effects on the wider readership even though none of them wrote the original letter. That the column is an American one probably explains the ability of six couples to dance in a reader's home, which seems otherwise implausible in a typical British family home.

A rare example of an advice columnist squarely taking the reader's side against her parents, again on the subject of at-home socialising:

I'm 16 and my boy friend is 18. When he comes to collect me, my parents expect us to sit and talk to them all evening.

Occasionally we go out alone together, but my mother always criticises us for being unsociable. Am I wrong to object?—Yvonne.

Dear Yvonne—Teenagers should not be expected to spend evenings with their parents. Your folks should have friends of their own age and not expect you to keep them company every night. (*Romeo*, 20 July 1963, p. 20)

The only gesture towards supporting Yvonne's parents which this response contains is that she and her boyfriend should not be expected to sit with her parents every night; it is otherwise a surprisingly direct disagreement with her parents. Nevertheless, it offers no practical help for Yvonne in negotiating this problem, and the suggestion that her parents should – but do not – have their own friends is unlikely to be helpful to Yvonne in keeping the conversation civil. If Yvonne begins her follow-up conversation with '*Romeo* agrees with me', that is unlikely to incline her parents to reasonableness. All the magazine has done here, then, is to confirm Yvonne's opinion on the problem, while offering no advice in navigating it.

A stronger condemnation of parental rules appears in the response to this letter to *Valentine* in 1974:

[M]y dad [...] won't let me bring any of my friends home. Even if they knock for me, they're left standing on the doorstep until I come out. When I ask why he won't let me invite them in, he just says: "This is my home, not a cafe for you and your friends to hang about in." My mum won't take my side because she says this is something he feels strongly about and he's very good in other ways. (*Valentine*, 8 June 1974, p. 31)

The magazine's response describes her father's rule as 'very extreme' and something which 'most people would consider [...] unreasonable', and although they also include a justification of his feelings, this is immediately mitigated with a restatement of the unfairness of his position:

Obviously, having hordes of people dropping in at all hours, eating you out of house and home and disturbing your peace and quiet can be very aggravating, but refusing to allow even an occasional visit seems unfair. (*Valentine*, 8 June 1974, p. 31)

However, even with this clear opinion on the rights and wrongs of the matter, and with the 'surprisingly large number' of other parents who uphold similar rules, the only advice the magazine offers is to ask her closest friends to continue to try and visit, 'hoping that he'd get to know them and soften towards them' (*Valentine*, 8 June 1974, p. 31). There is no suggestion on how a father who insists callers wait on the doorstep might get to know his daughter's friends, and no advice for approaching an attempt to change his mind. However, some magazines, especially later in the period, do offer detailed negotiation tactics, sometimes close to scripts, as in this example:

My mum used to let me out with my mates, but now I'm 16, instead of giving me more freedom, she always wants me at home. I feel trapped. Frustrated, 16, Yorkshire.

It sounds like your mum's a bit worried about you becoming more independent. You need to chat to her in a calm way so there's less chance of a row. Tell her you know she loves you, but you're frustrated at not being allowed out. Explain you want to spend time with her, but you also want a life of your own. Show her you're trustworthy by making a compromise. Agree to spend some time with her while she lets you out a little more. (*Bliss*, April 1999, p. 69)

These clear instructions, covering attitude and outcomes, as well as the details of what to say, are fairly typical of *Bliss*, with its emphasis on empowering and educating readers. Rather than advocating the willing submission to parental rules that earlier magazines sometimes promote,

Bliss attempts to teach readers the skills of managing relationships. Though even here, the suggestion that 'Frustrated' offers a compromise is disingenuous: the suggested solution is for Frustrated to be allowed out some of the time and stay in the rest of the time, which is in fact what she wanted originally.

In these negotiations with parents about going out and staying in, the magazines are treading a difficult path, acknowledging the power of parents over their daughters. However, it is only the earlier magazines which promote an unconditional surrender of girls to the authority of their parents, while later magazines gradually begin to suggest negotiation, albeit often in a half-hearted, unhelpful way, which tends to reinforce parental authority by default.

Although the magazines are thus broadly supportive of parental rulings about where and how to socialise, the issue of who to socialise with – boyfriends especially – is often handled differently.

Boyfriends

The way that magazines recommend girls deal with disputes about boyfriends varies with the age of the girl. However, older girls, who generally seem to be more free of their parents' influence on their decisions, may become more dependent on their parents when it comes to their approval for marriage:

We are both eighteen. We've had rather a set-back because both my parents, and Dennis's, say that they would much rather we waited for another year before we get married.—Helen T. (*Date*, 14 January 1961, p. 21)

In England and Wales, parental permission was still needed for those under the age of 21 seeking to marry,⁵⁹ so Helen's parents' wish for Helen and Dennis to wait before marriage may actually have had the force of a prohibition, instead of the preference she presents it as. This is

⁵⁹ This dropped to 18 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with the change in age of legal majority in 1969 (*Family Law Reform Act*, 1969). In Scotland, it was already possible to marry without parental consent from the age of 16.

implied in *Date's* response, which mentions 'a whole year before you can both have your dearest wish', but even without emphasising Helen and Dennis's dependence on their parents' permission, the magazine's position is that they should accept their parents' decision and make the best of it in the meantime.

This girl writing to *Valentine* in 1963 doesn't give her age, although the minimum school leaving age at the time was 15 (Simon, 1991), suggesting she may be younger than that⁶⁰:

I'm writing on behalf of girls still in school. I have, and I'm sure many other girls have, been asked for a date. But if it got to my dad that I had been dating he would be very angry.—Desperate Girls of Britain. (*Valentine*, 16 November 1963, p. 22)

The advice columnist is clear that the girl must obey her father, and her only attempt to soften this instruction is the claim, perhaps implausible, that '[t]he boys will understand'. There is no room for negotiation with the father's ruling, which must simply be obeyed.

By contrast, this letter from *Jackie* supports the reader's parents but sets the final decision on the shoulders of the reader herself:

For three years I have loved a boy my parents dislike. They've asked me to break with him, but I cannot do this. We get more serious every day. What shall I do?

The magazine responds:

Your parents are just trying to protect you. After three years they have had plenty of time to size this boy up—and remember they're not blinded by love. Have a talk with them and find out what they object to. But it's up to you to make your own decision in the end. (*Jackie*, 11 April 1964, p. 20)

⁶⁰ Only around a third of 16- and 17-year olds remained in full-time education in 1963 (Bolton, 2012).

It is likely that this letter-writer is older than the girl writing to *Valentine* above: the three-year duration of her feelings for the boy may mean she is old enough to have left school and be working, or to have stayed on past school-leaving age. Though she is, by implication, still living with her parents, she may nevertheless be less dependent on them than the *Valentine* reader, and in a better position to exercise her independence, supported by *Jackie* in making her own decision. She also presents her parents' position as a request, rather than an order, which, combined with her age seems a reasonable justification for *Jackie's* confirmation that the final decision is hers, not her parents'.

This balance of respect for parents' views, with acknowledgement that the decision remains with the girl, becomes gradually more common. This letter, from *Boyfriend* in 1966, is a response to Vanda, whose parents have discovered that her boyfriend's father has been in prison, and as a result have forbidden her to see him any more:

Mark Wynter⁶¹ says: If Dave has no record himself, then I think your parents are wrong to condemn him because of something his father did. You'd been going out with him for more than a month and they had nothing to say against him until they knew about his father. It seems to me your parents are scared stiff of their good name and their possessions rather than their daughter's feelings, let alone the feelings of a boy for whom life must have been pretty tough with a father in prison. So if you really like this boy enough to put up a fight for him, and he cares enough for you to make the fighting worthwhile, go on seeing him. But not behind your parents' back. Tell them that you've seen Dave again, and that you're going to go on seeing him. Try not to lose your temper but get it through to them

⁶¹ The problem page in *Boyfriend* features an array of 'Stars of the week' who take a turn at answering readers' letters; Mark Wynter was a pop star who had a string of hits in the early 1960s; despite his celebrity status he seems to take his advice-giving role seriously; see discussion of different types of agony aunts in the methodology chapter.

that their uncharitable attitude is losing them your respect. Ask them to give Dave a chance for YOUR sake. (*Boyfriend*, 15 January 1966, p. 25)

What Wynter offers here is effectively a script to use in bringing parents round to their daughter's way of thinking. But alongside the script, he also provides a damning critique of the parents' decision-making priorities, and repeats the phrase 'go on seeing him'. Although he recommends Vanda is open and honest with her parents, he is implicitly endorsing the idea that there is in fact little that her parents can do to stop her seeing Dave. The negotiation is therefore more of an ultimatum than is usually seen in the problem pages.

These more open forms of negotiation gradually start to take over from passive acceptance of parental rulings, as in this question from *My Guy* in 1980:

Please can you tell me at what age should girls go out with boys? I am 14 and I have dated a few, but against my mother's wishes. I feel so guilty and depressed going behind her back, but I go to discos and meet a lot of boys whom I find I like. What should I do? Carolyn, Kings Walden. (*My Guy*, 26 April 1980, p. 30)

The magazine's recommendation for Carolyn to communicate more with her mother about her boyfriends is much more accommodating of Carolyn's preferences than the similar letter in *Valentine* in 1963, discussed above. However, unhelpfully, and certainly contrary to the evidence Carolyn presents, the response assumes that her mother is not really opposed to her going out with boys, but just does not like the way that Carolyn has gone about it so far. There is no acknowledgement that if these negotiations fail, and Carolyn's mother remains set in her opinion, that Carolyn may have no option other than to simply accept the rule, or continue to lie to get around it.

Later still, we see an example from *more!* in which the end point of failed negotiations about parental disapproval of a boyfriend is much more serious:

I've been seeing my boyfriend for two years and he's the best thing that's ever happened to me. But my mother thinks differently. She says he's crafty, selfish and

arrogant. My boyfriend really makes an effort, but she still thinks the worst. I've tried to talk to her, but she can't see any good in him. It's got to the point where he doesn't want to come to my house. But if I had to choose between her and him, I'd pick him.

Paula, London

[...] I think you should approach matters with your mum in a less confrontational manner than you have been up to now. Reassure her that while you love this man, it doesn't mean you love *her* any less. Get her to admit what's really bothering her. If this approach doesn't work, make it clear that if she's forcing you to choose, you'd pick him. (*more!*, 12 October 1994, p. 90)

The length of Paula's relationship, and the fact that she feels able to choose her boyfriend over her mother, suggest she's at least 16. But the magazine's advice, while advocating negotiation, is not straightforward: there is a tension between the 'less confrontational manner' it initially suggests, and the more confrontational 'get her to admit'. The ultimatum it suggests is certainly not less confrontational. *more!* is a magazine which does not endorse old-fashioned subordination to parents, and tends to prioritise sexual and romantic relationships throughout its content, as well as having a slightly older readership, so this response, which might be surprising from another magazine, is less so here.

Early in the period, then, fathers are typically portrayed as the ultimate authority to be heeded, with only occasional reference to the facts and reasonableness of their rulings. Mothers' positions may be secondary to fathers'. Decisions made by mothers, or by both parents together, may attract suggestions that girls use negotiation as a method of addressing the problem, in a way that is not often suggested in response to rulings from fathers alone, and the decisions of girls themselves are only rarely considered to overrule their parents. Later, negotiation becomes gradually more commonly recommended as a way to deal with unwelcome parental rulings, and girls are offered a variety of implicit messages in support of their continuing to indulge in the forbidden behaviour even if negotiation fails, tacitly

acknowledging the limited power that parents may actually have to enforce their rulings, especially for older girls.

In the following section, I will explore the way that 1950s *Marilyn* magazine in particular deals with disputes between girls and their parents.

'Because your Dad says so': 1950s *Marilyn* mediating between parents and girls⁶²

Marilyn started publication in 1955, the first of 'a new type of periodical [...] the "romance comic"' (White, 1970, p. 173), shortly followed by a host of 'me too' magazines, including *Mirabelle*, *Romeo*, and stablemates *Roxy* and *Valentine*. It ran for a decade before being folded into *Valentine* in 1965. Like its contemporaries, it was originally aimed at older teenagers, but surprised publishers by being largely read by those aged 13–16 (Winship, 1985, p. 30). It sold for 3d. in 1955, rising to 5d. by 1961;⁶³ the earliest circulation data available is from 1961, when a typical issue sold 222,093 copies (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2018).

The magazine is generally friendly but didactic, especially in the voice of advice columnist 'Joan Courage' on the problem page, which is called 'Here's what I'd do if I were you' (underlining original). This title sets up a system of identification between columnist and reader, which is rather disingenuous: even though the writer is mostly sympathetic to girls' desires she nevertheless advises conformity to parental rules in almost all cases, and seems in general to be speaking from a position of adult experience and privilege, rather than making a performance of being on a level with her readers. She calls readers 'dear' and 'honey' – affectionate, but patronising – and her responses frequently carry a tone of explaining the workings of the world to her readers.

⁶² *Marilyn*, 9 April 1955, p. 13.

⁶³ Equivalent to approximately 30p, rising to 44p, in 2017 (National Archives, 2017).

This new type of magazine is fitted to the new type of teenager that appeared in the 1950s. Post-war prosperity meant that teenagers had more money and freedom than ever before, and although popular accounts, both at the time, and since, are rife with moral panic about out-of-control young people who reject the customs and laws of their elders and betters, the new teenager was also 'a symbol of meritocracy, affluence and classlessness – the cornerstones [...] of a modernity that should be celebrated rather than feared' (Todd and Young, 2012, p. 455). So *Marilyn's* readers were poised on the edge of this new way of being, with more opportunities available than had been for their mothers, and with the possibility of a whole new way of life opening up for their adulthood. So although many of their parents were supportive of their teenagers taking advantage of these new possibilities (Todd and Young, 2012), it is perhaps unsurprising that some were not, and it is these parents, who wish to restrict their daughters' activities, who appear on *Marilyn's* problem page.

The social and legal position of *Marilyn's* readers in the 1950s was complex. Most of them left school – and therefore ceased to be children – at 15, but they did not legally come of age until 21, so they were not yet adults either. Although those who married before 21 were treated as adults, their unmarried sisters, the majority of them still living in the parental home, were in some senses in limbo: working, probably allowed control over the majority of the money they earned, but still subject to parental authority (Spencer, 2005). One of the participants in Pearl Jephcott's study, albeit a decade earlier, described some of the contradictions of age:

You are grown up at fourteen if you want a railway ticket, at sixteen if you want to get into an "A" film. At home you are a child if it's convenient for them but the moment that they want to put something on you they say that you are grown up.
(1942, pp. 127–8)

This tension was particularly so for the largely working-class girls who read *Marilyn*. Some middle-class girls, more likely to have gone to grammar school, and to have stayed on past school leaving age for a year or more of further education, were more straightforwardly children for more of the teen years (Spencer, 2005).

Although the lives ahead of girls were still rigidly constrained by their gender, with the majority of them expecting their lives, like their mothers', to revolve primarily around home and family, and only to feature paid work incidentally, the idea of women's equality with men was not widely accepted; gender differences were still seen as natural and immutable (Jephcott, 1942; Roberts, 1995; Spencer, 2005).

In her responses about readers' disputes with their parents, advice columnist Joan Courage's default position is to support the primacy of parental authority, with the conservative belief that the parent is ruler of the child. A good example of this is in the response which provides the title of this section:

Although I am fourteen, Dad says I mustn't use make-up. Some of the other girls at school use it, so why shouldn't I?—Ava.

Because your Dad says so—that's why! It's time enough to use a bit of make-up when you start work. It's fun being fourteen and you'll find it fun being sixteen and being twenty-one. If you miss any of these different sorts of fun you can never go back. Your Dad's proud of his fresh-faced, schoolgirl daughter, and he'll be proud of her when she turns into a real beauty later on. (*Marilyn*, 9 April 1955, p. 13)

As is often the case with these replies, the first sentence is the crucial one, setting the tone for the rest of the reply, and conveying its most important point. The only relevant point in the columnist's eyes is that Ava's father must be obeyed simply because he is her father. The rest of the magazine response is presumably intended to soften this, and to help Ava feel better about the necessity of obeying her father's rules by looking forward to a future time when his rules will change. *Marilyn* supports Ava's father simply because he is her father, without reference to any consideration of whether there might be an objective 'right time' for a girl to begin to use

makeup.⁶⁴ On occasions where the magazine is able to relate parental advice to something more like an objective standard, they do so, as in this example:

Gerry and I got engaged just before he was sent out to Hong Kong. My parents weren't too pleased because they thought I was too young to be tied down. Now I've met another boy I like better than Gerry. My girl friend says I can just go out with the new boy and say nothing to Gerry until he comes home.—Irish Girl, Dublin.

Considering that you're a girl with such sensible parents, it seems such a pity that you should listen to the advice of such a dope of a girl friend. You must write to Gerry at once that you don't know your own mind well enough to be tied down and that he mustn't consider himself tied. Meanwhile, I think you'd better take Gerry's ring round to his Mother and in future—play the game straight, if you want people to be straight with you. (*Marilyn*, 9 April 1955, p. 13)

'Irish Girl' has herself demonstrated the sensibleness of her parents' advice with her change of affection, although their opinion as stated in her letter does not explicitly link her being 'too young to be tied down' with the description Joan Courage uses that she 'do[es]n't know her own mind'. Courage nevertheless makes it clear that she should follow her parents' advice in the future, rather than the 'dope of a girl friend', though in this case it is because they are so sensible, as well as simply because they are her parents.

In cases where the parental advice quoted in the reader's letter is clearly good, the magazine does not necessarily make mention of it at all, as in this example:

Hugh, my boy friend, is getting on my nerves. I can't do a thing or go anywhere without him wanting to know exactly what I've done and who I've been with. If I tell him I can't see him one evening, he flies off into a rage and says I'm two-

⁶⁴ The casual assumption that wearing makeup will turn the Ava of a few years hence into 'a real beauty' is also interesting, if beyond the scope of this chapter.

timing him. My parents tell me I shouldn't stand for his tantrums. But I like him really and don't want to give him up. I'm not engaged and I feel I have a right to do as I please. What do you feel about it?—Winnie (Newcastle, Staffordshire)

I feel you ought to put your foot down good 'n' hard, Winnie. Tell your boy that every scene he makes kills a little bit of your love for him. Jealousy is a poison, an ugly, bitter thing. It achieves just the opposite of what it aims at, because in the end the victim gets to the point where she can take no more. If he doesn't want to lose you, he'll have to trust you—and that's all there is to it I'm afraid! (*Marilyn*, 15 March 1958, p. 24)

The magazine's advice actually somewhat contradicts that of the parents, with discussion of how to maintain the relationship rather than end it. However, the relationship end that the parents recommend functions as a clear threat to hold over the discussions that Courage recommends Winnie has with Hugh, while her recommendation works as a gesture in the direction of Winnie's stated preference not to 'give him up'.

This general support of parental authority is combined with the assumption that parents are all reasonable and fair, as seen in this response to a letter which is unfortunately not reproduced in the magazine:

Hopeful (Surrey).—I feel that in this matter you should listen to your mother and abide by what she tells you, dear. After all, thirteen is very young to have one particular boy friend. If you make friends with a lot of young people, I am sure your mother will be kind and allow you to bring some of them home occasionally so that she can meet them. (*Marilyn*, 15 March 1958, p. 24)

'Hopeful' is told to abide by her mother's wishes, and the magazine offers what is presumably a repetition of her mother's reasoning, with an attempt to soften the blow with the expectation that Hopeful's mother will 'be kind and allow [her] to bring [friends] home', although, as seen in the later example from *Valentine*, discussed above, this may prove overly-optimistic.

The magazine again supports the reader's mother in this example:

Garry has given me a ring, but doesn't say it's an engagement ring. Just a present. Mum says I shouldn't take it. What do you say?—Puzzled.

Mum's right. When a boy gives a girl a ring and she accepts it, it has a special meaning. It will be awkward, but I think you'd better ask this boy to take the ring back. If he's rather special you might say 'maybe later on, I'd like it'. (*Marilyn*, 26 March 1955, p. 9)

In this case, the magazine's reiteration of the mother's advice is oddly unspecific, failing to inform 'Puzzled' of what 'special meaning' the ring has without her knowledge. It may be also that the special meaning is unknown to Garry, who might therefore be hurt at Puzzled's rejection of his gift, but the magazine offers no advice to mitigate this risk, or to navigate the hidden meanings of such gifts, just an endorsement of Puzzled's mother's interpretation of the situation. Puzzled must do as her mother says, because, of course, her mother is right.

There are rare exceptions to the assumption that parents are always right, such as this dispute about suitable clothing for readers' boyfriends:

My Mum and Dad say Laddie, the boy I go out with, is no good because he's flashy. It's true he wears an Edwardian suit. How can I explain that fashions have changed since they were young?—June.

The magazine response encourages June to try and talk her father around to her point of view, albeit through the intermediary of her mother:

You are right, of course. But the idea seems to have got about that all boys who go in for the new styles are corner-boys. I wouldn't mind betting that your Dad wore something pretty snappy when he was young. This is one of the cases where children need to educate their parents, and that calls for a lot of tact! Talk it over quietly with Mum, tell her one or two things about Laddie that will explain why you like him and trust him. She'll put Dad right. (*Marilyn*, 19 March 1955, p. 9)

'This is one of the cases' constructs this as an exceptional event, a break from the usual position that parents educate their children. By making it an exception, it serves also as a reinforcement of *Marilyn's* usual position that the parents are probably right in disputes with their offspring, and the children must do what they can to accept parental rulings, notwithstanding this rare case when the parents are wrong.⁶⁵

The advice to June to use her mother as an intermediary with her father seems to be assuming that the mother will be more inclined to take June's side, despite the original letter mentioning both parents equally in their disapproval of Laddie. It also acts as a gesture towards the magazine's preferred position of support for parental authority: if June must show her parents their error in judgement of Laddie, it is better to do so 'quietly', beginning with the parent who they assume will be more sympathetic, and more easily won over, and then the task of winning over June's presumably more intractable father belongs to his wife, rather than his daughter, thus minimising the risk of insubordination inherent in this recommended course of action, and allowing him to save face.

This suggestion that a reader use her mother to soften up her father also appears in other cases, sometimes with more justification, such as this one:

Dad won't hear of me going to a holiday camp with Bruce. We are both seventeen and very much in love. Should I defy my Father? Mum is on my side, but won't go against Dad.—Sylvia, Bristol.

No, you can't defy your Father. But it's natural enough that you and Bruce should want to spend your holiday together. Can't you fix up with a girl friend to go to the holiday camp with you? It's nice to share a chalet with someone you know. Then Bruce can take a pal along and the four of you can join in the camp

⁶⁵ See further discussion of the use of exceptions to reinforce the magazine's usual position in chapter one.

activities. I don't think your Father would object to this arrangement, if Mum put it up to him. (*Marilyn*, 16 April 1955, p. 9)

In this case Sylvia has positioned her mother as already on her side, although the description 'won't go against Dad' does not necessarily inspire any hope that she would be willing, let alone successful, in proposing the alternative arrangement to Sylvia's father. Both the letter and the magazine's response also manage to avoid the question of sex, as the probable reason for Sylvia's father's objection. The magazine's suggestion that 'it's nice to share a chalet with someone you know' assumes that in the absence of the friend they suggest, Sylvia would instead be sharing a chalet with a stranger, rather than possibly Bruce. The suggestion that bringing along a friend would assuage Sylvia's father's presumed fears therefore feels weak. It also offers no fall-back position if her father still objects to the new suggestion, once again assuming a degree of flexibility from parents which is not necessarily justified by the available information. If Sylvia's father's objection is indeed on the grounds of the likelihood of Sylvia and Bruce having sex, and he is, perhaps reasonably enough, not reassured that the addition of a friend for each of them is likely to prevent them having sex, the magazine offers Sylvia no other option: she must not defy her father. However her question, 'Should I defy my Father?' acknowledges his limited power to actually prevent her from going to the holiday camp, with or without the additional friends *Marilyn* suggests.

Like some of the other magazines discussed above, *Marilyn's* tendency to take the side of readers' parents in disputes seems to be about parents in particular, rather than all responsible adults, as seen in this letter from a girl whose uncle objects to her boyfriend:

Last week, my Uncle saw me walking out with a local boy who has a bit of a name for being a woman-chaser [...] Dirk had his arm round me at the time. Mum's brother, Uncle Will, says he'll give Dirk a good hiding if he sees him touching me again. I'm fond of Dirk, so what can I do? You see, I haven't got a Father of my own, but Mum likes Dirk and lets me take him home.—Wanda

Well, thank heaven you've got a Mother and she happens to be Uncle Will's sister! She doesn't object to Dirk, so she'd better tell her brother to calm down.

(*Marilyn*, 9 April 1955, p. 413)

Marilyn does not accept Uncle Will as an authority over Wanda's life, and in fact puts the onus on Wanda's mother to keep her brother under control. This rejection of avuncular authority, however, seems to be unrelated to his cause of concern, as seen at the end of the letter, where the magazine adopts some of Uncle Will's concern, albeit on a much weaker level:

All the same, Dirk seems to have got his name up and I hope he's serious about you. Why not tell him what Uncle Will said? Then you'll soon find out. If he's scared off, then it looks as if he wasn't so serious after all. (*Marilyn*, 9 April 1955, p. 413)

So although *Marilyn* sees Uncle Will's reaction as excessive, and not his business to overrule his sister, who has the proper authority over Wanda as her mother, the magazine nevertheless tentatively supports his objection to Dirk, and advises Wanda accordingly.

By contrast, 'Snub-nose' writes complaining about a broad range of parental strictness, only to be advised by *Marilyn* that she must do as they say, and wait for her time to do as she wishes:

My Father and Mother are too strict. They are always telling me what to do and what time to be in at night. They complain that I wear too much make-up and the wrong sort of clothes. I am sixteen and haven't a friend in the world who understands me. I want to be attractive and gay like other girls I see about, but seem to be stopped on all sides by my parents. My friends all have boy-friends.
—Snub-nose.

You are attracted by a different world from the one to which you belong. Believe me, you wouldn't be at ease among the girls who giggle at street corners. You have loving parents and you were happy with them up to a little time ago, weren't you? Try out your wings in your own little world. Join the sort of club your parents

approve of, follow up the hobbies you've dropped and don't worry about the boy-friends—they'll come along later. (*Marilyn*, 2 April 1955, p. 9)

This response seems to be assuming a great deal about Snub-nose and her parents, perhaps implying class distinctions between the letter-writer and the 'girls who giggle at street corners'.⁶⁶ The magazine offers no comment on how long Snub-nose will have to content herself with the version of her 'own little world' which is sanctioned by her parents, or how much later the boyfriends will 'come along', which makes the final reassurance ring somewhat hollow. This is an endorsement of Snub-nose's parents' view of appropriate behaviour for their daughter, and a fairly gentle nudge to her, encouraging her back into the world of a younger girl than she feels herself to be. However, there is a hint of a loophole in the recommendation of strict adherence to parental rules: *Marilyn's* reply makes no mention of the make-up and clothes which Snub-nose's parents complain about (as indeed the fact that they merely 'complain' rather than forbid is suggestive). This omission may imply that as long as she confines her social activities to parentally-approved ones, she may continue to dress as she pleases.

The position of Joan Courage on the *Marilyn* problem page, then, is that in general, teenage girls should obey their parents absolutely, often combined with the belief that the girls themselves know, deep down, that their parents have good reasons for their rules. The magazine supports the view that parents have a special authority over their children which is only open to extremely delicate negotiation, and only on rare occasions. In particular, mothers can be assumed to be more supportive, and to be a suitable intermediary for negotiating with fathers, who are nevertheless the ultimate authority over their daughters' lives. This use of mothers as negotiators is perhaps the only route available for readers of *Marilyn* to soften

⁶⁶ The 'girls who giggle at street corners' are presumably spending time with the dubious 'corner-boys' discussed above; the 'street-corner crowd' is seen as problematic in the social work literature of the time, albeit in the US, for example in Ethel Grumman Ackley and Beverly R. Fliegel's 'A Social Work Approach to Street-Corner Girls' (1960).

parental restrictions without any inappropriate displays of insubordination to parental authority.

The readers of the magazine are not so much progressive as pushing for their own independence of movement, decision and association, and seeking magazine agreement and support for their position. However, as readers of the magazine, they will have noticed that the magazine typically supports the parental view, so they write, presumably, hoping to be one of those rare exceptions which may support their own cause, but does so at the expense of others, by emphasising the unusual nature of the case where readers' parents are wrong.

By supporting the parental side, *Marilyn* avoids alienating parents who still exercise quite a lot of control over teenagers, and who need to be kept on side by the magazine if it is to continue to sell. Readers' parents may be paying for the magazine: there's little in *Marilyn* about girls working, and many of its readers were below school leaving age, so presumably most of their money comes from their parents, and if the magazine wasn't acceptable to them, it would not be able to survive; even those readers who were working – likely to be most of those over 15 – will have been living with their parents, and handing over at least part of their wages to pay for their 'board', so wage earning does not necessarily equate to independence from parental authority (Roberts, 1995). The magazine must of course also balance this attention to the parents' needs with the needs of the girls themselves, which accounts for the careful softening and hedging that Joan Courage performs around her responses in support of parents, and the affectionate tone of address in which she delivers her responses. It may also account for the way the magazine restricts its assumption of fairness and good will to the parents of readers, and not to other parental figures in their lives, such as the Uncle Will mentioned in Wanda's letter: Wanda's uncle is likely to exercise much less influence over Wanda's buying habits than her mother is. The magazine is, therefore, carefully balancing its responsibility to support girls with its need to keep their parents on side. The default position of supporting parental rulings may also be seen as indirect support of girls, by helping them adjust to the position of authority

which their parents rightfully hold over them.⁶⁷ The magazine's responses to these reader letters, then, are acting in support of conservative views of the relationship between parent and daughter. Although *Marilyn* is otherwise interested in the new kinds of fun and independence available to teenage girls, it is firm that these must be grounded in respect for parents, and in obedience to their rules.

Conclusion

These challenges that girls make to parental authority through the letters they write to their magazines are perhaps the most problematic for the magazines to respond to, since unlike other actors in girls' lives, the antagonists here are likely to have a large amount of influence over girls' continuing ability to buy the magazines. A girl who begins a confrontation with a too-strict father with 'well, *Marilyn* says you're in the wrong' may be prevented from reading any future advice *Marilyn* has to offer. But as well as aiming to encourage girls to submit to parental rulings on most matters, the magazines are also, as ever, serving a performative function for readers other than those responsible for each problem page letter. These readers, most of whose relationships with their parents are likely to be more-or-less smooth, may take away messages of reassurance about how much worse their lives might be, as well as learning tactics to try when dealing with more minor disagreements. On a broader scale, though, the magazine portrayal of these girls complaining about wanting to go out dancing, get married in their teens, or go out with unsuitable boys, are likely to contribute to the prevailing popular impression of wild teenagers, bent on defying their parents. My exploration of the way these interactions played out, however, suggests that in fact these girls were not entirely the wild teenagers of the moral panics. They write in to their magazines for validation of their feelings in disputes with their parents, but they write knowing, if subconsciously, that the magazines usually take the parents' side in such disputes. What they receive in exchange is often an endorsement of their feelings of unfairness, but this nevertheless usually comes with advice on how to submit to the rules of their parents, until or unless various subtle tactics of negotiation

⁶⁷ This might also prepare them for bearing the authority of husbands, later; see chapter five.

have an effect. Although disputes with parents are a common occurrence on the problem pages, these girls typically combine complaint about parental unfairness with the search for advice on how to attempt to change their parents' minds through legitimate means; those who write about having disobeyed parental rulings are looking for ideas about how they can get what they want without having to be disobedient. These findings mirror those in previous research about girls who sometimes lie or negotiate in attempts to evade or change parental rules they disagree with, but that they are nevertheless mostly law-abiding, and not, in fact, the wild creatures of popular imagination.

Moving on from this work, which is effectively about the limitations placed on girls by reason of their age, in the next chapter, I will consider ways they deal with the limitations imposed by sexism.

4. Dealing with sexism

I'm still really angry about the feature *What makes boys tick?* Who do these boys think they are? The girls asked sensible questions which I've always wanted to know the answers to, but those boys really rattled my cage!

Angry MIZZ reader, West Glamorgan. (*Mizz*, 15 February 1995, p. 29)

She is not the only reader made angry by the 'What makes boys tick?' article, which had been published in the 4 January 1995 issue of *Mizz*, and which asked boys questions about sex and relationships. The boys' responses demonstrated a range of stereotypical, unreconstructed ideas about girl–boy relationships, and the article ended with the magazine encouraging follow-up letters, which they received in abundance. Two further articles followed, apparently designed to showcase sexist attitudes from boys, and generated a chain of reader letters in response which ran until 7 June, and gave girls the chance to demonstrate just how angry they were about the boys' sexism.

In this chapter I will explore the ways that girls' magazines depicted and discussed issues of sexism, and the ways that their readers responded. I will ask how this interaction between magazine and reader portrays sexism and the struggle against it, and conclude by returning to the coverage of sexism in *Mizz* in the 1990s, when I will foreground methods analysing voice, and responsibility: who speaks, and who is responsible for their words, and for their ability to speak; the portrayal of the relationship between the magazine, its readers, and the boys who also speak, is also a key site of analysis. Of course, issues around feminism are also relevant here; although it is never explicitly named in the magazine content itself, it is of primary importance in the analysis.

For the purposes of this discussion, I am defining 'sexism' broadly, as the range of ways that society, and the people within it, constrains and disadvantages girls and women relative to boys and men. Although the OED's first citation for the term is 1866, its transition from meaning 'categorization or reference on the basis of sex' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008b) to its modern meaning is sometimes unclear. However, OED citations for 'sexism' and 'sexist'

from the early 1960s make it clear that the modern meaning was in use then, although probably not much earlier. As an example, neither term appears in the index to *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963): although the effect on women of sexist society may be said to constitute its subject matter, the term was not sufficiently widespread for Betty Friedan to use it.

Mizz is unusual in treating sexism as directly as in 'What makes boys tick' and the articles which followed it, but throughout the period, the magazines had a complicated relationship to sexism. The very existence of these magazines, with their extensive and convoluted lessons in how to be a girl, could be said to be a primary plank of sexist society: boys (and therefore men) are natural, normal, unmarked; by contrast girls and women are noteworthy for not being boys and men. They need to learn to be suitably feminine, and to be taught their place in society, and one of the methods used in this teaching is the girls' magazine. This is a function which is recognised by readers (though perhaps only in hindsight): one of my survey respondents, for example, when asked what she learned from reading magazines said: 'How to be a socially acceptable girl' (Respondent 6). Despite this aspect of the magazines, many of their readers, and sometimes the magazines themselves, are alert to issues of sexism, and prepared to argue against them.

There is, then, an uneasy relationship between the magazines and feminism, but expectations about gender equality do appear in their pages, and become more and more commonplace as the century progresses, especially with the rise of third-wave feminism in the 1990s, as seen in the discussion of *Mizz* magazine that concludes this chapter. However, what was considered 'sexism' was not necessarily clear-cut, and issues of sexism inevitably overlap with issues discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

Waves of work on sexism

There is an extensive literature on sexism, and much of the research on girls' magazines is at least peripherally concerned with their function as a tool of patriarchy, and therefore of sexism.

Although work on sexism existed well before the second wave movement which began in the 1960s and 1970s, this era represented a boom in research, with key thinkers including Betty

Friedan (1963), bell hooks (1981), Audre Lorde (e.g. 1984), Kate Millet (e.g. 1977), and Adrienne Rich (e.g. 1980), writing on the various ways that sexism interacted with race, culture, heterosexuality, and so on to enact the oppression of women. The rest of the twentieth century saw enormous productivity in this area, as the movement gained traction both in the popular media and in the academy. Of particular relevance to my work here is of course the large amount of feminist work on the ways that girls' and women's magazines themselves operate as a form of sexism (e.g. Winship, 1987; Peirce, 1990; Ballaster *et al.*, 1991; Hermes, 1995; Beetham, 1996; Garner, Sterk and Adams, 1998; McKay, 1999).

In the 1990s, 'girl power' and the 'third wave' (Walker, 1992) brought about a particular focus on young women and girls, and the ways that they experience sexism. Susan Faludi wrote of the 'backlash' that attempted to push back against the gains made by feminism (1993); in a similar vein, Naomi Wolf described the rise of beauty as a method of controlling and policing the behaviour of women, in place of the earlier constraints of 'motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity' (1990, p. 11).

Exploring the changes in girls' lives between the era of the second and third waves, Sue Sharpe revisited her 1970s work on Ealing schoolgirls in the 1990s, and found increasing acceptance of feminist ideas. In part this may have been a result of changes she sees in the attitudes of their mothers, who in the 1970s 'accept[ed] the existence and validity of sex differences and pass[ed] them on intact' to their daughters, whereas the mothers of the 1990s girls (who may in fact have been among the cohort of girls in the 1970s),

[H]ave come to question the rigidity of at least some aspects of sex and gender differentiation [...] they are recognising that these differences are neither right nor natural. (1994, p. 71)

In talking to the girls, she found that the word 'sexism' was not commonly in their vocabularies in the 1970s, but was much more familiar by the 1990s, a sign that public awareness of some aspects of feminism were becoming mainstream (1994, p. 143).

In the magazines, however, this mainstream acceptance was still problematic. Even in the third-wave era and beyond, feminist ideas of writers and editors have only a limited ability to influence the content of magazines without risk of reprisals from more conservative parent companies and advertisers. Naomi Wolf claims that the magazines were transformed 'beyond recognition, for the better, after the rebirth of feminism' (1990, p. 71), but Jessalynn Keller's work with feminist-identified editors finds that although they are trying to pursue feminist aims in their work, they do so in a weakened way, with aims like 'disguise feminism' and 'make feminism fun' (2011, p. 6), which means this has only very limited potential for actual social change. Angela McRobbie argues that 'words like "empowerment" and "choice"' are being used 'as a kind of substitute for feminism' (2009, p. 1), and points out that advertisers still hold enormous power to restrict progressive messages which are counter to their commercial aims: 'the battle for circulation figures could see an editor sacked for displeasing a company with a lucrative advertising contract' (2009, p. 5).

Although their ability to bring about improvements to the sexism under which their readers suffer is always constrained, the magazines nevertheless reflect growing public awareness of feminist issues, enabling a progression from the pre-second-wave position that gender roles are natural and set, through gradually increasing challenges to that position. They make some use of the pragmatic strategies discussed by Keller to achieve the covert inclusion of feminist aims, however weak and restricted, and, as we will see, this becomes slowly more overt as the century progresses.

My work in this chapter examines the way that the discussion of sexism changed in teen magazines over the period, as these ideas from both the research and popular literature on the subject filtered into the public consciousness, and from there into girls' magazines. It is therefore a miniature history of one view of the public perceptions of feminist literature. The case study at the end of the chapter specifically deals with the era of girl power and the third wave, when not only was feminism on the rise again, but it was explicitly bringing younger women along for the ride. As I will show, we can see the operation of decades of feminist work articulated in girls' contributions to these mainstream magazines, although in the early part of

the period, before they have been given the tools to address these issues, readers' statements of the problems of sexism do not go beyond a suggestion that maybe something is wrong.

Nothing to do with structural inequalities

In the 1950s and 1960s, on the rare occasions that sexism was acknowledged, the message from the magazines was typically that girls simply had to accept it, take the consequences, and do the best they could within the ordinary parameters of gendered life. It was an individual issue, or simply 'the way things are', and nothing could be done. This example from *Jackie* in 1964⁶⁸ is typical of the pre-feminist era. A reader writes:

Isn't it awful that a girl has to wait to be asked out, yet a fellow can ask any girl he fancies? Don't you think it's unfair?

The magazine response, in its entirety, is:

Frequently! (7 March 1964, p. 15)

Even when sexist behaviour, such as harassment, is acknowledged as a problem, both the blame, and the responsibility for a solution, may be placed at the feet of the girl who complains about it, as in this 1955 example from *Marilyn*:

My boss at work calls me by my Christian name; he also puts his arms round me in a fatherly way. Do you think this is all right? The other girls say he's a wolf. He doesn't do it to them.—Hazel Eyes.

The other girls are right. The boss is obviously a bit of a wolf, but I can't help wondering if you're quite the innocent lamb you'd like me to believe. The boss probably wouldn't have singled you out for his special attention if you hadn't been rolling those hazel eyes of yours at him. You ask me if it's all right. It mightn't be so good if his wife turned up one day. You've started off on the wrong

⁶⁸ Also discussed in chapter one.

foot, honey, and I advise you to look for another job. (*Marilyn*, 9 April 1955, p. 13)

This 'singling out for special attention' is portrayed as problematic mostly because the boss's wife might catch them at it, not because it is an example of a man abusing his position of authority over a much younger woman, or because she, relatively powerless, has no option but to accept his behaviour or to leave her job⁶⁹. And since she probably encouraged him in the first place, she can only expect very limited sympathy. Meanwhile the boss himself is dismissed as 'obviously a bit of a wolf' – not a big deal, not a very serious accusation, and a problem that 'Hazel Eyes' can easily avoid if she refrains from rolling her eyes at future bosses. There is, of course, not any hint that this issue might be related to wider societal inequalities.

Five years later, in *Boyfriend*, it has become acceptable to question some of the old sexist assumptions: we find a staged debate between two readers on whether the boy should be in charge in a romantic relationship. Neither Jenny, arguing that 'in [her] book of rules, there ain't no such thing as equality of the sexes', nor Louise, who calls the suggestion 'utter tripe', produce much in the way of a logical argument, though the magazine's position can perhaps be inferred from the fact that Jenny's argument is much less coherent, and even acknowledges some dissatisfaction with the status quo:

Maybe [caveman] Charlie even won his arguments by clobbering [his wife] with a club. But, anyway, that's the way it is and I don't see how I can change things.
(20 February 1960, p. 26)

Jenny does not like the idea of being 'clobbered with a club', but claims no power to change such gender dynamics: 'the knotty problems in man-and-woman relationships were worked out back in pre-historic days' and have been set and unchangeable ever since. She offers several

⁶⁹ Though it was relatively common for teenage girls in the 1950s to leave one job and easily find another, so the suggestion that Hazel Eyes changes her job was not as dramatic a recommendation as it might have been in later decades (Roberts, 1995; Spencer, 2005).

cautionary examples of what happens in relationships where the man isn't in control – women change their husbands from 'the gay, young lover-boy [...] into an unhappy hen-pecked heap', and children of those relationships are 'proper terrors' – but the only positive advantage she offers is that she likes 'to be fussed over', and she later goes on to describe what she calls 'feminine guile' as a means of women exercising some influence over men, so she does not in fact advocate complete submission in all things (20 February 1960, p. 26).

One of her points is to consider the celebrities women are attracted to:

Robert Horton, Bob Mitchum, Elvis, Sinatra, Brando (yes, please!). Each one of them would look pretty ridiculous drying the dishes! It's their "bossy" masculinity we go for. (20 February 1960, p. 26)

Louise, whose argument is printed after Jenny's, responds directly to this:

I think girls who go for big bossy hunks of beefcake have been seeing too many films. It takes far more than that infantile kind of admiration to live happily ever after with the man of your choice. Real life usually starts where the films end! (20 February 1960, p. 26)

She also directly references first wave feminism in her arguments:

When I think of what women did long ago to win the vote – went to jail, chained themselves to railings, etc. – it makes me sad to see some of my girlfriends letting big-headed boys boss them around. (20 February 1960, p. 26)

Louise is primed for the resurgence of feminism which is just around the corner: she seems disappointed that the battle won 'long ago' has not had more wide-reaching consequences in interpersonal relationships, and that her friends are still waiving their rights to vote about the conditions of their own lives.

Boyfriend's position here is interestingly equivocal: giving the pro-equality writer the chance to answer the writer who is in favour of traditional roles is a gesture towards support for equality,

but that the magazine frames the question as a matter of even-handed debate clearly places this article in the period before the resurgence of feminism.

The beginnings of the Women's Liberation Movement

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, things begin to change, against a background of equal pay strikes,⁷⁰ the appointment of Barbara Castle as the first female First Secretary of State, the Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College, protests against the Miss World pageant, and other opening volleys of the rising second wave of feminism. Equal rights for women, and the sexist laws and institutions that stood against those rights, were in the public eye.

In its first issue of 1970, *Petticoat* published an article calling for the reinstatement of chivalry which offers a new, feminist-inspired, definition of the word:

Coming round to cook a meal and then washing up when she wants to watch telly. Maintaining his cool when she gets promoted over him... (*Petticoat*, 3 January 1970, p. 31)

The article also explicitly positions itself as sitting in between two moments of increasing equality. It is first of all in the lull period after first wave feminism: 'women may not have acquired much *evidence* of equality since Mrs. Pankhurst chained herself to the railing to give us the vote' (emphasis original, and echoing Louise, above), but the author also looks forward to a period of greater change approaching:

[I]f we do eventually acquire that evidence of equality that Mrs. Castle and Vanessa Redgrave⁷¹ are striving towards, things might be different indeed. With obvious equality such as equal pay and respectability for the unmarried mother, as well as our psychological strength, we'll no doubt be on our way to complete

⁷⁰ For example, Ford sewing machinists in 1968 and Leeds clothing workers in 1970.

⁷¹ Redgrave was active in the radical left-wing movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

superiority. In which case we might well let chivalry slide! (*Petticoat*, 3 January 1970, p. 31)

This 'chivalry', presumably, is the usual version, rather than *Petticoat's* new definition: men opening doors and paying for meals, and so on. Implicitly, chivalry is the compensation for inequality, which is only needed until true equality is achieved, and can then be left behind.

As the 1970s progress, discussion of sexism becomes more mainstream in the magazines, and even when the magazines are not explicitly discussing what they might consider political issues, some of the discourse of feminism becomes visible, as magazines assume that readers will have a background awareness of the issues. For example, in response to a problem page letter in 1972 in which a reader complains of an excessively controlling boyfriend, *Romeo* magazine's advice columnist writes 'Honestly, love, Women's Lib would have a field day with you and your bloke!' (*Romeo*, 26 February 1972, p. 27) That is, *Romeo's* advice columnist does not position herself as a 'libber', but she makes use of their presumably now-familiar positions on the wider social problems of traditional male-female relationships, to make a point about the inequality in this reader's relationship.

In *Petticoat* at around the same time, sexist ideas are somewhat self-consciously performed by columnist Christopher Ward,⁷² who presents himself as an unreconstructed chauvinist, and attracts frequent letters from readers objecting to his attitude to women, such as this one:

Christopher Ward's column in *Petticoat* has angered me many a time before, but I feel that his December 30th column was just the limit. His little 'story' insinuating that female virgins are scarce, if not extinct, is an insult to the female species. If one had never encountered Mr. Ward before it is obvious from this that he is biased and a male chauvinist pig! Miss S. Waterson, Clevedon, Somerset.
(*Petticoat*, 3 March 1973, p. 2)

⁷² For whom this was a sideline, alongside a career as a newspaper journalist.

The performance of chauvinism which Miss Waterson objects to seems to be the main point of Ward's column, in contrast with the rest of the magazine content and its support of girls and women. His chauvinism frequently generates outraged letters for the magazine to publish, but it is occasionally possible to see through Ward's performance to a suggestion that he has a working knowledge of the feminist thinking he is deliberately baiting, as in his column on the 'first British all-male nude calendar' in February 1973. In the column he considers whether he would like to appear in the calendar, and what effects it would have on his career if he did, covering territory familiar from discussions of the nude work of actresses. His conclusion is:

I wasn't at all sure I wanted girls to think of me as being the sort of man who was always dropping his Y-fronts. Nor did I like the idea of lecherous girls ogling my naked body all day long on the wall of the typing pool. (*Petticoat*, 10 February 1973, p. 17)

While Ward makes no explicit comment sympathising with the equivalent dilemma women in the public eye face, he clearly understands the issues, and his presence in the magazine provides an excuse for readers to write in complaining about his sexism, and therefore to perform their own commitment to opposing sexist thinking. The position of the magazine, publishing both Ward's inflammatory columns, and readers' angry responses, is less clear politically, though the commercial aim, as often the case in such situations, may be simply to keep both sides of the debate happy, and to encourage readers' continuing commitment to watching the article–response cycle unfolding, or in fact to contribute to it by writing in themselves. And by publishing these response letters, they may help to placate the other readers who are also outraged by Ward, but have not written in, thus keeping them reading.⁷³

⁷³ Ward's *Petticoat* column, encouraging readers to argue back, is an interesting development from the type of man-advising-girls-about-romance columns described by Penny Tinkler in the magazines of 1920–1950, where the advice was intended to be taken seriously, with no possibility of readers writing in to disagree with it.

Later in the decade, we can sometimes see outright discussion of the problems of sexist society, such as here:

Most of us at some time have felt like Jekyll & Hyde. Sally Vincent⁷⁴ believes that to be in two minds is a wound society inflicts on women [...] The [girl] who feels entitled to, and anxious for, sexual equality, is repressed into unconsciousness and the [girl] who plays the obedient dolly is left to carry the can alone. (*Honey*, August 1978, p. 57-8)

This article, however, has no solutions to offer; merely a description of the tension between ‘the female passivity of her upbringing and the active knowledge of her experience and education’ which affected the girls of the 1970s when confronted with new possibilities. They were apparently being offered liberation, but – as with Jenny arguing for the boyfriend as boss nearly twenty years earlier, they were unsure about whether they wanted it, or how to cope with it.

The double standard and sexual harassment

In the 1980s, the message of gender equality has been generally accepted within the magazines, and discussions of sexism are largely around the sexual double standard and the problem of sexual harassment. A survey in *19* magazine found that nearly 90% of its readers agreed that ‘A woman should have exactly the same sexual freedom as a man’ (*19*, November 1985, p. 68), and the magazine summed up its readers’ responses with:

[19 readers are] certainly not traditional in their attitudes, but neither are they ‘libbers’ [...] they do not accept traditional sex roles, they do believe in sexual freedom for women [...] The girls have been influenced by liberationist ideas, but have not swallowed them whole. Instead, they look at such ideas in the light of

⁷⁴ A journalist who later became known for searching celebrity interviews.

their own life and individual experience, and have come up with their own choices of mixed, moderate and modern views. (*19*, November 1985, p. 70)

Both the 'traditional' view and the 'libber' view are presented as extremes, with the sensible *19* reader positioned comfortably between them. This presentation of 'liberationist ideas' as extreme is actually belied by the results: most of the questions asking about women's rights in general receive similarly strong responses in support. Where *19* readers are more 'moderate' are questions about their own lives and their own practice, for example, in response to a question asking if they 'have ever made the first move in starting a relationship', only 10% 'said they often take the initiative, although another one in six said they sometimes make the first move', but half of the respondents also agreed that 'I wish that I could assert myself more often and take the initiative in a relationship'. So although 'liberationist' ideas about equality in relationships might not yet have appeared in many of these girls' actual relationship practice, they are nevertheless firmly present in their ideas about relationships (*19*, November 1985, p. 63).

In the same issue of *19*, a reader writes to the letters page complaining about sexual harassment:

Am I alone in objecting to the constant barrage of comment (both derogatory and approving) and sexual innuendo that I, as a woman, seem inevitably to attract from men in the street? I find it insulting, disturbing and threatening, and it makes me very angry. (*19*, November 1985, p. 103)

It is another indication of the partial progress of feminist ideas into the magazines that she frames a feminist objection to street harassment, but also asks 'Am I alone in [this]?' without apparent knowledge of a wider culture of resistance to such behaviour. That this reader refers to herself as 'a woman' is also perhaps a gesture towards a feminist position of assuming the adult label, rather than the extended use of 'girl' which is still otherwise quite common, and which *19* typically uses to refer to its readers, as in the summary of the survey results discussed above.

Three years later, and for younger readers, *Just Seventeen* runs an article on sexual harassment, in which they are careful to frame it as a serious problem:

These forms of pestering are usually dismissed as embarrassing, but essentially harmless. However, sexual harassment is a very real and unpleasant problem. When the pestering develops into threats or blackmail [...] the problem takes on even more sinister tones. (*Just Seventeen*, 9 November 1988, p. 32)

The word ‘pestering’ is somewhat at odds with the claims that this is a serious issue, but where this coverage has progressed dramatically from the case of ‘Hazel Eyes’ and her ‘wolf’ of a boss in 1955 is the magazine’s framing of it as a wider societal problem, and one which men are, at least partly, responsible for solving:

The way towards a solution lies as much with men as it does with women. It is time that women who object to offensive behaviour from their male colleagues were taken seriously and not dismissed as being “up tight” or “over sensitive.” When females feel free to voice complaints over harassment without fear of being laughed at, then a breakthrough will have been made. (*Just Seventeen*, 9 November 1988, p. 33)

But in the meantime, *Just Seventeen* offers supportive advice to its readers, emphasising that they are not at fault, and offering suggestions of how to deal with the problem, including what is, in effect, a call to arms for victims to share their stories and so help to highlight the extent of the problem, and to lessen the feeling of being alone. None of this is framed explicitly as a problem of sexism, or the magazine’s response as a feminist discussion, but even without the labels attached, that is nevertheless what it is.

The issue of girls and women making the first move recurs later in the decade, in *more!*, which later in its lifespan will become the champion of the sexually liberated girl,⁷⁵ but presents itself

⁷⁵ See discussion in chapter three.

as more serious at this point, and although its articles are mostly on adult-oriented topics, it features many problem page letters from teenagers, suggesting it had a younger readership than it might appear. A two-part article in December 1988 opens with a man crying out for women to chat men up, including the claim that ‘In an equal relationship the woman makes as much running as the man’, though the article also acknowledges the ‘[c]enturies of conditioning’ at work (*more!*, 14 December 1988, p. 58). The second part of the article features a woman who had made the first move on her boyfriend being sent out to a night club to chat up some men, and report back on the experience. Her nightclub test subjects were positive about being approached by a woman, but she also reveals that

it wasn’t until we’d been going out six months that [my boyfriend] told me he’d been surprised I was quite a nice person. He’d half-expected me to be a bit of a tart, because men don’t think ‘nice girls’ will make the first move – charming.
(*more!* 14 December 1988, p. 59)

Although the magazines have moved on from the advice discussed in chapter one, which warns that girls must never make the first move, there are evidently still sexist pitfalls to be navigated. However, readers of 1980s magazines across the age range were being exposed to messages about their – theoretical, at least – equality with boys and men, in a way that seems to have been thoroughly normalised in comparison with the magazines of the earlier decades, even if there are still lingering questions about how that equality interacts with normative gender roles, and a resistance to being seen as too much of a ‘libber’.

Girl power

By the 1990s, discussion of the ‘women’s liberation movement’ has vanished from magazines, seeming a relic of the past, with battles largely won. A letter to *19* magazine in 1991 congratulates the magazine on an article about the ‘20th Century Girl’, and describes the current position:

[T]he world [...] is still a rapidly changing place. There’s still a great deal that’s wrong and unfair, but I do truly believe that equality is now ours and women

have gained the respect they've long deserved – hard fought though it was.

Debbie Croole, *Watford*. (19, March 1991: 89)

Despite this reader's diagnosis of gender equality, sexism continues to be discussed; perhaps because what Debbie considers the achievement of equality is legal changes like the Equal Pay Act, and what remains of sexism is a more trivial problem, merely falling under the heading 'a great deal that's wrong and unfair'. The tone of the discussions of sexism changes in the 1990s, perhaps demonstrating that Debbie's belief is widespread: everyone is now equal, and can band together to complain about such isolated outposts of sexism as they encounter.

Discussions of feminism in the magazines now take on the tone of 'girl power', which had appeared in the wake of the Riot Grrrl movement in the US, and the Spice Girls in the UK⁷⁶. One of my survey respondents, who was in her teens in the 1990s, describes this as 'proto-feminism', and says:

J17 in particular had a feature called 'rants' which was often a girl complaining about something that I'd taken for granted which was actually a deeply sexist double-standard. I was exactly the right age for the 'Girl Power' of the Spice Girls, as well; however simplistic that philosophy seems to me now, it mattered at the time. (Respondent 60)

Unlike the coverage in *19* in the previous decade, which had presented the sexual double standard as a poll question to which readers might agree or disagree, it now becomes a standard complaint, to be called out as sexism, albeit still not necessarily evidence of a wider societal issue. Fourteen-year-old Sarah writes to the 'A boy's view' problem page in *Just Seventeen* in 1992:

Nearly all the boys I know [...] go around getting off with lots of girls and then call them slags. How come boys can go out with lots of girls, but when a girl goes

⁷⁶ The phrase was used as the title of a zine by Riot Grrrl band Bikini Kill, and later used by the Spice Girls.

out with just a few boys she gets called names? It's so unfair [...] Are all boys like this?

And advice columnist Nick Fisher replies:

No, not all boys are like this, but sadly you're not the first person to point out these terrible double standards that some boys have – guys get patted on the back and called studs, but girls get called slags. (*Just Seventeen*, 28 October 1992, p. 48)

Fisher attributes the double standard partly to girls' complicity in it, and advocates as a solution 'calling boys [...] "slags", [to] balance things out', and 'ignoring the petty, hypocritical judgements of a few boys' (*Just Seventeen*, 28 October 1992, p. 48). He makes no mention of systemic issues of sexism of which the sexual double standard is part, nor does he acknowledge the relative lack of power of Sarah alone to fight back. Although the wider *Just Seventeen* readership might have slightly more power (albeit still extremely limited), the conceit of the problem page that each letter response is addressed to one recipient unless otherwise stated means that the wider call to action remains only implicit. Although the problem is a common one, it is still individual.

At the very end of the decade, in *Bliss*, we finally see some discussion of systemic issues of sexism: 'In 1999, the age of equality, why are all our female role models blonde and big-boobed?' (*Bliss* May 1999, p. 29). This article explicitly positions itself within the context of a world where equality is assumed to have been achieved, and yet it identifies the anti-feminist backlash in operation in the 'rise of the sexpot TV presenter':

A strange thing's happened to women on TV today, here we are heading for the next millennium, when you might expect to see women really progressing in the public and private arena. But on TV, we appear to have gone back in time to some 1970s babefest. (*Bliss*, May 1999, p. 29)

Bliss is specifically lamenting the lack of representation of aspirational role models, women who have achieved success through means other than their looks⁷⁷, and characterises the available options, exemplified by people like Zoe Ball and Gail Porter, as ‘a destiny of “look pretty, smile a lot and don't say anything too taxing”’, which it says, ‘is making us quite uncomfortable’ (*Bliss*, May 1999, p. 29). The one woman mentioned in the article of whom the magazine approves is Carol Vorderman, who has ‘been hugely successful because men are constantly shocked at how clever she is. Why? Because she can add up?’ Accordingly, girls are called upon to ‘[k]eep passing your maths’ in order to shock the world with the ability of girls to do sums (*Bliss*, May 1999, p. 30).

Magazine coverage of sexism, then, develops dramatically across the period, from the assumption of common-sense, accepted gender roles which, regrettably, had some disadvantages for girls, through an increasing awareness of the ways that these roles might be challenged, and that girls might be able to expect better. There are changing portrayals of individual versus systemic causes of the issues, and varying assessments of the extent to which equality has been reached, both from readers and from magazines. And alongside these changes, there is the increasing use of the language and ideas of feminism, even though the f-word itself is rarely mentioned.

‘I thought they looked like decent lads, but then[...] they turned into chauvinist pigs’: conversations about sexism in *Mizz* in the 1990s⁷⁸

One magazine which did confront issues of sexism, however, was the 1990s incarnation of *Mizz*. IPC brought out *Mizz* magazine in 1985 as part of the new wave of 1980s magazines,

⁷⁷ Though, of course, the models who grace the pages of *Bliss* are just as thin, white and pretty as in any other magazine, and its coverage of fashion and beauty complicates the message, as always in magazines which attempt to balance the support of their advertisers with the support of their readers.

⁷⁸ Sarah-Anne from Hertfordshire, writing to *Mizz*, 15 February 1995, p. 29.

aiming to emulate the success of rival *Just Seventeen* with readers in the mid-teens, though with a fortnightly publication schedule instead of *Just Seventeen's* weekly. In 1995, when the articles I discuss below were published, it had a cover price of 80 pence⁷⁹, and was bought by an average of 185,880 readers per issue (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2018). In 2006, it was sold to Panini and relaunched with a younger target audience, and eventually folded in 2013, one of the last remaining titles in the UK teen magazine market.

The economic outlook for young people in the 1990s was uncertain, after the recession early in the decade. Pay for young people was reduced; in 1988, those under 18 had ceased to be entitled to benefits, and an 'ambiguous, even bleak, set of representations [of the teenager] began to come to the fore' (Osgerby, 1998, p. 207). Perhaps as an antidote to the way that the adult world was looking unwelcoming and uncertain, girls' magazines maintained a cheerful optimism, separating themselves and their readers from the looming view of adulthood to enjoy the extended adolescence that was continuing and expanding from the trends in the 1980s, with more and more young people remaining in education, and fewer of them getting married⁸⁰.

Teenage girls in the mid- and late-1990s were riding the wave of 'Girl Power' spearheaded in the UK by the Spice Girls, and commonly seen as a feminism-light movement. But it was not straightforwardly feminist, as Jessica K Taft shows, defining four 'types' of Girl Power, which are variously apolitical, assuming equality already exists, and emphasising the individual, or consumer power, instead of feminism's work towards collective activism to address still-existing inequality (Taft, 2004). Christine Griffin also shows how in its claim that girls should be equal to boys, Girl Power shifts into assuming that they already are (Griffin, 2004). This tension between the idea that there should be gender equality, and the suggestion that it already exists, is also shown in Madeleine Jowett's work with young women. As with Debbie

⁷⁹ Equivalent to approximately £1.40 in 2017 (National Archives, 2017).

⁸⁰ See discussion in chapter two.

writing to *19* magazine at the beginning of the decade⁸¹, they shy away from the suggestion that gender inequality still exists, being willing only to accept that it is ‘a residual and temporary problem’ (Jowett, 2004, p. 95). Nevertheless, the common use of the term ‘Girl Power’, alongside the distinctly more political rise of the third wave feminist movement, meant that ideas about girls’ rights were in the public consciousness, and some of this was assumed within the pages of girls’ magazines. And a small number of the girls in Jowett’s study did identify themselves as feminists, to a combination of admiration and gentle ridicule from their peers. The relationship between girls and feminism in the 1990s, then, was an uneasy one.

In the 1990s *Mizz* was full of debate and discussion with its readers. It encouraged reader responses to articles, and it quickly responded to feedback with more, or more-nuanced, coverage of difficult issues. In some ways *Mizz* foreshadowed the social media interactions that current media for teenagers rely on so heavily, making extensive use of the experiences and opinions of readers as a basis for articles. The magazine also often extended this platform to other people, such as boys (the magazine was much more accepting of lesbian relationships than earlier magazines had been,⁸² but the primary focus in articles was still relationships with boys).

At this point in its life, *Mizz* includes a wide assortment of subjects beyond the traditional boys–beauty–celebrities content of girls’ magazines, many of them apparently calculated to encourage girls to think for themselves, such as staged debates between readers on topics including fox hunting, vegetarianism and abortion. In most issues, the letters page, ‘Oi!’, includes reader letters responding to earlier articles, typically praising the magazine for its coverage, as in this response to an article about drugs:

I would like to congratulate you on your feature about drugs [...] It’s very important to make teenagers aware of the effects and dangers of drugs. I know

⁸¹ Discussed above.

⁸² See discussion in chapter one.

quite a few people who take them regularly and not all of them know how badly it can affect them later in life. Some of them read your feature and it made them think again, so I would also like to thank you for helping them before they got in too deep. (15 February 1995, p. 28)

However, reader letters also often express disagreement with or disapproval of the magazine's articles, or the people quoted in them, sometimes leading to a later full-fledged reader debate. For example, one issue featured a first-person article entitled 'I took the abortion ferry', about a girl who crossed the Irish Sea in search of a legal abortion in England (1 March 1995, p. 58). Three issues later, the letters page included a reader response complaining that this constituted biased, one-sided coverage of a complex issue, which received this sympathetic and supportive editorial reply:

Thank you for your comments. The feature was not in any way meant to be portrayed as biased. The feature was basically written about an individual's personal experience. However, there will be a chance in the near future for everyone to air their views for and against abortion. So watch this space. (12 April 1995, p. 26)

This was followed in the next issue by a feature in which pro-life and pro-choice readers questioned each other on their positions, with the magazine performing a carefully neutral position between them and merely acting as the debate's facilitator (26 April 1995, p. 24). This sort of reader interaction and influence is very common in *Mizz*: the magazine encourages readers to critically engage in this way with its content, and may benefit from increased reader loyalty as a result, if readers feel that their opinions will be listened to and respected. Although other contemporary magazines encourage reader letters in response to articles, they tend not to then publish follow-up articles in the same way that *Mizz* does.

In the articles I discuss in the rest of this chapter, the magazine demonstrates this receptiveness to reader ideas with a chain of linked articles which offer readers a guided tour of boys' attitudes to girls, sex, and sexism. The first article, 'What makes boys tick', offers a mixture of

'good' and 'bad' attitudes; the second, 'Lies about boys and sex', mostly 'good' attitudes, and finally, 'Sexists speak out', demonstrating some outright sexism. The run of articles features a variety of responses from girls, both in letters to the magazine and in *vox pops* within the articles.

This is the introduction to 'What makes boys tick?', in which three readers of the magazine pose questions about the things they find difficult to understand in boys' behaviour, and are answered by five boys:

Just when you think you understand a boy he does something which makes you realise that not only is he a different sex, but he might as well be from a different planet! If only you could get inside his head and find out exactly how his mind works. (4 January 1995, p. 13)

The girls and boys all seem keen to generalise about boys' attitudes, with questions from the girls such as 'Why [do] [...] boys start pestering you to sleep with them...?', and 'the boy always expects the girl to sort out contraception', and similar assertions from the boys: 'boys don't think that far ahead', and '[boys] swap stories about girls, especially on holiday when you have a points system and have to tell what happened to get the points!' (4 January 1995, p. 13) This last is particularly interesting in implying a claim of the universality of boy culture, as well as boy behaviour, and in suggesting a view of girls not as people in their own right, or as potential romantic interests of the boys, so much as scoring chips in a competitive game where the significant others are actually other boys.

This article succeeded admirably as an example of the magazine's apparent policy of deliberately starting debates. Three issues later the letters page included six letters from readers responding to 'What makes boys tick', expressing anger and disgust with the boys' attitudes to girls, sex, and contraception. Responses included 'I [...] would definitely tell him where to go', 'I'd slap him one right in the face to teach him a lesson', and 'He should be taken down a peg or two' (15 February 1995, p. 29).

In the same issue as these response letters, an article entitled 'The top 10 lies about boys and sex' is explicitly positioned as a follow-up to 'What makes boys tick'. It begins:

It seems we made a lot of you hopping mad with our feature *What Makes Boys Tick?* earlier this year [...] here we've given the lads a chance to prove they're not as bad as we may think! We presented 10 ordinary boys with statements many of us believe about boys and sex – and they've told us we've got it all wrong! (15 February 1995, p. 46)

This article offers a less stereotypical view of boys, and attempts to improve the image presented in the previous article, with mixed success. These boys disagree that they only want one-night stands, expect girls to have perfect bodies, take no responsibility for contraception, and 'can't stop themselves once sex starts' (15 February 1995, p. 49). However, when asked about pressuring girls into having sex, their responses are more problematic. Two of the 'lies about boys and sex' both amount to 'boys pressure girls into having sex', but receive somewhat different responses. The first is:

Boys are always desperate to have sex. As soon as you've got past the 'holding hands' stage, boys are out to steer you straight to the next step, and the next... (15 February 1995, p. 46)

Eighteen-year-old Colm says:

Of course boys are always going to think to themselves 'How much can I get away with here?' That's only natural because if you're attracted to someone then you're curious, but you have to think of the girl you're with and her feelings. Most boys wouldn't dream of really pushing their luck if the girl had said she didn't want to go further. The important thing is that it's up to the girl to say something if she feels uncomfortable. (15 February 1995, p. 47).

He straightforwardly endorses the 'boys always want sex' line, albeit tempered with some respect for the girl he might be having it with, while making it her responsibility to draw lines, rather than his to seek consent.

The second statement about boys pressuring girls into sex is:

Boys always rush girls into sex before they're ready. So you've only just met the bloke, or you're totally adamant that you don't want to have sex just yet. Does that put him off pushing for a bit of 'the other'? No, it does not! (15 February 1995, p. 46)

To which 15-year-old Adam gives a more nuanced response:

I don't agree with that at all. I think boys are a bit more sensitive than girls give them credit for. It's such a big step to start a sexual relationship, and it's not something that all boys take lightly. Having said that, if I told my friends that I wasn't interested in sex with a girl and wanted to take things a bit slower then they would take the mickey a bit. Girls might not believe it, but we're not all obsessed with sex – even if we seem to be! (15 February 1995, p. 47)

Adam demonstrates that some boys feel about sex much the same way that girls are expected to, but that they shield this in order to perform their own socially-expected role, and that what girls see as the sex-obsessed behaviour of boys may actually be a performance to avoid losing face with other boys.

Another example of boys' public attitudes to sex being mediated by peer pressure comes from 16-year-old Orlando, in response to 'Boys never regret having had sex':

Because boys aren't as emotional as girls, perhaps we don't think as deeply about things to do with sex! If we ever do regret having had sex at the wrong time then we probably hide it a bit better and aren't as likely to discuss it [...] One thing a lot of boys do regret is if they get slagged off for having slept with the wrong girl.

If your mates find out and give you a hard time about it, you well and truly regret it. (15 February 1995, p. 48)

The regret that Orlando discusses here is not, in fact, regretting having had sex, but regretting 'having sex at the wrong time', or being found out having had sex with 'the wrong girl': it is not sex that he regrets, but the details of that sex.

None of these boys offer much reassurance to girls who complain of being pressured into sex, although perhaps there is some comfort for them in the knowledge that boys, as much as girls, are trying to live up to social expectations that may not come naturally.

Three issues later, *Mizz* publishes only one response to this article:

I was really impressed when I read The Top 10 Sex Lies (15 February 1995), in particular, Sam from Edinburgh's comment that girls should stop being so paranoid about their bodies when it comes to sex. I'm a little chubby and I've been worried that when I sleep with my boyfriend he'll laugh at my body. Sam helped me to regain confidence in myself. Sian, Leicester. (29 March 1995, p. 38)

This reader is taking away a reassuring message, in contrast with the infuriating messages received by readers of the earlier article. This one letter is of course only an extremely indirect indication of the response letters received by the magazine, but once again, the magazine itself continues the conversation. The cover of the issue includes 'Sexist Pig!! Meet the lads who'll make your blood boil', advertising another follow-up article. Under the title 'Sexists speak out', four more boys are given the opportunity to represent their entire gender, and this time the questions they are asked seem designed to encourage sexist answers. The questions are:

- Do you think it's a man's world?
- What things are men better at?
- What are women better at?
- What's the most sexist thing you've ever done?
- Do you ever deliberately wind girls up with sexist remarks?

- Do you get away with doing less at home because you're a boy?
- What do you think of girls doing 'men's' sports?
- Would you say you are sexist? (29 March 1995, p. 29)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the boys mostly show uncritical acceptance of gender stereotypes, suggesting cooking, emotions and looking after children as female strengths. Eighteen-year-old Tony openly recites the sexual double standard when asked if he makes sexist remarks:

No, but if I knew a girl who did sleep around I'd call her a slag. I'd look up to a boy who did the same thing because he's obviously got the knack with women.
(29 March 1995, p. 29)

Two of the other boys give interestingly ambivalent responses to being asked outright if they are sexist. Fifteen-year-old Michael says:

I don't think I'm sexist. I think I tell the truth about what men and women are capable of. I respect women but I am old-fashioned, and I haven't heard any complaints yet from girlfriends or my family. (29 March 1995, p. 28)

And 17-year-old Peter:

No, because if I do live with my girlfriend in the future I wouldn't expect her to cook and clean for me, but not for the want of trying! (29 March 1995, p. 29)

All three of these demonstrate attitudes which we might categorise as sexist, but in each case a lack of understanding of the term allows the boys to claim that they are not in fact sexist. These boys all start by giving what they assume is the correct answer, but then undermine it with their follow-up remarks. Opening with a denial that they might be sexist, or citing a lack of complaints, shows that, if only in the context of their responses to this article, these boys have absorbed some aspects of the idea that girls don't like sexism, but have nevertheless not quite understood what sexism actually is.

This time responses from two girls are included within the scope of the article. Fifteen-year-old Sam says:

These sort of attitudes make girls soooo angry! No sexist boy is going to impress me [...] Right girls? (29 March 1995, p. 28)

She demonstrates the kind of reaction which these boys are trying to escape with their confused attempts to avoid sexism. Fourteen-year-old Paula is more forgiving, echoing Orlando from the previous article in her acknowledgment of the social pressures on boys:

I think these boys are like that because they want to be macho and keep face with their mates. When they grow up a bit they won't be as bad! (29 March 1995, p. 29)

Once again, the article is followed three issues later by a section of the letters page, introduced with:

At the end of our Sexists Speak Out feature (29 March 1995), we asked you to tell us how you felt about the somewhat controversial answers the lads gave. It certainly provoked a big response! (10 May 1995, p. 51)

There are eight responses on the letters page, every one of them angry, but only two touch on the role of the magazine in their anger: one reader praises the magazine as if it had no part in provoking her rage:

Oh I'm filled, boiling, leaking and pouring with anger. Well, thanks MIZZ for being my punchbag and a superdooper brill cooltastic mag! (10 May 1995, p. 51)

The other, while also expressing anger at 'what those chauvinistic pigs had to say', directs disapproval at the magazine:

This feature has really irritated me, and you shouldn't have wasted your time on them. (10 May 1995, p. 51)

The final word in this run of articles also takes issue with the role of the magazine. In the letters page two issues later, a reader with the unhelpfully gender-neutral name of 'Sam' offers a #notallmen response:

Leave the lads alone. Although I generally like your magazine, I'm becoming annoyed at your articles that slag off blokes, e.g. Sexists Speak Out (29 March 1995). Okay, there are some prats out there who are sexist, two-timers or complete b@!*?^s, but girls can be just as bad – take all these new girl gangs. No wonder so many girls turn to fantasising about Keanu Reeves or Brad Pitt instead of normal boys! Give the real lads a chance! (7 June 1995, p. 35)

After months of providing a soapbox from which carefully selected boys can display their unsavoury opinions, the magazine's response is disingenuous:

Thanks for your comments, Sam. We know not all lads are hopeless, but we didn't force the boys in Sexists Speak Out to look undesirable – they did it all by themselves! These were just a handful of lads' comments, and we hoped that our readers wouldn't assume they were speaking for the whole of the male teenage population. (7 June 1995, p. 35)

Despite this denial of responsibility, the magazine is of course responsible for the selection and framing of the articles, and has deliberately chosen to represent these sexist attitudes from boys. The articles can be seen as the magazine giving its readers carefully controlled exposure to boys' problematic attitudes, to demonstrate what different kinds of sexism look like, and to give readers a safe space to consider and hone their own responses.

Mizz is also demonstrating that some readers, both boys and girls, are aware that what a reader calls 'typical boys' attitudes' (15 February 1995, p. 29) are, to some extent, and for some boys, a performance, required of them to fit in with their peers and to live up to the social expectations placed on them. In sharing this understanding with an audience which includes those who subscribe to ideas about typical gender behaviour, the magazine may be opening up conversations about these gender expectations among its readers, both boys and girls. Janice Winship's work tentatively supports this reading, though with a somewhat broader remit:

It's [...] feasible to suggest that the extensive presence of boys and men in the magazines is part of a project to take on questions of gender via masculinity. Gender is a shifting ground in these magazines, and femininity and masculinity are categories which are in flux. (Winship, 1985, p. 42)

This is only a small blow against the overwhelming message of gender difference, and I do not wish to imply that *Mizz* was fighting a battle for full-blown gender fluidity. However, these small assertions that boys may be behaving in particular ways as a performance for the benefit of other boys, rather than because that's just 'what boys are like' (and the implied parallels in girls' behaviour), are nevertheless feminist assertions, challenging the idea that accepted gender norms are overwhelming and unavoidable, and giving girls a tool to use in negotiating their relationships with boys. With these articles, *Mizz* offers a view of gender as 'a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo' (Butler, 1988, p. 520).

Girls' magazines are also read by boys; in *Mizz*, for example, the problem page includes a section called 'Boys have problems too', featuring their letters. The articles negotiating girls' and boys' different ideas about relationships and sex therefore also work to educate boys into what girls find acceptable, and thereby to add an extra layer to their 'macho' socialisation: they may be required to act like 'typical boys' in the company of their male friends, but since girls do not appreciate such behaviour, they must also cultivate a more 'sensitive' side to attract romantic interest. Although these exchanges offer readers a narrative to explain why boys might play up 'macho' characteristics for their peers, they may also serve to reinforce the expectation of such performance among boys, and to normalise boys' production of two different performances – the 'sensitive' side to attract girls, and the 'macho' side to court popularity among boys. For example, in 'What makes boys tick', one of the girls complains:

I've been out with boys who I've thought I could trust and then found out that they've told their mates everything about me, especially the sexual things. (4 January 1995, p. 13)

These boys may have learnt that to succeed with girls they must project a trustworthy persona, but to succeed with boys they must produce a macho performance, sharing sexual secrets without regard to the feelings of the girls concerned. Despite pointing out the constructed nature of these performances, the magazine does little to suggest a way out, for girls or for boys; its message may simply be that girls must wait until, in Paula's words, the boys 'grow up a bit' (29 March 1995, p. 29).

The boys represented in these articles are of course not statistically significant samples of boyhood, but the magazine implies that between them they represent the typical boy that *Mizz* readers might encounter. Whether they function this way for readers seems to depend on the amount of experience of 'real' boys readers have: those with boyfriends, for example, are in a position of security from which to resist the image of boyhood the magazine has offered them. One of these, Emily from Dumfriesshire, writes in response to 'What makes boys tick':

I'm ashamed of some of the answers the boys gave in your feature. Over half of them were just childish, selfish, typical boys' attitudes. They made boys on the whole look terrible and interested in only two things – sex and football. And this isn't true. I have a gorgeous boyfriend who is the most romantic and sensitive guy ever. He is everything to me and if he ever dumped me he would do it carefully so as not to hurt me too much. (15 February 1995, p. 29)

However, even she uses the phrase 'typical boy', betraying her belief that although her boyfriend may be a shining exception, the rest of his kind might be more accurately represented in the article.

These articles about boys can sometimes convey the impression that boys are alien, and that girls need the magazine to interpret their language and behaviour; a message which is explicit in the introduction to 'What makes boys tick', which says 'not only is he a different sex, but he might as well be from a different planet!' (4 January 1995, p. 13). However in learning how to interact with boys through the magazine's discussion format, readers may also be receiving implicit permission to fight back against any unacceptable attitudes they encounter from boys:

Mizz encourages girls to question what they are told, and to see such questioning as normal, natural and desirable.

By showing a range of attitudes from boys, *Mizz* is not only helping girls to understand this apparently-alien species, but also equipping them to deal with the more difficult or unsavoury behaviours they might encounter from boys: 'if they're sexists, by all means let them express that clearly and take any flak that results' (Cameron, 1995, p. 162). In showing this sexism from boys, *Mizz* is also prompting proto-feminism in its readers, although, like the magazines of a decade earlier surveyed by Janice Winship, it tends not to use the f-word itself, but instead adopts some of the underlying attitudes and ideas, without the label (1985, p. 40). The magazine is thus performing the dual role of offering inexperienced or unconfident girls some 'insight' into boys, while also publishing letters from girls like Emily whose experience contradicts the magazine's story, or who argue against the attitudes expressed by the boys. This may help *Mizz* to serve the interests of a larger group of readers, with a broader range of experience of boys and sex, as well as giving them tools to address sexist attitudes they encounter.

The magazine's careful framing of the articles encourages proto-feminist readings. For example 'Sexists Speak Out' is introduced with 'You might be surprised at some of our lads' answers – but not shocked that they wanted to remain anonymous' (29 March 1995, p. 28-31), making clear that these attitudes are unacceptable, and that girls will want to argue against them, and expect better. *Mizz* is thus both empowering girls to challenge sexist attitudes and behaviour from boys, and preparing boys to receive such challenges. By staging these debates, the magazine is acting as what Sara Bragg and David Buckingham call "'tools to think with" for young people' (2009, p. 131): the magazine is helping them to rehearse their interactions with each other in negotiating the terms of their sexual and romantic relationships; it may also be preparing readers for interactions with wider society, where they will encounter similar issues, including the need to defend their romantic and sexual choices.

The magazine strives to present itself as occupying a neutral position, with interventions from its writers and editors implied only in the shaping and presentation of the discussion, rather

than in direct contributions to it. The magazine's role is depersonalised – the letters page is not presented as managed by a distinct personality (unlike, say, letters editor 'Samantha' in *Jackie* as seen in chapter one), and the articles which showcase the views of these boys and girls are only credited to a particular writer in small vertical print, probably unread by most. The people involved in producing the magazine are reduced to the status of uninteresting background, while the voices of the young people concerned are brought to the foreground, as the actual speakers and actors in the debate, and the people whose opinions matter and are of interest to other readers. The processes of identifying the topic to be discussed, recruiting participants to speak, and selecting, editing and presenting their words, are made almost invisible, leaving the impression that the magazine simply provided a space for the conversation and then faithfully recorded it. One of the things that this approach obscures is the fact that the magazine's contribution – selecting the topic and the contributors and distributing the results – is actually the most direct of all.

The relationship of readers to producers in this debate is presented, then, as being at the least a relationship of equals. It is also possible to view these interactions as evidence that the magazine is presenting itself as subservient to its readers, playing the role of domestic staff who welcome guests, take their coats, and refill their drinks: leaving the important people to get on with their conversations while being as unobtrusive as possible. As with domestic staff, this unobtrusiveness obscures frantic activity beneath the surface, and categorises that activity as necessary but dull – somebody must ensure it is done, but that person does their job best when the main actors in the situation are as little interrupted by it as possible. This is, perhaps, an extreme view of the standard position of magazines, both specifically for teenagers, and in general throughout the periodical market: they present themselves as subservient to readers, performing a service for them, offering the kind of content they demand, as if the magazine's staff, its parent company and financial backers are altruistically offering their time and money with no expectation of return. It also obscures the presence of the less-visible partner in the magazine business, the advertisers, and the role of the magazine as a tool for offering consumers up to advertisers. In the teenage girls' market in particular, the magazines and

advertisers are further performing a 'grooming' function, to help readers progress towards their lives as adult women, consuming women's magazines and the advertising contained therein.

Like all commercial magazines, *Mizz* is always working in support of its own sales and advertising revenue: a magazine which makes no money is in no position to promote feminism to anyone. This group of articles, along with others on similarly controversial lines, use sensationalism to promote sales, encouraging interaction and repeat custom from readers, who keep buying the magazine to see if their outraged letter will be published, or to look forward to the outraged responses of other readers.

So the debate about boys and sexism worked partly to encourage this backlash, in a behaviour that the internet generation of twenty years later might describe as 'trolling' their own readership. The magazine had an established practice of publishing contentious articles, responses to them, and sometimes commissioning follow-ups, often framed as a debate between two readers with opposing views, and always followed by reader letters. This article–response–article cycle helps the magazine to maintain the appearance of a carefully neutral position, while helping their readers to think through the different angles, and allowing them a space in which they can ask questions and voice disagreement in a supportive place which may follow up their responses with further articles.

It is by comparison with other articles, such as those discussing vegetarianism or abortion, that the appearance of a neutral pose about sexism disappears. The magazine did not directly contribute, but unlike their other controversial debates, this one puts the magazine's official readers, girls, on one side, and an external group, boys, on the other. Despite the pose of neutrality, the framing of the debate as between readers and non-readers betrays the magazine's position. By displaying boys' sexism clearly and encouraging girls to challenge it, *Mizz* made it a subject that could be discussed and changed, rather than merely accepting the 'boys will be boys' line often peddled by other magazines for girls. This message of equality while avoiding the difficult f-word echoes the name of the magazine; as Janice Winship puts it, '*Mizz* isn't spelt Ms but it certainly sounds like it' (1985, p. 32). The magazine is therefore encouraging reader engagement, helping to keep sales buoyant and bringing readers back time

and again, and at the same time promoting a distinctly proto-feminist independence of thought in readers. This showcasing of controversial views thus works as a sales technique, as a development tool for adolescent readers, and as a stealth act of feminist activism.

Conclusion

The relationship of girls' magazines to issues of sexism and feminism, then, was complex, changing, and ambiguous throughout the period. Even *Mizz* with its explicit condemnation of sexism shies clear of using the word 'feminism', and earlier magazines often present sexism of various sorts as a topic of debate, about which both sides have valid arguments. The rise of second wave feminism gradually put a stop to the earlier magazines' simple acceptance of sexist gender roles, but its messages about systemic issues of gender inequality only rarely appear within girls' magazines, which tend, always, to present problems as individual issues, even when they are problems which are shared with many other readers. However, the second wave did produce within the magazines the new tactic of publishing performative displays of sexism as a convenient target at which girls can aim their developing proto-feminism. This balance between showcasing sexism and encouraging or permitting responses arguing against it may also serve the magazines' commercial aims. By avoiding too much overt commitment to the women's movement, the magazines may avoid antagonising conservative parent companies and advertisers, while still providing a place for girls to speak their own objections to sexism in letters pages and reader debate articles. This is not, of course, anything resembling a strong and positive commitment to feminism or indeed any form of social progress, but may be the best available within the commercial climate.

Although the aims of the feminist movement have still not been entirely met, even now, some aspects of feminist rhetoric and ideas gradually became mainstream through the end of the twentieth century, so this rhetoric also became more and more acceptable within the magazines. And although *19* uses 'libber' as a label for an extreme position, *Romeo's* columnist invokes 'Women's Lib' while making it clear she's not part of it, and even the later magazines almost never use the word 'feminism', there may be some sign of hope in the way

the magazines' coverage of sexist ideas and behaviours becomes increasingly intolerant, and increasingly supportive of girls fighting back against such attitudes.

This chapter therefore shows how girls' magazines mirror, if in distorted form, the progress of feminist research and activism across the period. The magazines, and the view of life they are able to offer their readers, benefit from the work of the second wave in expanding the possibilities open for women and girls, although they disclaim that connection, and it is only with 'girl power', a diluted version of feminism which avoids any broader analysis, that the magazines make any overt attempt to pursue the fight against sexism. As in Keller's findings on later magazines, feminism must be disguised and made 'fun' in order to be included (2011).

My next chapter explores the final step for girls in bringing together all they have learnt in girls' magazines, and being ready to graduate to women's magazines as they become women.

5. Becoming a woman⁸³

Not only can we decide how many babies to have and when, but it is perfectly possible for any woman who so wishes to avoid having babies altogether. It is remarkable, considering this new freedom of choice, that so few women decide to remain childless. (*Honey*, December 1974, p. 72)

In 1974, in a period of dramatic transformation in what it might mean to be a woman, Anna Coote⁸⁴ published an article in *Honey* questioning women's choices about childbearing, and why so many of them assume that being a mother will be a fundamental part of their adult lives. The article is followed up by a run of reader letters agreeing, disagreeing, and continuing the argument. What it meant to be a woman was in flux, and readers of *Honey* were engaged in working out how that affected their lives.

In this chapter I ask how magazines and readers negotiated aspects of attaining maturity, navigating the tension between home-making and career as the 'primary purpose' of women's lives, and what it means to be a woman as girls approach the transition to adulthood, and what the interaction between magazine and reader can tell us about that transition. I conclude the chapter by returning to the debate in *Honey* about whether or not to have children, with methods which focus on the interaction between 'progressive' and 'conservative', and the way that the magazine manages the portrayal of this. Also relevant is the magazine's own relationship to this balance, and its choices of who speaks and when. I also foreground the analysis of this magazine interaction within its historical and societal context. Again, although feminism isn't explicit in the text, it is a key site of analysis.

⁸³ A version of the section of this chapter dealing with *Honey* magazine appeared in *Logos* as 'Interactions in the Text: Becoming a woman in 1970s teen magazines' (Lovegrove, 2018); this is included at appendix 3.

⁸⁴ Now head of social policy at the New Economics Foundation, and continuing to write for newspapers and magazines.

One of the main purposes of teen magazines is to educate readers to be suitable women (as defined at that moment in time), and preparing girls for their adult lives; part of how they do this is by preparing them to transition to reading women's magazines, thus retaining customers who have aged out of reading teen magazines, and continuing to be able to advertise to them in each new stage of their lives. Some aspects of this are more-or-less clear to the readers: the women responding to my survey talked about moving up through magazines as they got older, with the sometimes explicit aim of preparing to read women's magazines, as in this comment:

The aim was to upgrade through the appropriate age levels [...] We were all aiming to read *Cosmopolitan* by the age of 18 [...] it was the high end sophisticated magazine. (Respondent 99)

The age transition is visible within the content of different magazines.⁸⁵ Those targeting younger teenagers – and the pre-teens who also read them despite being ostensibly outside their target market – take as their main function helping girls to progress to being teenagers, with coverage of issues such as first boyfriends, kissing, and perhaps menstruation (although coverage of periods only started to appear later in the century). Girls who are comfortable with their ability to be teenagers move onto older magazines, which assume some of those earlier issues are now settled, or at least sufficiently well understood, and the issues covered may now move on to sex, jobs, whether to stay living at home or to move out, and other proto-adult concerns (though there are also other issues which are of concern to magazines targeted at all ages of teenager, such as those around appearance and celebrities). These older teen magazines are the ones which most directly discuss what it means to be, or become, a woman.

Many of the ways they do this are more-or-less implicit; few articles explicitly discuss the processes needed to move from being a teenager to being an adult. Information about what is involved in being a woman is sometimes shown through interviews with or mentions of actual adult women who could be figures of aspiration, such as the article 'A day in the life of Senior

⁸⁵ Although it might not always have been visible to readers' parents; see discussion in chapter three.

Aircraftswoman, Janette Evans' in *Honey* (July 1978, p. 53), or a throwaway reference to TV presenter Carol Vorderman's ability to shock men by doing maths, in *Bliss* (May 1999, p. 30).⁸⁶ Other information comes from the way readers discuss their own mothers, older sisters, and so on in letters to the magazine.⁸⁷ It is only rarely that the magazines explicitly discuss the movement from girl to woman, as in this example from *Petticoat*:

To be a successful woman is every girl's ambition. And whether you define success as a career, or a happy marriage and motherhood, or both, one thing is sure: every form of success demands self-understanding. (24 March 1973, pull-out supplement page i)

This discussion over whether successful womanhood means family or career is a recurrent theme, albeit not often this explicitly, in magazines for older teenagers in the 1970s. The change in age of legal majority from 21 to 18 in 1969, and second wave feminism, helped to foreground questions about what being an adult, and being a woman in particular, might mean.

Some of the magazines' messages about how to learn and perform womanhood persist through readers' adult lives, even when they later come to more independent or critical understandings of the role of women. In the results of my survey, one respondent said that what she learnt from her magazine reading was:

Subconsciously that a woman will never be perfect and ultimately will never be enough. (Respondent 79)

⁸⁶ Discussed in chapter four.

⁸⁷ See chapter three for examples of the depiction of readers' mothers in letters to magazines. Although these examples are demonstrating conflict rather than aspiration, they are still demonstrations within the magazines of what it means to be an adult woman.

Implicitly this respondent recognises the constant striving for perfect girlhood or womanhood which the magazines present. Becoming a woman takes work, and the magazines promise to help readers with the decisions and labour necessary to that work. Perfection is impossible, but is nevertheless tantalisingly dangled just out of reach.

In all of the coverage of the transition from girl to woman, the terminology used serves to blur the lines: 'girl' is frequently used to refer to adult women, as well as to children and adolescents, and often the same article moves back and forth between 'girl' and 'woman', perhaps with the intention of encompassing both current readers and the women they will be, as in this example from *Heiress*:

The early Elizabethan women stayed at home while their men-folk sailed to new lands on earth. Will the modern Elizabethan girl be content to wait until her boyfriend floats about in space, building satellites, or being rocketed to Venus, to find – who knows – Venus herself, maybe? [...] Behind the scenes there will certainly be jobs for girls – and perhaps even a chance, one day, to take their feet off the ground and join in the great adventure. Why not? There are women scientists, women fliers, women doctors, women comedians. (*Heiress*, January 1956, p. 3)

This blurred usage of 'girl' and 'woman' is common practice in public discourse throughout the period, and even now, and although a commonly criticised effect of it is to infantilise adult women (e.g. Doyle, 1995, p. 153), it can also serve in texts targeted at teenage girls to unite them with their adult future selves and to help ease the transition to adulthood, although it also operates in the opposite direction, to remind adult women that we are still sometimes seen as less than fully adult, that we always remain 'girls' in some senses.

Accordingly, the magazine content discussed in this chapter contains references both to 'girls' and to 'women', treating them, as do the magazines themselves, largely interchangeably.

Transitions in the move to adulthood

Much work on the transition from childhood to adulthood focuses on the problems that the transition may present, such as work on youth unemployment, or on transition in already

difficult situations, such as children leaving local authority care, though this work does also shed light on what 'normal', untroubled transitions might look like. For example, Bob Coles, focusing primarily on the social policy implications of various aspects of young people's lives, provides a useful attempt at a definition of the transition from child to adult, with three main social markers, though he also points out that they interrelate:

- the transition from full-time education and training to a fulltime [sic] job in the labour market (the school-to-work transition)
- the transition from family of origin (mainly the biological family) to family of destination (the domestic transition)
- the transition from residence with parents (or surrogate parents) to living away from them (the housing transition) (Coles, 1995, p. 8)

All of these transitions are visible in the teen magazines, though it is the domestic transition that is most visible, and of most concern to the magazines. Finding a job or a house does not offer the same sort of all-consuming interest that finding a husband does.

These social versions of the move to adulthood are in competition with the legal point of view, which positioned the beginning of adulthood at age 21 until 1969, when it was changed to 18. This change came after a decade in which the transition was a more-than-usually charged topic, fuelled by teenagers with money and independence, increasing rates of teenage marriage, and the declining age of puberty (Dyhouse, 2013).

Class differences also complicate the issue, even while the social expectations of young people attaining adulthood were changing. Exploring the way that social changes affected young people's lives, Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel report that in the 1960s and 1970s, 'working-class youth tended to become economically independent much earlier than those from the middle classes' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). This difference is partly attributable to differences in length of education, and may have become more marked as the century progressed and university education opened up.

There are also, of course, differences in what the attainment of adulthood means for girls, compared with what it means for boys. There is a large body of work on the differences in what it means to be a woman versus what it means to be a man, whether there actually are any differences, and whether those differences are constructs of society or biology. Arguing against biological determinism, Cordelia Fine, for example, takes on what she calls 'neurosexism' to demonstrate that differences between the male and female brain are caused by the sexist 'social context in which it develops and functions' (2010, location 4185). Researchers in a wide range of disciplines working on women's socially-expected role find, for example, that emotional labour is expected to be performed as part of women's 'natural' abilities, and is therefore not conceptualised as work (Daniels, 1987), that women are expected to perform a certain level of 'beauty' as a means of keeping them constrained (Wolf, 1990), and that they might need to fight for a right to education (Robinson, 2009).

These expectations of women, however, are not constant. As well as the change in the age of legal majority from 21 to 18 in 1969, ideas about adulthood and womanhood changed in many of the same ways that I have already discussed in earlier chapters: the women's liberation movement, changes in age of marriage, and in expectations of family versus career all affected the visions of womanhood visible to girls at different points in the period. Carol Dyhouse explores these changes through the twentieth century in the history of moral panics, and in the process tells us much about the way that ordinary girls in general lived their lives (2013). Focusing in on groups of specific girls, and looking at changes in their lives and expectations between the 1970s and 1990s, Sue Sharpe's work shows that by the end of the century, women were expected to 'have a good job or career' as well as managing their domestic responsibilities, which seemed little changed in response to this additional requirement (1994, p. 66). However, there is some hope visible in work on changing attitudes to fathering, for example that by Julie Brannen and Ann Nilsen, which finds new, more involved, modes of fathering developing in the current generation (2006). As these researchers show, expectations change and break down, and as time goes on, girls are able to see more and more examples of alternatives.

So the existing research on what it means to be, and to become, a woman is wide-ranging, sometimes contradictory, and demonstrates dramatic change in the period. The view of womanhood available in girls' magazines is no less complex, moving from relative certainty in the 1950s and 1960s, through a period of upheaval in the 1970s, towards the end of the century where although there are suggestions of a new certainty, this is revealed to be fragile and in constant flux.

What does a woman look like?

A common message in magazines in the 1950s and 1960s was the importance of looking like a woman, and not trying to look like a man. In an article on young marriages, *Boyfriend* interviews 22-year-old Bevan about his marriage to 18-year-old Bernice, and discovers that:

He likes a girl to look feminine, but he doesn't mind slacks and jeans. (23 January 1960, p. 24)

The slacks and jeans are, presumably, expected to come with suitably feminine accessories in order to avoid the risk of an insufficiently-feminine performance, but there is at least some leeway in what Bevan will tolerate.

In 1962, *Girl* published an article called 'The A-Z of being a girl' (January 1962, p. 4). With its younger target market, this is only implicitly a step towards learning to be a woman: it covers instead the intermediate stage, of progress from a child, whose gender performance may be at least partly mediated by her parents rather than by herself, to an adolescent who is beginning to learn her own gender performance. The article includes a range of relevant issues, but several are of particular interest. 'Grooming' is described as a 'basic essential for the girl who wants to be charming', ignoring the requirements of the girl who does not want to be charming, presumably on the assumption that she does not exist. Grooming is defined as: 'Everything, and we do mean everything, should be spick and span and spotless' so the whole seems to be to conflate the requirements of being well-groomed (presumably covering such issues as tidily arranged hair, neat clothes) with being clean, and, oddly, with being charming, which might otherwise seem to be a purely social trait. This is useful advice for the girl who

aspires to be a societally-approved woman, considering her personal charms in both the social and the physical areas, and making sure she will be suitably decorative at all times.

Further on in *Girl's* alphabet there is a hint of what a less socially-acceptable girl might look like: 'eXtra. The little touches that make you stand out from the crowd. Extraordinary. Beatniks come into this category. Be sure those little touches above don't make you this kind of character' (January 1962, p. 4). To press the point home, this item is illustrated with one shaggy-haired sour-faced girl and one smooth-haired smiling one: temperament and grooming are intimately linked.

The entry for Y, however, might confuse matters for girls who are naturally sour-faced or shaggy-haired: 'You. You are you. There is no one else quite like you, so be grateful for this and be yourself.' Be yourself, that is, as long as you are sufficiently charming and well-groomed, and not inclined to be a Beatnik (*Girl*, January 1962, p. 4). Readers of *Girl* are just beginning to play with these ideas about acceptable ways for girls to look, but as they grow up and move onto older magazines, these messages will be reinforced.

In a letter to *Jackie* two years later, Betty James laments that the boys she wants to dance with are not as swayed as she feels they should be by her 'feminine' attire:

Why is it that most boys seem to prefer girls who wear jeans?

I go dancing every week and more than half the girls dress in sweaters and jeans. Certainly they never lack partners.

I always wear a skirt, as I think they are more feminine. My friends all say I'm square, but I say that girls were meant to be girls and not she-men. (*Jackie*, 4 April 1964, p. 2)

Betty has understood the message about presenting herself in a suitably feminine manner, and cannot understand why the boys she wants to dance with turn out not to care very much about this presentation.

Magazine coverage of the appropriate appearance choices that girls should make in preparation for being appropriate women mostly appear in the fashion and beauty features rather than in more text-based articles. The range of 'appropriate' does seem to widen out as the century progresses, but the issue of gendered clothing appears again in a 'Boy panel' feature in *Bliss* in 1999, where a girl asks a question, and the magazine's panel of tame boys each offers an alternative response:

I'm quite worried that my clothes might be turning boys off. I usually wear casual stuff – my favourite outfit is trainers, combats and a hoodie. The thing is, I think this may be what's stopping me from getting a boyfriend 'cause all my friends who've got boyfriends wear little dresses and sexy tight tops – in fact, they dress just like Posh Spice. Whenever I hear boys talking about the sort of girls they like, they're always the girls that wear those kind of clothes. Could my All Saints look be putting boys off? Tara, 16, Warrington. (*Bliss*, April 1999, p. 36)

Of the four responses, three are accommodating of girls wearing a wide variety of clothes according to their own preference, but one from 19-year-old Paul sounds very much like the opinions aired decades earlier:

I can't stand girls that dress up as blokes. What's the problem with looking feminine and wearing a nice dress? [...] All this girl power stuff is all very well, but girls should at least attempt to look like girls. I can appreciate that everyone is unique, and that different styles suit different people, but why do girls these days insist on covering up all the curves that nature gave them with baggy jumpers, unflattering combats and big boots? Yuk! (*Bliss*, April 1999, p. 37)

Paul seems to believe that the entire point of girls' clothes is to produce a suitable display of femininity, apparently unaware or uncaring that they might not all be dressing for his approval at all times, or that issues of comfort, preference, and many others, might be good reasons for not wearing 'a nice dress'. His desire for girls to wear dresses is perhaps also a wish for them to mitigate the potentially threatening aspect of 'girl power': it is 'all very well' for girls to stand

up for their rights, as long as they do so in a suitably feminine manner. Their right to be unfeminine is not one that Paul wants them to stand up for. His 'girls should [...] attempt to look like girls' is another statement of the paradox about girls and women needing to put in effort in order to display the supposedly natural female appearance: if looking like a girl was as natural as the phrasing implies, they would not need to try.

However, these disagreements about the appropriateness of girls and women wearing trousers are mostly outliers to a general agreement that an important part of being a girl, as preparation for being a woman, is appearance, and that girls must learn through the magazines to look like a girl, and then to look like a woman. Alongside these messages about how to perform a suitably feminine appearance are messages about what a woman's life will be like as a wife.

What does it mean to be a wife?

Some of the messages about what marriage looks like come from older readers of magazines, such as this letter to *Marilyn* in 1958, which, with the magazine's response, paints a picture of married life which is alarming to modern eyes, but which would have helped to teach the magazine's readers about the kind of life they might have when they married:

My husband is being very awkward about the people that call round. He has never liked having people in his home, so I have tried to keep my own friends' visits to the afternoon. But I can't turn them out suddenly at six o'clock when he comes home, can I? They'd think it very odd. He won't let me have an evening out with them and he complains if they are here when he's home.

Mrs W. (Birmingham)

If you can't talk sense into him, you'll have to drop your friends a hint that six o'clock is curfew hour, time for them to fade quietly away. After all, they probably need to be off by then to get their own husbands' teas. Quite a few men seem to have this 'no trespassers' attitude about their homes, so your pals ought to understand if, in fact there's any need for you to explain. Make a joke of it; say

'You know what these men are', and they won't feel hurt. (*Marilyn*, 15 March 1958, p. 24)

This image of the married woman at home alone, with any company from her friends dependent on her husband's good will, was perhaps a common one in the 1950s, leading to the sort of problems described by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The magazine's assumption that Mrs W's friends would be in a similar position further reinforces this, assuming that the main activities for these young women are visiting with each other, and cooking for their husbands. Aspects of Mrs W's letter which might look like red flags for an abusive relationship to twenty-first century eyes, such as her husband's attempts to control her contact with other people, are ignored in the magazine's reply, assumed to come under the heading of 'what these men are', and to be an expected and ordinary part of marriage which the letter writer's friends will understand. Unmarried readers of *Marilyn* will learn from this letter something about the expectations that will be placed on them as married women, and will perhaps also learn that the restrictions which a husband will enforce might not be very different from those enforced by parents.⁸⁸

In 1960, *Boyfriend* spends a lot of time considering marriage, especially *young* marriage, starting off the year with a quiz which invites readers to work out if they are 'too young to marry' (9 January 1960, p. 23), and moving on later in January to a series called 'So there is a wedding' which explores the magazine's belief that 'weddings between people who are young in years as well as in heart are the stuff of romance' and showcases in each issue 'a story of courtship and all the love that blossoms...' (23 January 1960, p. 24). In February, another quiz asks readers 'Will you make an ideal wife?' (13 February 1960, p. 24).

As with the reader of *Marilyn* two years earlier, the *Boyfriend* reader will discover from the quizzes that marriage will involve subordination to the decisions of her husband:

⁸⁸ See similar letters about restricted socialising with friends as debated with readers' parents, in chapter three.

If your husband wants you to give up your job, will you do so? (9 January 1960, p. 23, and with very minor changes of wording, 13 February 1960, p. 24)

Are you prepared to live wherever your husband's business takes you? (9 January 1960, p. 23)

Would you leave all money matters to your husband? (13 February 1960, p. 24)

If your husband wanted you to give up dancing would you do so? (13 February 1960, p. 24)

She will also learn that marriage will involve housework, which might be lonely, tedious, and involve activities which she might not be interested in:

Can you bear being left on your own for hours, without getting lonely or miserable? (9 January 1960, p. 23)

Are you truly fond of children? (9 January 1960, p. 23)

Would you expect to clean your husband's shoes? (13 February 1960, p. 24)

Does needle-work interest you—honestly? (13 February 1960, p. 24)

The results of the quizzes uncritically promote the idea that agreement with all of these points is required for a successful marriage; the lowest marks attract the comment:

[I]t would be disastrous for you to attempt to make a success of marriage until you are a little more grown up in your outlook and character. (9 January 1960, p. 23)

Being 'grown up' for a woman therefore necessarily involves submission to a husband's authority (after a childhood which has involved submission to a father's authority), and to tedious chores. There is no alternative suggestion for how a woman who does not grow up to feel this way might find ways other than marriage to live her life, or might be able to find a marriage which does not operate on these lines. The implication is that the *only* way to be a

successfully grown up woman is to become a wife in a marriage structured along traditionally gendered lines.

Boyfriend's interviews with young married couples are similarly illuminating on the type of relationship that marriage might involve for the magazine's readers. Bevan⁸⁹ laments that his eighteen year old wife is 'a bit spoiled perhaps' and not as submitted to his will as he would like: 'girls are a bit difficult to control nowadays – after all their independent money-earning' (23 January 1960, p. 24). The interview with him does not include any response from his wife Bernice on how she feels about this. Her opinions on her own life are apparently not as relevant as those of her husband. Bevan may be finding her difficult to control, but the way that the magazine presents their relationship certainly has him in charge.

In the next issue, we hear more from the young wife. Daphne displays an un-*Boyfriend*-like independence in her belief 'that a woman should be prepared to go out to work if it is necessary', but since she also 'believes in the age old recipe for happy marriage—put your husband's happiness first and the rest will follow', we must assume that the 'if necessary' is only with her husband's permission (30 January 1960, p. 24). The following week makes it clear that at least some husbands will not give their permission. Eric says of his marriage: 'I don't think a wife *should* work, [...] I shan't let Pat. She's got plenty to do with the flat and the baby' (6 February 1960, p. 24). Eric easily assumes that since he and Pat are married, it is up to him whether she works, and even if she wants to, he can deny her.

Collectively, these articles give a clear portrayal of a traditional marriage where husbands make decisions and earn money, and wives – even though they might have made decisions and earned money in their pre-marital lives – must stay at home and keep house, unless for some reason their husbands permit them otherwise. For *Boyfriend's* readers, then, this is a stark distinction between their lives as girls, which are frequently depicted as free and easy, independent, enjoying life, and their lives as women. There is no visible acknowledgement that

⁸⁹ Mentioned above in connection with his views on appropriate female clothing.

they might find this transition hard, let alone any attempt at support for the transition, or any reason given to pursue it beyond the assumption that all girls want to get married. Certainly the 'So there is a wedding' articles, despite their promise to cover 'all the love that blossoms', do not seem to offer much in the way of consolation for freedoms given up.

Domesticity versus career

A key part of the magazine coverage of what it means to be a woman is discussion of where girls will position themselves on the job-family spectrum. An article called 'New life. Three on the brink' in *Honey* in 1967 showcases some of the possible options, interviewing a young woman who is about to get married, one who is about to start working, and one who is about to go to university, as well as three slightly older women looking back on those new starts. Theresa Hurst, who is about to get married, says she will continue to work 'because she and her fiancé, David, need the money':

I'm sure being a working wife can't be easy, but I'll get organised somehow. I mean, it's not as though I'm the only girl who's ever had to cope. I can't cook, but I'm really looking forward to learning. David says he'll help me with the washing-up but I shan't let him do too much in the house. I hate husbands who are too domesticated. I don't think a man's place is in the kitchen. Mind you, we'll probably shop together in the supermarket at weekends, but I know that the home-making part of marriage is really up to me. (*Honey*, September 1967, p. 38)

So even in the apparently more 'liberated' pages of *Honey*, with its somewhat older and more middle-class readership, there are echoes of the approach to marriage demonstrated in *Boyfriend* seven years earlier. These women have jobs which free them from the loneliness of staying at home on their own which we see in the earlier magazines, but they nevertheless expect to shoulder the majority of the domestic burden, assuming that their adult lives will be made up of a mixture of domestic and outside work, and although it is not stated in the *Honey* article, the expectation is still that women's work outside the home will cease when they have children (Roberts, 1995). Another interesting point of contrast is Theresa's 'I shan't let him do too much in the house' as a comparison with Eric in *Boyfriend* saying 'I shan't let Pat [work].'

(6 February 1960, p. 24; discussed above): while men might be the gatekeepers over their wives' ability to participate in work outside the home, women are the gatekeepers over their husbands' ability to participate in work inside the home.

Working outside the home, however, is an expected part of young womanhood, even if it is only an intermediate step on the way to marriage, though careers – as opposed to jobs – for women can still seem problematic in the 1970s. *Petticoat's* series of articles about girls' relationships with their mothers introduces Kate's mother who 'tends to think that career women turn into very hard people who spend their time drinking and having affairs', but who nevertheless tries hard to be enthusiastic about Kate being 'very liberated and career-minded' (*Petticoat*, 10 February 1973, p. 6). Even though readers can be expected to disagree with this old-fashioned opinion of career women, they will nevertheless absorb this possible view into their ideas about the women they will become. In the same article, Mik's mother, who is generally portrayed as being warm and supportive of her daughter, says:

It's a good thing for a girl to have an independent career behind her, both for financial reasons and for the interest it can bring outside her family. (*Petticoat*, 10 February 1973, p. 6)

Even this message of support of women's careers falters somewhat with the need to justify why it can be a 'good thing': the assumption is that a woman's primary purpose is still the support and care of 'her family' – her husband and children – and that a career is useful as a provider of a bit of extra money and interest, rather than as an aim in its own right. It is, furthermore, 'behind her' – either in the past, or in the background; not an important part of her life or identity.

We see this again in *Petticoat* the next month, in an article called 'In at the deep end. Your first job', which gives advice on occupations, and interviews representatives of organisations which might employ the magazine's readers:

Some don't know settle for a shop or office job as a last resort. It need not be at all. You might start behind a counter or licking stamps but the seventies' assistant

or clerk could well climb to the top if that is what she wants to do. For those who look on a job as a short term activity until they marry (and thousands still feel their real occupation is to be wife and mother) there is no excuse to be bored.

(*Petticoat*, 3 March 1973, p. 34)

The information that it is possible to start at the bottom of an organisation and be promoted to more responsibility sits alongside the acknowledgement that many girls will not aspire to this at all, but merely to fill their time until marriage. 'Thousands' is a strange number to choose, since it both sounds large, but is also actually quite small in the context of the population of the whole country. Again we see the combination of an openness to girls having jobs, with the expectation that they probably won't want to have careers.

There is, however, also evidence in the magazines that the balance may be changing, and that some of their readers will be aiming for lives beyond the confines of marriage and motherhood. In 1970, *Petticoat* introduces a quiz on 'What kind of wife will you make?' with a somewhat backhanded acknowledgement that marriage may not be the sole aim of all its readers:

The aim of every girl, so they say, is to marry. Maybe you don't agree but if it did happen to you, just how would you cope? (*Petticoat*, 3 January 1970, p. 12)

This is a different type of quiz from the one in *Boyfriend* a decade earlier. Even its tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of different 'kinds' of wife may be a result of the burgeoning women's liberation movement. Although the quiz still focuses girls' attention on their role as wife above all else, there are now different possible ways to perform wifeliness: 'Mistress Wife', 'Mum Wife', 'Dolly Wife', 'Pushy Wife', and, perhaps a new variant, the 'Career Wife', who:

marries twice – once to her husband and once to her job. She struggles along, trying to keep both of them happy, but never quite succeeds [...] dresses smartly but with no sense of fun or femininity. (*Petticoat*, 3 January 1970, p. 12)

She is not presented as a figure for readers to aspire to, and is perhaps the least-fun sounding of the available alternatives, but her presence, alongside other discussion of jobs and careers

elsewhere in the magazines, does at least offer an alternative way to *try* to balance the competing demands of domesticity and career, even though she's doomed to failure from the start.

The reader survey which *19* magazine ran in 1985, discussed in chapter four, also covered readers' expectations about marriage. When asked about the ideal age a woman should get married or settle down, 'Two-thirds [of respondents] believe that women should be at least 24 years old, and the proportion favouring teenage marriage is minuscule'. The sociologist the magazine has brought in to theorise about these results cautions that 'There is a certain amount of evidence, nationally, which shows that many people actually marry earlier than the age they specify as ideal' (*19* November 1985, p. 64), however, this difference is not as great as he implies: the actual average age of women at first marriage in 1985 was 23.8 years (Office for National Statistics, 2014).

The survey also asked readers to respond to the statement 'What I'd really like in life is a home of my own, and a man to look after in it', with the equivocal response that 45% agreed, 42% disagreed, and 13% said 'don't know'. However, it is difficult to pin down the responses, since there is so much bound up in the question. Readers might have stated they agree with it because it is indeed their primary goal in life to find a man to live with and look after, or because they agree with some elements of the question, for example if they have other life goals but also want to live with a man in a home of their own (while not necessarily 'look[ing] after' that man). The responses varied according to the type of occupation the respondents had, or could expect:

Girls who are in higher education or who work in professional fields tended to disagree more strongly with the statement in the same way as they also voted more strongly for getting married later. (*19*, November 1985, p. 65)

This portrayal of a possible womanhood available to the readers of *19*, of a 'home of [their] own, and a man to look after in it', seems somewhat dated in the context of a magazine which mostly portrays the fun and excitement of young adulthood, but it serves as a reminder that

even while talking about the independence of the teen years, in a time of increasing freedoms for women, many of *19's* readers can still look forward to a life of traditional gender roles.

The tension between working within and without the home, and its associated questions of motherhood and career, appears again in *Honey* throughout the 1970s with, for example, a debate about why women feel they should have children.

'Why do women feel they should have children?': to mother or not to mother in *Honey* in the 1970s⁹⁰

Honey was launched by Fleetway in 1960, at the top end of the teen magazine age range, being read by independent young women as well as their still-dependent younger sisters; an early tagline proclaimed it as 'For the teens and twenties'. It was aspirational, middle class, and forward-thinking by comparison with its contemporaries. In terms of the type and quantity of advertisements, it looks more like the glossy women's magazines than the rest of the teen market⁹¹. By 1975 the magazine cost 20 pence⁹², bore the tagline 'Young, gay and get-ahead', and sold on average over 168,000 copies per issue (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2018).

Articles tended towards serious rather than frivolous, and most assumed readers would think critically about the issues they were facing. It did not usually publish a problem page, although it frequently included articles offering a mouthpiece to readers on a variety of topics about their lives, and a lively letters page, called 'Chatterbox' with reader responses to articles, which paid readers £1.25⁹³ for every letter they published.

Like most, the magazine altered in focus during its life. Cynthia White describes its initial run as 'intended as a magazine of general guidance for young women, as it might be put over by a

⁹⁰ *Honey*, December 1974, p. 72

⁹¹ Indeed, Fan Carter compares *Honey's* advertisers to those of *Vogue* (2016).

⁹² Equivalent to approximately £1.52 in 2017 (National Archives, 2017).

⁹³ Equivalent to £12.38 in 2017 (Bank of England, 2018).

“big sister”, aiming to fill a perceived gap in the advertising spread, which was not yet tapping the increasing disposable income of teenage girls; however, ‘[t]his approach did not find favour with readers, and after a difficult start, *Honey* eventually achieved rapport by appealing to them on their own level.’ (1970, p. 172)

This shift from a didactic to a more (superficially, at least) egalitarian approach led White to describe the incarnation of *Honey* which was contemporary with her writing as ‘a display vehicle for the latest and best in the world of fashion and beauty’, but her description misses some of the more critical and challenging content which typified the magazine, of which the motherhood debate is just one example.

Janice Winship, writing around the time that *Honey* was merged into *19* magazine in 1986, does acknowledge the wider content of *Honey*, which she uses as a cautionary tale for ‘editors who tread any vaguely political path’ by relating what happened to editor Carol Sarler who between 1980 and 1983 had tried ‘to introduce feminist arguments and ideas and, generally, a “more thinking” editorial style alongside *Honey*’s usual fashion and beauty spreads’ and had lost her job as a result, albeit ostensibly as a result of falling circulation (1987, p. 20). The feminist content might have been responsible for the falling circulation: perhaps readers were not ready for it, or were unprepared to be challenged alongside their fashion content; or the falling circulation might be attributable to other causes, and to have merely been the excuse to dispose of an editor who was too political for the magazine’s owners.

Whether White’s characterisation of *Honey* as glossy and fashion-focused, or Winship’s – using fashion as a cover for more serious content – is the more accurate on the whole, the issues of the magazine I explore in this chapter did encourage readers to engage with the ideas presented, to critique their application to their own lives, and to argue back when they felt unrepresented, and Anna Coote’s article on motherhood, and the responses it spawned, is a perfect example.

The issues of *Honey* under consideration here appeared in a time when there was a resurgence of feminism. Throughout the 1970s, the women’s liberation movement held national

conferences at cities across the UK, arguing for reproductive rights, equal pay, and the recognition and valuing of domestic labour, among other issues. The United Nations declared 1975 to be International Women's Year, and it was also the year of the Sex Discrimination Act, which made some kinds of sex discrimination in employment illegal. This was also the aftermath of influential and popularly successful American books arguing about what it meant to be a woman, such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), cataloguing problems with the fulfilment of American housewives, and Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962) advocating sexual freedom for women in life before marriage, and her relaunch of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1965 in the US, which reached the UK in 1972 (Quinn, 2018), and which is likely to have overlapped in readership with *Honey*.

At the same time there were changes in the timings of the transition markers which changed a 'girl' into a 'woman'. In 1972, the minimum school leaving age had been increased to 16, extending the 'schoolgirl' life of the child, but on leaving school, which two-thirds did as soon as they were able, the majority of young people immediately found work, allowing them entrance to the period of relative freedom and disposable income that they enjoyed between school and marriage (Osgerby, 1998, p. 156). In 1974, when *Honey* published Anna Coote's polemic against child bearing, the average age of a single woman marrying a single man was just under 22, around its lowest point in the century, and just starting to rise. The total fertility rate dropped below two children per woman for the first time since 1942, and continued to fall for the next few years; it has not yet gone back up over two (Office for National Statistics, 2015). With the contraceptive pill available even to unmarried women since 1967, this meant that the young women reading *Honey* were potentially freed from some of the burdens of responsibility which their mothers had carried: they might marry young, but that need not mean an immediate transition to motherhood as well as wifedom.

It was, then, potentially both an exciting and an unsettling time to be becoming a woman. Many aspects of womanhood which had previously been mostly taken for granted became increasingly open to debate, and allowed girls to envisage new forms of womanhood which

might not have been available to previous generations. One of the most fundamental aspects of this new possibility of questioning was whether or not to have children.

In December 1974, *Honey* published an article by Anna Coote entitled 'Why do women feel they should have children?' in which Coote questions the assumption many women make that having babies will be a central part of their lives. The article is introduced with:

ANNA COOTE takes a stand against the social conditioning and possibly irrational impulses that tell us we must want children. (December 1974, p. 72)

So even before the reader has begun on Coote's own words, she is primed by the phrase 'possibly irrational impulses' to approach the article in a certain way, influenced by her own feelings on whether she has, or wants to have, children to respond either with defiance at this characterisation of her own motivations, or with relief at seeing a reflection of her feelings about these motivations in others. The magazine is clearly positioning the article as a challenge, and including 'possibly' does very little to soften that. Thus, from the beginning, readers are implicitly encouraged to argue back, to explore this new area of possibility along with Coote and the magazine.

Coote sets out in some detail many reasons not to have children, covering topics such as financial independence, careers, romantic relationships and the lack of equality between mothers and fathers in terms of who bears the brunt of child-rearing. She suggests that many women who have, or want, children, are unable to articulate the reasons why, although she also admits that,

there are still occasions when I find myself thinking that perhaps, after all, I *would* like to have one or two. Like most other women, I cannot deny myself the possibility. (December 1974, p. 72)

This is a relatively new form of freedom, and its newness and still-controversial nature is perhaps responsible for the occasionally ambivalent tone Coote strikes about her intention to have sex without having children.

Coote acknowledges early in the article that the freedom she calls for, to make a *choice* about whether to have children, is a recent development:

Not long ago, there was no question of choice. You abstained or you didn't. If you didn't, you were lucky or unlucky, depending on your point of view. A baby arrived as a happy event, an answer to a prayer, an unfortunate accident or a downright disgrace. It didn't arrive to order. (December 1974, p. 72)

She presents an image of sexually active women playing a game of chance with their reproductive systems, a game which the young woman of the 1970s might, for the first time, be able to opt out of, though the world around them might not yet have caught up with this change.

In the image accompanying the article (figure 10), all the shops are the mother and baby store Mothercare, all the pedestrians have children, and there are some more pictures of children superimposed at the back of the scene; the headline on the newspaper board on the right is 'Film star has baby'. This is Coote's view of a world which assumes and expects that she will have babies, that normalises and glorifies motherhood, and which she finds difficult to reconcile with her equivocal view on the subject.

The image is small on the page, and the article is relatively long: two dense pages of small text in four columns, and must have been expected to cause some controversy: the idea that young women could both be sexually active *and* choose not to have children was still a fairly new one, and with the appearance of second wave feminism prompting new questions about what it meant to be a woman, the magazine must have expected vehement responses from both sides.

The magazine's 'Chatterbox' letters column carried three reader letters in each of the February and March editions of *Honey* in response to Coote's article, and there is one last letter in the April edition. The letters published all seem to be responding to a version of the article which

is more black-and-white than the reality, seeming oblivious to Coote's equivocation. The writers of three of the letters position themselves as agreeing with her that women should not have children, or should at least think more carefully about it before doing so. Of the other four, three write with some defensiveness about their own choices, although two of those also agree with some of Coote's argument. One letter is roundly dismissive and critical.

Implicit in the letters which agree with Coote is relief from the readers at seeing themselves reflected in the article. They finally feel themselves included within the discourse of womanhood which otherwise tends to glorify motherhood, and to judge them because they do not wish to be mothers, even in the 1970s against the backdrop of the increasing influence of the women's liberation movement.

Trixie Cooper begins her letter with 'A sincere thank you' to Coote for the article, and writes that she has 'no inclination towards motherhood, but [is] made constantly aware of the fact that [she's] "different"'. She has 'read several pieces on women's place in society', from which she draws the conclusion that women's urge to have children is partly an attempt to gain whatever power they can in a male-dominated society, as well as 'a wish to avoid being "different"'. Like Coote, she implies a negative judgement of women who choose to have children; while she sees that they judge her for being 'different', she judges them in return for conforming. She is in fact more certain in her decision to be childfree than Coote, and ends her letter with a recommendation to readers who are 'wavering on a child-bearing decision' to read Ellen Peck's book *The Baby Trap*,⁹⁴ as she did, with the expectation that, like her, they will then decide against reproducing (February 1975, p. 4).

M Cook, also agreeing with Coote, also writes of her hopes for more critical thought among her peers: she hopes Coote's article 'causes people to sit and think about the subject in question constructively'. Like Coote and Cooper, she assumes that most people who have reached a

⁹⁴ A polemic encouraging women not to have children, explaining all the ways they are indoctrinated to want children, and extolling the virtues of life without them (Peck, 1971).

different decision from hers have done so uncritically. She has taken Coote's suggestion that those who like children should 'make friends with other people's' one step further, and works as a nursery nurse, which, she says, means she has 'experienced every conceivable emotion connected with the care and upbringing of the human infant'. She admits a 'fondness for children', but looks forward to a future of 'money and freedom', and although she admits being too selfish to dedicate herself to a child of her own, she also claims that 'The desire to see oneself reproduced is entirely selfish': an interesting accidental, statement of the double standard applied to this, as to so many of women's choices: both having children and *not* having them is selfish (February 1975, p. 4).

The first published letter disagreeing with Coote, from E Cohen, offers a reason women want children: 'the creation of a child between two people who love each other is the most wonderful expression and extension of that relationship'. She takes Coote to task specifically for her implication that 'the majority of mothers only have children because they feel it is what they should do', and portrays a world of wider options for women which has freed them from child-bearing as a default, leaving some able to freely make the choice to have children:

Gone are the days when women merely saw jobs as the stepping-stone between school and motherhood. With greater opportunities and better education for women today there are still those of us who want children for what they stand for, and not as the result of some disease from which we are waiting to be cured.

(February 1975, p. 4)

Cohen writes from the position of defending her own choice, having felt Coote's article as an attack on it; her phrasing, 'there are still those of us' suggests that the 'greater opportunities' may also feel like an attack, or that they are passing her by.

Also in disagreement with Anna Coote is J Matthias, writing the most negative of the published responses. She calls Coote's article 'yet another de-humanised "liberated" article', and expresses surprise that anyone with a strong ego would not want to reproduce themselves, or 'to see beyond the child to the ultimate unique person'. She groups Coote's article with others

she has read, and perhaps reads into it arguments from those other articles, but which do not appear in this one; she seems not to have noticed Coote's 'perhaps, after all, I *would* like to have one or two', and having opened with a criticism of Coote's perceived equation of children with 'any other consumer goods', she ends with an odd description of a child as a permanent possession:

[A child] will be at least as interesting and stimulating as all her valued but temporary lovers and friends and the only one she can begin to claim as her own.
(March 1975, p. 4)

Finally, we see two letters which mirror some of Coote's own ambivalence about children.

A Evans, who is seven months pregnant, agrees 'to some extent [...] that women are still conditioned by society to have children', and expects that 'there will be times when [she] will be bored', but offers 'the culmination of a good relationship [...] and self-indulgence' as reasons for wanting a child (March 1975, p. 4). Yvonne Luke grants some of Coote's claims, for example 'it certainly is true that many – perhaps even most – women are pressurised into motherhood and end up somewhat disappointed', but advances herself as an exception: '[t]here are no pressures whatever being brought on me', and accuses Coote of foolishness for denying the 'maternal urge', or that there might be 'some positive rewards' to having children (March 1975, p. 4).

The last letter on the subject, in April, is introduced with 'We're *still* getting your reactions to Anna Coote's article'. Jennifer Hanstock, like the earlier letter-writers supporting Coote's position, seems to have missed her equivocation. She talks about only being able to 'put up with friends' and neighbours' children for short periods of time', and goes on to complain about social conditioning which teaches women that their 'rôle is to be a wife and mother', and calls for that conditioning to end to free women from 'more children than they can cope with and [...] alleviate the population situation' (April 1975, p. 9).

These readers are all keen to state that, whether they agree or disagree with Coote's article in general, they personally have thought clearly about whether to have children, and have

reached their decision, in whichever direction, with properly articulated – if not always entirely logical – reasons. However, several of them agree that *other* women do not think so carefully about their decisions, having children for reasons of social pressure, selfishness, or for no reason at all; readers of *Honey*, they imply, think clearly about their decisions, and those who write letters to the magazine especially so. No reader letters are published from anyone admitting to having (or wanting to have) children just because it is the done thing, and the only representation of these women is Coote's initial one:

I recently asked about 30 young women why they wanted to have children. Time and again, I watched mothers and would-be mothers shrug their shoulders and frown perplexedly as if they had never considered the question before. 'I've always assumed I would, that's all.' 'What else is life for?' 'Doesn't everyone want to?' When pressed, they became elaborately vague. 'It must have some advantages, otherwise people wouldn't keep doing it.' 'I just see it as a bit of my life. You know, you go to school for a bit, you work for a bit, you have babies for a bit, and you work for a bit.' (December 1974, p. 72)

The '30 young women', of course, do not speak except through the words Coote has chosen to represent them. The impression is perhaps that such uncritical mothers and mothers-to-be are not wise enough to read *Honey*, but are instead offered as a cautionary tale for its readers, who may think of themselves as more sophisticated.

No published letters make any mention of the section of Coote's article which calls for 50-50 parenting from men and women, perhaps unsurprisingly, since more than forty years later this can still sometimes seem like an impossible dream for many women, and must have been close to unimaginable in 1975.

Many of *Honey's* readers will not yet be in a position to be making decisions about child-bearing, but most are likely to be looking ahead to the time when those decisions will need to be made, and considering the kind of woman they want to become, wrestling with the fact that even in the 1970s, with the defining boundaries of womanhood starting to change, many

women still needed to choose whether to focus on family or career. This debate, then, will have been part of the background information feeding into their developing thoughts on the subject. It is, therefore, not merely of interest to those readers who wrote responses to Coote, or those whose responses were published, but will have showcased various different lines of reasoning around the motherhood question, and prompted readers to assess their own position in comparison to Coote's, and to those readers writing responses to her.

Honey is fairly unusual in not publishing responses to its reader letters, so although it is Anna Coote, writing for the magazine, who opens the debate, it is the readers whose letters are published who get the last word. In particular, the March letters are all broadly in opposition to Coote, but the last, from Jennifer Hanstock in April, agrees entirely with her. The lasting impression of the debate, then, is that Coote fired a deliberately controversial opening barrage, which received some early support from Trixie Cooper and M Cook, but was then gradually brought down by other readers, who disagreed mostly with Coote's assertion that women don't have good reasons to want children (albeit while largely agreeing with her that there are also good reasons not to want children), and then, when the debate was largely over, a solitary letter supporting Coote brought the whole to a close.

Thus *Honey* carefully balances both sides of the question, all while helping to problematize the issue as a whole simply by entering into the debate at all. In this it is setting itself on the tipping point of new possibilities which were only just starting to open up for its readers. Although one of the main purposes of magazines for teenagers and young women is always to educate readers to grow into the kind of adult women that the society of the time expects, in the 1970s with these societal expectations in flux, this position became more complicated. *Honey* engages with the moment of transition by showcasing a variety of different ways that women might approach this central decision about the shape of their adult lives, and encouraging their readers to consider these new possibilities. The controversial nature of the topic, and its great relevance to readers' lives meant the magazine is likely to have received enough letters to have a choice about which to print, so choosing these letters in particular helps the magazine to mitigate the anti-establishment position of the initial article, presenting the illusion that the

magazine is a more balanced voice, taking no sides in the debate, and thus minimising the risk of alienating those who disagree. Being targeted at a market of independent older teenagers and young women means that *Honey* is free from the burden of appeasing gatekeepers like parents and guardians, who might control the spending of younger girls, and therefore need to be placated in magazines with younger audiences.

As these reader letters demonstrate, *Honey* readers fall into many positions on the spectrum from wanting to not-wanting children: the magazine may then have pleased the unconventional childfree among its readers by publishing the initial article, while placating the perhaps-more-conventional mothers and future-mothers with its choice of reader response letters disagreeing. Those readers who have, or want to have, children, who might have been angered by Coote's portrayal of them as unthinkingly conventional, will also have been soothed by the reader letters arguing their defence: although *other* women have children without thinking, *Honey* readers may reassure themselves that they have made a careful decision to do so.

This article and its responses, then, place *Honey* alongside its readers as they move towards womanhood, at a time when what that meant was rapidly changing. As teen magazines have always done, the magazine helps to guide its readers through the transitions of their lives, but by showcasing the new ways to be a woman, and highlighting readers' own voices in exploring them, the magazine is also hand-in-hand with its readers in exploring the transition in womanhood.

Conclusion

What the transition to womanhood meant, as far as the magazines were concerned, changed over the period, with social changes in the 1970s in particular having a huge impact on the visions of womanhood visible in the teen magazines. This change can be seen in action in the snapshot presented by the child-bearing debate in *Honey*. However, through most of the period, ideas of womanhood are inextricably bound up with ideas about marriage; childbearing is assumed to follow on from marriage, but is only rarely explicitly discussed in the magazines, being a topic for the magazines of adulthood to which teenagers will graduate

when they have aged beyond the teen magazines. This domestic transition is especially important in the magazines of the 1950s and 1960s. Questions about the transition to work also start to appear in the 1960s, and the tension between work and marriage as the purpose of women's lives tend to dominate teen magazine discussions of adulthood through the 1970s and into the 1980s: girls are now widely expected to work, but whether women, especially married women, are also expected to work, is a fraught and difficult question. In this, as in much else, the girls of the 1960s are taught by their magazines to expect to defer to the wishes of their future husbands. There is also a pervasive message that young women are at complete liberty to get jobs if they want to (and, if married, if their husbands agree), but that most of them will not want *careers*. This serves to implicitly position those who do as unusual, as what Carol Dyhouse describes as 'intellectual girls who likely as not wore spectacles and would end up as spinsters' (2013, p. 127); even if they do end up marrying, they run the risk of being the 'career wife' described so pityingly in *Petticoat*.

The voices of the girls themselves are largely absent from questions of domesticity versus career, but they are more visible in discussion of the appropriate appearance for girls and women, policing those who have got this wrong with letters in to the magazines. Publishing these letters offers the magazines the chance to support this policing from a safe distance; although the magazines are often full of instructions about how to perform a suitably feminine appearance, this criticising of girls who have failed is in the voice of girls themselves. The magazines, therefore, perform the role of a neutral third party, merely providing a venue for readers to complain. This function fades over time, although as we saw in *Bliss* at the end of the century, it still appears occasionally.

The reader voices in the childbearing debate in *Honey* present an alternative view of the interaction between magazine and reader in defining the shape of womanhood that girls will have available to them. The combination of a progressive magazine, and a moment when all previous assumptions about womanhood are open to question, means that the magazine can present a genuine debate, provoked by an initial polemic, without much risk of antagonising people from either side: the visible debate ameliorates the challenge which Coote's article

might otherwise present. What the magazine offers here is the chance for girls to test out on the page the ideas that would play out for real in their own lives, a function which, as always, works also for those readers who do not write in, because by reading the opposing views they must position themselves relative to them.

These different views of the questions around what it meant to be, or become, a woman in the late twentieth century support existing research findings that the transition to womanhood is (or is seen as) complicated, contentious, fraught, and changing. The vision of womanhood on view at any one time may be presented as straightforward, natural and obvious, however this is not so on closer examination. The way that readers intervened in the magazines' presentation of womanhood demonstrates the possibility of disagreement, even when they support the status quo: Betty James may be espousing conservative ideas of appropriate female performance when she writes to *Jackie* complaining about other girls wearing 'sweaters and jeans' (4 April 1964, p. 2), but she is also showing that her opinion is not shared by everyone, and therefore unintentionally striking a blow in support of the unconventional jeans-wearers. This sort of problematising the accepted orthodoxies of womanhood is an indirect function of much of the magazine content on this topic: since girls and women are not, in fact, naturally equipped to perform the types of femininity that are expected at any given time, instruction is required.

Conclusion

Teenage magazines helped me to negotiate the culture of my peers and learn to get on with them. I studied them like most kids study their textbooks. I wish I had known at the time how advertising-driven the media is – I thought I actually needed to buy the stuff in them in order to be cool. I knew of course that adverts were adverts, but didn't appreciate the influence advertisers have over editorial. I read magazines as a window into a subculture I wanted to infiltrate without realising that the mirror was warped. (Respondent 48)

A hipster pub near me has wallpapered the ladies' toilets with issues of *Just Seventeen* I remember reading. It was amazing to read the articles back, they seem so naive and hopeful. The style advice was dubious and the how to talk to boys tips even worse but the warm feeling rereading was amazing. (Respondent 84)

Teenage magazines were complex, continually changing, and often problematic entities, and their relationship with their readers no less so. During the latter part of the twentieth century they exercised enormous power over their readers, and offered enormous comfort at the same time. The legacy of emotion they still provoke, as demonstrated by the survey responses above, is an indication of how important they were then, and how important the study of them remains.

Within magazines, the problem pages which have provided so much of my material are an especially valuable source, and one which has been largely neglected in scholarly work. Their value lies partly in the interaction between readers and writers, and the fact that the problem pages are the site in the magazines where that interaction can most clearly be seen. Indeed, Angela Phillips talks about advice columnists as the interface between the magazine and the reader: the magazine writers who are most exposed to 'the unmediated, unsolicited, thoughts and feelings of readers' (2008, p. 102). Their value is also in their popularity; as the most popular section of the magazine, and with the magazines' function as a social tool, problem

pages also helped to shape face-to-face communities. Girls gathered in bedrooms, or school playgrounds, to share the latest advice, to apply it to their own lives, to learn about 'what is both typical and desirable' in the lives and behaviour of girls their age (Currie, 2001, p. 265), or to position themselves as more or less advanced in relation to the writers of letters. An IPC readership survey quoted by Robin Kent identifies the problem page as the second section of a magazine readers turn to, after the 'straight' letters page (1979, p. 28). Twenty-five years later, the Canadian teenage girls in Currie's study rank advice pages as their favourite part of the magazine (2001). These presentations of readers' voices within the magazine therefore served a vital function in connecting magazine and reader.

The obfuscated identities available to the writers of problem-page letters also help to create a space with greater freedom than anywhere else in the magazine. Even those readers who write with their real names benefit from the fact that others do not: any name, no matter how 'real'-looking, might be a pseudonym. It is in part this identity play which allows advice columnists and readers alike to push the boundaries of what it is possible to say; their pseudonyms act as a shield, protecting them from any unwelcome consequences of the things they need to say.

Problem pages thus offer some magazine readers greater freedom than anywhere else in their lives, to stand behind a mask and ask for information and support that they are unable to find in any other way.

These aspects of the problem page remained constant, even while the lives of teenage girls changed out of all recognition between 1955 and 2000. Girls acquired more independence and freedom, and more expectation that they were entitled to an education, a career, and respect, on equal terms with their male contemporaries. They no longer expected to marry and settle down as quickly as possible, many of them were having sex, some of them were lesbians,⁹⁵ and some of the heterosexual ones even asked boys out rather than waiting to be asked. They were also more likely to be (financially, at least) dependent on their parents for

⁹⁵ Of course, many of them were having sex, and some of them were lesbians in 1955, too, but they were less visible.

longer, staying in education for more of their teenage years, getting jobs later, and marrying later, thus deferring their entry into adulthood. When they arrived in adult life, there were more options for the kind of woman they might want to be. However, there are also ways that their lives, as seen in their magazines, remained strikingly similar. Their magazine-mediated interests were still overwhelmingly focused on boys, looking good, and celebrities. Although a few of their magazines at different points in time did offer some more serious content, this always fought for space with the latest hairstyle or the next big pop group.

Girls' interactions with their magazines changed in tone, too. From the affectionate authority of Joan Courage in *Marilyn* to the way that *Mizz* made the role of the writers fade into the background to foreground the readers' voices, the way magazines addressed girls changed, though some types of letters girls wrote to their magazines changed little. Strict parents and pushy boyfriends remained problems throughout the period, although questions about sexism and the problem of what kind of woman to be were opened up for discussion in the wake of the women's liberation movement, and were taken up in the magazines by both the readers and the magazines themselves.

Against the backdrop of women's liberation, the increasing availability of the contraceptive pill, feminist-inspired legislative changes, and changes in life patterns, girls and their magazines balanced on the edge between widening possibilities, and the need to teach girls 'suitable' feminine interests and behaviours to keep them in their place. Girls *may* have sex, but in the small print there are a lot of conditions to be met before it's acceptable; girls and boys are equal now, but boys are still sexist; girls can access education on the same terms as boys, but are still expected to spend time and money on fashion and makeup.

So the girl and her magazine changed together. As always with consumer magazines, it is impossible to assign responsibility for change either to pressure from the magazine or the reader; the relationship between them was one of mutual construction, with small shifts in offered content and the reception to it gradually taking them on a journey from the conservative, domestic view of the 1950s to the sexualised, girl power view of the 1990s. One

of the ways this content–reception cycle of change played out was through expressions of dissent from readers.

Functions of dissent

Readers wrote to magazines to express dissent with ideas they had encountered either in the magazines, or in their everyday lives, and the magazines used these letters of dissent to perform a variety of functions. They enabled the magazines to balance support for the *status quo* with the need to support readers: it was not the *magazine* prompting this topic of discussion, or challenging this aspect of social convention, it was the reader, and the magazine was merely responding, perhaps to teach the reader the error of her ways. On contentious topics, like the debate in *Honey* about child bearing, the publication of reader letters allowed magazines to present themselves as offering support for both sides of an argument, without risking antagonising readers who fell at different ends of a spectrum of opinion. The magazines presented themselves as neutral, although sometimes they betrayed this by the way they framed the discussion, the way different voices were introduced, and of course by their ongoing choices of articles and letters to publish. These reader letters allowed the magazines to distance themselves from potentially divisive topics, as in the policing of girls' appearance in the magazines of the 1950s and 1960s: it was not the magazine which criticised the girls who presented themselves as insufficiently feminine, but their peers, the other readers of the magazine, and the magazine simply offered a place to speak. These acts of dissent were almost always presented as individual issues, one girl writing her disagreement with one instance of magazine content or one thing she had observed in the world around her. This tended to obscure the way that published letters to magazines are performative, and even when they did not explicitly position themselves as speaking to the entire readership of the magazine, that was nevertheless what they did; although it was the reader speaking, it was the magazine which chose the letter to publish. Reader letters therefore bore the burden of providing serious content, and alternative points of view, while allowing the rest of the magazine to present a more frivolous appearance and a more conservative position.

Portrayals of dissenting opinion are risky, however. By advising against a particular action, a magazine also reminded readers that the action was possible: problem page responses exhorting girls not to leave home after parental disputes, for example, risked reminding girls who felt they had exhausted all other options that they still had this last dramatic solution. Similarly, magazines publishing letters from readers who had been romantically successful in ways the magazine didn't approve of, as in those we saw in *Jackie*, may simply have highlighted alternatives to the current orthodoxy of permitted behaviour, even if the magazine responds to depict these occasions as exceptional, or to make jokes at the reader's expense. The use of these published contradictions and dissents, then, required readers to negotiate the different sides of argument, with the chance they might reach a conclusion that was contrary to the one the magazine endorsed.

This reader dissent and disagreement seemed, in some cases, to be deliberately provoked. For example, Christopher Ward's calculated sexism in *Petticoat* frequently prompted readers to write in disagreeing with him; like the debate articles seen in later magazines like *Mizz*, this appeared to be a deliberate policy to engage readers with the content and encourage them to write to the magazine. This is an example of what Sara Bragg and David Buckingham call 'tools to think with' (2009, p. 131): when reading a provoking article and reader letters in response to it, or both sides of an apparently even-handed debate, even readers who did not write letters had to consider their own position. Those who did write dissenting letters often presented themselves – or were presented by the magazine – as critical, engaged, thinking, which might have served either to suggest that the rest of the magazine's readership was likewise, or to elevate the letter-writers over the passive readers. Either way, they helped to contextualise magazine positions within their real lives, and to support the possibility of dissent for others. All readers, therefore, even those who did not write, may have been able to use this type of magazine content to practice decision making in their own lives by exploring disagreements they saw within their magazines.

The presence of dissenting opinions may have accounted for the apparently over-optimistic position of some readers writing to the problem pages. While allowing for difference of opinion

on many topics they covered, most magazines had fairly consistent positions on some topics of major importance, but girls nevertheless wrote in seeking advice on their specific circumstances. As we saw in *Marilyn*, girls who read the magazine and could be expected to notice the standard position that the magazine always supported the parents, nevertheless wrote letters asking for ways to change their parents' minds. If dissent is permitted on some topics, maybe *my* problem will receive a different answer from every other similar problem.

Magazines' commercial aims

This portrayal of dissent and difficulty was one way that magazines fostered their need as commercial organisations to make money by keeping girls (and therefore advertisers) coming back issue after issue. In an environment where displeased advertisers could withdraw their ads, and therefore their financial support (Steinem, 1995), or a too-political editor could be ousted by a parent company (Winship, 1987), the safest way for a magazine to remain commercially viable was to maintain a carefully conservative appearance; any hints at feminism should be disguised, and made 'fun' (Keller, 2011). Balancing this service to their paymasters with service to their readers may have been precarious, but shifting the burden of controversial or difficult material to readers helped to maintain the illusion of neutrality.

These tactics also worked to placate parents who might otherwise have forbidden their daughters to read the magazines. The magazines offered specific support for parents in their advice to girls on handling parental disputes, for example the advice given to the girl writing to *Valentine* about her father not permitting her friends to visit. However, the broader presentation of magazines as sensible, as avoiding controversial topics, and avoiding giving girls dangerous ideas, also helped to keep parents happy with their daughters' reading matter, especially with the earlier magazines. By keeping readers' parents on side, the magazines enabled girls to continue to buy the magazine.

Later magazines had the advantage of the increased independence of their readers; even though girls were typically living at home for longer, they benefited from increased autonomy in their choices about leisure time and ways to spend their money. So although parents might still have opinions about girls' magazine reading, they may have had less power to enforce

outright bans. Indeed, several of my survey respondents talk about reading magazines in secret to avoid their parents discovering what they were really like, or privately reading magazines they were officially banned from. Of particular note towards the end of the century is the coverage of sexual topics, with moral panics about sexualisation, and the creation of the Teenage Magazine Arbitration Panel. Most of the magazines kept sex strictly within the problem pages most of the time; again, allowing the pretence that it was readers, not the magazine itself, who were responsible for the discussion of sex. The exception was *more!*, frequently mentioned by my respondents in connection with concealing their magazines from their parents, or with content that they now consider to have been inappropriate at the age they read it. *more!* evidently served its own commercial aims by distinguishing itself this way – one respondent said ‘*more!* magazine was the sexy one’ (Respondent 6) – but although it was successful and long-running, no other magazine followed its path. There was evidently only room in the market for one magazine performing *Cosmo* while dressed up as *Just Seventeen*.

The magazines’ use of reader dissent in contrast with the illusion of magazine conservatism worked as well to encourage readers to keep coming back. A reader who had written a letter to a magazine would be more likely to buy the next few issues to see if her letter was published, and readers who knew that the magazine might publish such letters would keep reading, looking forward to the outrage the magazine had generated, even if they did not themselves write in. This was sensationalism disguised as debate, but it worked as part of the overall strategy.

It was of course not just the publication of dissent which kept girls reading magazines in such huge numbers throughout the late twentieth century. By their very existence the magazines promoted girls’ need for their complicated advice on all the things girls have to know and do in order to be successful girls. They encouraged girls to think of themselves as needing advice and support. This was perhaps especially so in considerations of romance, but applied to other areas too, some of which can be seen in what my survey respondents report having learned in the magazines, on topics including boys, makeup, sex, bodies, fashion, kissing, skin tone, and

periods. The overall message of the magazines could be said to be that being a girl is difficult, and that girls have to read magazines to find out how to do it.

This was of course also preparation for the difficulties of being a woman. Most publishers of teen magazines also published women's magazines, and girls' magazines functioned as feeder schools for the longer-term magazine reading relationships which the publishers hoped to cultivate. This survey respondent describes the transition, and her later feelings about it:

At the time I saw nothing wrong with [reading magazines] and felt like I was being 'grown up'. It led to me getting a *Marie Claire* subscription and later reading *Cosmo* etc, and now I look back and think hmmm that was not helpful to my self image or my sex life / development of a healthy relationship with my body or my sexuality. But if you'd taken them off me as a kid I would have been insulted at the thought I couldn't make up my own mind. (Respondent 40)

Whatever else the magazines aimed to achieve in their content and their support of their readers, this was against the ever-present background of the commercial need to make money, to remain viable, and to keep readers coming back issue after issue through whatever tactics work; these tactics were not always supportive, healthy or encouraging. Nevertheless, they remained a huge influence on girls throughout the period.

Interactions in the text

This thesis has investigated how the published interactions between teenage girls and their magazines both contributed to and reflected changes in girlhood, finding an ongoing period of negotiation around the nature and possibilities of girlhood. I have shown that signs of this negotiation are visible in the magazines, with girls demonstrating an engagement with the issues that, for some of them, belies the popular impression of girls as passive recipients of media directed at them. At the same time, the magazines exert a patriarchal influence on their readers which still resonates with some of those readers decades later. I have argued that this relationship between magazine and reader is also influenced by other parties who are often

invisible, including readers' parents, and the advertisers who provide a substantial proportion of the financial backing of magazines.

This work has shown a new view of the interplay of voices and influence in girls' magazines, and has reclaimed the voice of the magazines' readers, which are often silenced in other research on these magazines. I have prioritised the use these girls made of their voices at the time, through writing letters to the magazines, and, in asking their adult selves to speak, I have also recaptured some of the wider effects that the magazines had on them as teenagers. This leads to a nuanced reading of the way that both patriarchal aims, and reader resistance, can be seen in the text, and the way they push against each other within the commercial magazine market. This is a grouping of multiple perspectives, which, combined with earlier research about the extent to which readers are critical (Currie, 2001; Bragg and Buckingham, 2009), or editors feminist (Keller, 2011), helps to show a view of readers who may sometimes be critical, and editors sometimes feminist, but that the overall effect is complex and ever-changing, and resistant to easy categorisation. My findings echo Angela McRobbie's (2009) concerns about overestimating the ability of readers to be critical; for example, my survey results paint a picture of adults looking back regretfully on their teenage selves and their inability to resist the vision of girlhood the magazines offered. This thesis sits within the middle of the spectrum from a reading of magazines as a damaging tool of patriarchy – such as work by Kate Peirce (1990), Ana Garner *et al.* (1998) and Jenny McKay (1999) – to a view of consumers of magazines as critically aware, including work by Janice Winship (1985, 1987), Ros Ballaster *et al.* (1991), Joke Hermes (1995) and Margaret Beetham (1996). My research supports the further problematisation of both ends of that spectrum, acknowledging that magazines do often function as a tool of patriarchy, but that some readers, at some times, may nevertheless be able to demonstrate some limited criticality. The interaction between magazines, readers, and patriarchy is therefore not as straightforward as has sometimes been portrayed.

The combination of critical lenses from book history, feminist theory, and critical discourse analysis, along with detailed case studies of individual magazines at one point in time, has allowed me to offer a view of the way these interactions between reader and magazine

operated, and the way the tension between patriarchal aims and reader criticality plays out in those interactions. I have drawn on insights from magazines not just as static texts, but as publishers, with both commercial and consumer readers, and the interactions between these aspects of the magazine; the way changing gender politics affected these operations of the magazine, and the function of linguistic choices within the texts to serve or undermine these operations. My movement back and forth between a general overview of the way the magazines develop over the period, and a detailed focus on individual magazines, shows both the broad sweep of change, and an intimate look at the ways the textual interactions work with or against that change.

The approach could be applied to other magazine audiences and periods to provide new ways of seeing the relationship between magazine, reader, and history. Perhaps especially women's magazines, which have so much in common with the twentieth century magazines for girls I have examined. My work also points the way towards new work on the equivalent experiences of twenty-first century girls, in media which are descendents of the magazines discussed here. Girls now go online for the kinds of support, education, entertainment and community which their mothers and grandmothers received from magazines; there is scope for a similar type of research on their interactions in these new places, with all the different challenges and possibilities that the internet affords.

My research has found that the textual interaction between readers and magazines is a key part of girls' magazines, their commercial aims, and the development of girlhood in the period. The readers of these magazines weren't just passive recipients, but the magazines were also not just tools of patriarchy. The interactions in the text served varied functions in support of both readers and magazines, including mirroring changes in girls' lives in the period, but always supported the magazines' commercial aims. By publishing readers' contributions, magazines were able to publish difficult content in someone else's voice, to avoid antagonising advertisers or parents; they also published letters to keep readers coming back and buying again. They used reader letters to showcase dissenting opinions in order to criticise or to validate them; to enable readers to practice debate; and to air cautionary examples. These varying forms of

interaction helped to problematise and make unstable any possibility of reading 'the overall message' of magazines.

In this thesis, I have told a story about how girls became women in the twentieth century. Most British women over about thirty will have been influenced by the way these magazines presented and negotiated girlhood. Many of them will have been voracious readers of the magazines, and have brought the messages they learned there into their adult lives; they came of age as readers of magazines. By examining the ways that twentieth-century girls' interventions into their magazines complicated the magazines' messages this work has provided new insight into the teenage experience of twenty-first century women, and allowed them to contribute to this retelling of their own story.

Afterword: In the 21st century...

While I have been writing this thesis, there has been a steady stream of closures in the magazine market for teenage girls⁹⁶ leading to Kate Wills writing in the *Independent* in June 2014 declaring that with the closure of *Bliss* there remained no teen magazines in the UK market (Wills, 2014).

In the US, the teen market survived a little longer in print, and persists online. The last magazine standing, *Seventeen*, announced a move to 'digital first' as I finished work on this thesis, in late 2018. In 2017, *Teen Vogue* enjoyed a brief notoriety for managing to seamlessly combine progressive politics with its traditional fashion and beauty territory, leading one Twitter user to position the magazine as part of the resistance to a repressive political atmosphere:

The year is 2017. America is a tire fire. The resistance is led by Teen Vogue, Badlands National Park, and the Merriam-Webster dictionary. (Chandler, 2017)

But by the end of 2017, the magazine announced a move to online-only after the new approach proved insufficient to save its print production. *Rookie*, started in 2011 as an online magazine by teenage fashion blogger Tavi Gevinson, and run by young women, many of them teenagers, managed for a while to go the other way, producing beautiful, weighty, hardcopy yearbooks which have as much in common with the beautifully bound magazine annuals of the Victorian era as they do the slender 1980s annuals of magazines like *Jackie* and *Just Seventeen*. Reading *Rookie* made me feel like the women writing in the *Girl's Own Paper* in the 1880s, who write of excitement for 'the girls of today', and the opportunities open to them, but also with a tinge of sadness that they themselves were born too early to benefit from the same opportunities. Unfortunately, it too folded in 2018.

⁹⁶ For example *Sugar* closed in 2011, survived for five more years by its website, sugarscape.com, and *more!* closed in 2013.

In parallel with the increase in multi-national corporate uniformity dominating our professional media, the early twenty-first century has brought a surge of multifarious independent voices in our amateur online media, much of which is accessible to, or even aimed at, teenage girls. Anyone with an internet connection is now able to reach out and find their support and their connections with like-minded others around the world. In the teenage market, this seems to have rung the death knell for magazines; the limited processes of interaction I have examined in this thesis have in the twenty-first century been expanded beyond anything that could have been imagined by the editors, writers and readers of magazines of the twentieth. The internet has become the means through which teenage girls can make contact with each other far more directly than they ever could through the problem pages of *Just Seventeen*.

However, the move online takes teenagers to a potentially more risky place than the relatively-safe haven that magazines used to offer. The same debates between boys and girls about sexism that we saw in chapter four are happening now on social media. But without the mediating influence of the magazine's editors and writers, they can get much nastier, and on some types of social networking sites, the apparent anonymity of the participants can lead to extreme responses, including threats of rape and murder. This is an increasingly recognised and discussed aspect of online activism – or even just online presence – for the adult feminists who might have read *Mizz* in the 1990s, as described, for example, by feminist journalist Laurie Penny: '[I]n recent years, violent misogyny in comment threads and blogs has become an everyday feature of political conversation on the web' (2013, location 266). While this violent misogyny is primarily used as a weapon to try and force adult women to stay quiet, it also works on those who are not directly receiving the threats, but simply observing them (Smith, 2018). Those observers include teenage girls, who are shown what's ahead for them as young women growing up online, and – worryingly – teaching many of them to shut up before they've even begun to speak. And while adult misogyny is operating as a cautionary message to teenage girls, it also works to teach teenage boys how to respond to girls and women who have the temerity to speak out. For example, teenager Jinan Younis, writing for the *Guardian* in 2013, describes setting up a feminist society at her all-girls school, and taking their activism

into their online social spaces, only to be greeted with waves of misogynistic abuse from her male peer group:

It's been over a century since the birth of the suffragette movement and boys are still not being brought up to believe that women are their equals. Instead we have a whole new battleground opening up online where boys can attack, humiliate, belittle us and do everything in their power to destroy our confidence before we even leave high school. (Younis, 2013)

And while the debate pages of *Mizz* shielded an earlier generation from the worst sexist excesses of teenage boys, and spoke up for girls, supporting them and encouraging them to feel they could respond to such sexism as they did encounter, the response of the authorities at Younis's school was reluctance to allow her to found a feminist society, and when the girls posted photos of themselves as part of the 'we need feminism because' project and received sexually explicit abuse as a result, the school insisted they take their photos down.

In the context of an online world where mentions of feminism in mainstream (that is, not explicitly feminist or women-only) spaces usually attracts hostility, and often descends to violent threats, the comments in response to Younis's article are unusually supportive and friendly, with only a scattering of 'This comment was removed by a moderator because it didn't abide by our community standards' – perhaps a response to an unusually strict application of the *Guardian's* comment moderation policy, as required by the topic and the age of the author. Others of the spaces which have inherited some of the role of teen magazines are less moderated, and may therefore be less supportive and safe. Teenagers using social media to talk to their friends may be engaging in a quiet corner of the internet, but they are nevertheless occupying the same space which responded to Caroline Criado-Perez's campaign for a woman on British banknotes with threats of rape and murder.

The public internet, then, is potentially an unsafe place in the twenty-first century. However, as Penny explains, while the internet may act as a venue for sexists to threaten girls and women, it also acts to bring women and girls together, to share their experiences, and 'to realise that they

are not the only ones feeling angry, and that something can be done about it' (2013, location 347), in a way that the magazines, with their limited page space, their slow production times, and the need to keep potentially-conservative advertisers on-side, could never have offered.

Moral panic about girls continues. While I have been writing this thesis, we have had moral panics about twerking, sexualisation, drinking, sex, rape, ambition, exam grades, and many others. Girls' lives are contested on almost every level, by girls themselves and the people around them who talk to, and about, them. This historical study of how their lives played out in the twentieth century aims to show that despite the panic and fear of adults, some girls, at least, have always questioned and challenged the assumptions made about them, and the 'rules' they are given to live by. How successful they are in doing so depends in part on the atmosphere in which they do it, and although magazines as a teenage medium have faded, the providers of online spaces which replace them can learn from their predecessors about how to empower girls to challenge the destructive and limiting myths which still circulate.

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Appendix 1: Reader survey

Participant information sheet

Investigating girls' magazines

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

This study is being organised by Elizabeth Lovegrove, a PhD student in the Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies at Oxford Brookes University. I'm researching British teenage girls' magazines 1950-2000, and using this survey to gather the recollections of readers about their relationship with teen magazines. You can read more about my research project here: <http://arts.brookes.ac.uk/pgr/profiles/elovegrove.html>

The survey will be open until 31 March 2015.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, answer the questions on this page (which should take 5-10 minutes), and click 'submit' at the bottom of the page. If you decide not to take part, simply leave this web page.

This survey collects no identifying data. Data will be kept for 10 years, in line with the university's policy for academic integrity. Your responses may be quoted, anonymously, in my PhD thesis, and in published work and/or conference papers based on my thesis. You can find details of my published work at my profile on Academia.edu:

<https://oxfordbrookes.academia.edu/ElizabethLovegrove>; future publications will be linked from that page.

This study has been reviewed by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee.

If you need more information, please contact me, Elizabeth Lovegrove, at ejlovegrove@brookes.ac.uk, or my PhD supervisor, Jane Potter, at j.potter@brookes.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns about the way this study has been conducted, you can contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information.

December 2014.

Questions

*Required

How old are you?

(I am interested in the opinions of people who were aged between 13 and 18 in the period 1950 to 2000.) *

- 27-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-83

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Did you read any of the following magazines?

Please tick all that apply.

- 19
- Bliss / It's Bliss
- Blue Jeans
- Boyfriend
- Date
- Heiress
- Honey
- Jackie
- Just Seventeen
- Marilyn
- Marty
- Minx
- Mirabelle
- Mizz
- More!
- Oh Boy!
- Petticoat
- Romeo
- Roxy
- School Friend
- Shout
- Sugar
- Valentine
- Other:

Did you ever write in to the problem page or letters page in any teen magazine?

- I wrote to the problem page at least once
- I wrote to the letters page at least once
- No, I never wrote any letter to any teen magazine

What was your letter about? Did you get an answer, either in print or by post?

(There is no requirement to answer this question if you would prefer not to say.)

Was there anything particular you learnt from reading magazines?

Do you remember anything about agreeing or disagreeing with content presented in magazines?

Did you share your magazine reading with friends or family members?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about your teenage-magazine-reading experience?

Survey response data

How old are you?

| | | |
|-------|----|-----|
| 27-39 | 79 | 72% |
| 40-49 | 22 | 20% |
| 50-59 | 6 | 6% |
| 60-69 | 2 | 2% |

What is your gender?

| | | |
|-------------------|-----|-----|
| Female | 103 | 95% |
| Male | 0 | 0% |
| Other | 4 | 4% |
| Prefer not to say | 1 | 1% |

Did you read any of the following magazines?

| | | |
|----------------------|----|-----|
| Just Seventeen | 92 | 84% |
| More! | 53 | 49% |
| Mizz | 49 | 45% |
| Bliss / It's Bliss | 43 | 39% |
| Sugar | 42 | 39% |
| 19 | 31 | 28% |
| Jackie | 30 | 28% |
| Shout | 21 | 19% |
| Blue Jeans | 11 | 10% |
| Minx | 8 | 7% |
| Smash Hits* | 5 | 5% |
| My Guy* | 4 | 4% |
| Oh Boy! | 3 | 3% |
| Cosmo Girl* | 3 | 3% |
| Honey | 2 | 2% |
| Elle girl* | 2 | 2% |
| Hi!* | 2 | 2% |
| Look-in* | 2 | 2% |
| NME* | 2 | 2% |
| Pink* | 2 | 2% |
| Boyfriend | 1 | 1% |
| Bravo Girl* | 1 | 1% |
| Girl | 1 | 1% |
| June & Schoolfriend* | 1 | 1% |
| Cosmopolitan* | 1 | 1% |
| Melody Maker* | 1 | 1% |
| Kerrang* | 1 | 1% |
| School Friend | 1 | 1% |

| | | |
|------------------------|---|----|
| June | 1 | 1% |
| Bunty* | 1 | 1% |
| Hits* | 1 | 1% |
| Clothes Show Magazine* | 1 | 1% |
| FHM* | 1 | 1% |
| Marie Claire* | 1 | 1% |
| Number One* | 1 | 1% |
| Fast Forward* | 1 | 1% |
| Suzy* | 1 | 1% |
| Teen Beat* | 1 | 1% |
| Top Of The Pops* | 1 | 1% |
| YM* | 1 | 1% |

* Answers added in the free text field, most of which are outside the scope of this research, for example because they are targeted at an older age range, outside the time period, or are focused on a particular subject, rather than the general 'lifestyle' magazines I discuss here.

Did you ever write in to the problem page or letters page in any teen magazine?

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----|
| No, I never wrote any letter to any teen magazine | 100 |
| I wrote to the problem page at least once | 8 |
| I wrote to the letters page at least once | 1 |

What was your letter about? Did you get an answer, either in print or by post?

| |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A crush on a female teacher. It was printed along with a reply. |
| a drawing of jarvis cocker. it was published. |
| Everything in my life is a complete disaster (it wasn't. No reply) |
| I vividly remember that I was, at 12, very concerned that I had a weird growth between my legs as it hadn't been explained in any kind of sex education. It was my clitoris. I don't remember getting any kind of answer. |
| I wrote in when my parents were considering fostering, and I had an answer in print. |
| Liking a boy and wanting to know how to get him to like me back, if I remember correctly |

Appendix 2: Analysis framework

1. Which magazine, when?
2. What is the contested topic?
3. Whose voice/perspective sparks the debate? producer? (editor, writer, The Magazine, etc), reader? third party? (e.g. parents, boys/men, other authority figures)
4. Who responds?
5. Is the response in an accepted form (e.g. 'Oi!' in *Mizz*: letters page which encourages debate)? A special event (eg Bertha Mary Jenkins in the *GOP*)?
6. Does the magazine respond?
7. Does the magazine response encourage or shut down further debate? (Short editorial reply (like Samantha's in Jackie)? Full-fledged article? Staged debate? Long running series?)
8. How is the relationship between reader and producer? (formal, informal, equal, authoritarian, etc)
9. What is being negotiated here? (sides of argument, relationship to girls' lives and roles, etc)
10. How are participants constructed? Who is 'winning', whose arguments are being emphasised and valued, etc?
11. How does this relate to the magazine's usual 'party line'?
12. Who is progressive and who conservative?
13. What is the ideal reader of this content?
14. What language choices are being made (e.g. lexical choices, voice, tense, style, grammar)? What effects do they have?
15. Are feminist principles active in this interaction?
16. Is the layout and design of the page doing any particular work here?
17. How does this contested issue relate to others?
18. How does this relate to wider events in society at the time?

Appendix 3: Published work

Following is a version of the section of chapter five dealing with *Honey* magazine, published as:

Lovegrove, E. (2018) 'Interactions in the Text: Becoming a woman in 1970s teen magazines', *Logos*, 29(2–3), pp. 37–45.