

'Who's the girl with the kissin' lips?' Constructions of class, popular culture and agentic girlhood in *Girl*, *Princess*, *Jackie* and *Bunty* in the 1960s.

This article focuses on four British periodicals which contained comic strips and were aimed at girls and young women: *Girl*, *Princess*, *Jackie* and *Bunty*<sup>1</sup>. It will explore how these titles depicted agentic girlhood, class and popular culture. It begins by contextualising the titles before analysing the content through the notion of girlhood as a social construction. This concept derives from the work of Allison James and Alan Prout (2015: iix) who offer a powerful lens for the discipline of Childhood Studies in their insistence on the 'historically and culturally specific constitution of childhood in and through discourse'.

These comics were designed to address different implied audiences in terms of age and class, although they did appeal to actual readers across such boundaries. In the 1960s *Girl* and *Princess* were both intended for middle-class readers, whilst *Bunty* and *Jackie* were aimed at working-class girls. *Girl* was intended to appeal to readers from as young as 9 years old up to late teens, although predominantly to those at the older end of the range. Generally *Princess* had a slightly younger audience, with an emphasis on younger teens. *Bunty* was aimed at readers under twelve, whilst *Jackie* firmly targeted the teenager. The producers' views on girlhood, their social constructions of it, cross-cut by class and age, had an impact upon the narratives and other elements offered as we shall see.

These periodicals changed throughout the 1960s, but there are some common strands which this article will focus on. Although these titles were part of the popular culture of the era and it might be thought that they reflected and engaged with other popular culture, this was not necessarily the case. Periodical publishers tended to construct and offer a version of popular culture which they felt was appropriate for girl readers and acceptable to parents and other adult gatekeepers. This resulted in narratives and other content also being in line with adult constructions of girlhood, often as in need of protection, and there was rarely any consultation with girls as to content development. Publishers assumed, paternalistically, that they knew best. This filtering of content also indicates that publishers often positioned what they produced as outside, or partly detached from, popular culture.

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<sup>1</sup> *Girl* (Hulton Press, 1951-1964), *Princess*, (Fleetway, 1960-1967), *Jackie* (DC Thomson, 1964-1993) and *Bunty* (DC Thomson, 1958-2001)

However, to focus entirely on adults omits girls as stakeholders. Publishers attempted to attract potential readers by offering adventure stories in which girls solve mysteries, or narratives about careers, which vary according to the target audiences for the comics, amongst other items. In effect they offered material about agency in attempting to balance the interests of young readers against that of adult stakeholders and company ideology, mediating the interests of children and adults to gain consent from both groups. How these titles did that, and to what extent, varied.

This construction of the girl reader, and the offering of a bounded girlhood within the titles, can be seen as antithetical to full agency. Adults determined the parameters of girlhood, and, as Jennifer Higginbotham (2013: 182) argues regarding life writing, girl readers ‘had not yet been granted a social voice’. Agency in this context is partial, then, as Allison and Adrian James (2008) state, but this does mean that children ‘not only have *some* control over the direction their own lives take but also, importantly, ... play *some* part in the changes that take place in society more widely’ (9, my emphasis). This is reflected in how content tends to focus upon agency within genres, narratives and items where that might be considered socially acceptable for girls<sup>2</sup>. This does allow for a limited and partial agency in the terms James and James suggest, given age as a significant limitation upon young people’s actions. Further, there were points where these titles addressed and engaged the reader as an independent social actor, as we shall see, and girls’ actual voices also appear, again in very specific adult controlled contexts. This is at times akin to agency as Berry Mayall describes it, as about how children and young people’s interaction with others ‘makes a difference – to a relationship or to a decision, to the workings of a set of social assumptions or constraints’ (2002: 21). Even though feedback was not sought by publishers on content, mechanisms became established through which girls spoke through the text to other girl readers.

Whilst popular culture and consumption were often omitted from these texts, there were depictions of girls engaged in activities seen positively by publishers in an attempt to both constrain and guide girl readers. This can be seen as relating to and reinforcing girls, as James and James say of childhood (2008: 5) as having a, ‘collective position as a minority group in society’. Their agency, because of age and gender, is not fully acknowledged by the adult world. These periodicals, particularly for younger readers, attempt to construct a timeless

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<sup>2</sup> There were sometimes science fiction or fantasy narratives too, but not as commonly as realism.

girlhood, one outside society, which contributes to a subordinated structural position regarding generation and gender. In *Bunty*, for instance, a title aimed at readers under twelve, one can identify a concerted effort to avoid popular culture, whether in the form of television, music, fashion or advertising. There are similar attempts in *Princess*, also aimed at a younger age group, where contemporary working life and fashion are also largely eschewed.

Age, then, intersects with girlhood to create a construction of early girlhood largely disconnected from popular culture, style and agency and a teenage or older reader seen as more engaged and agentic, although still in a limited way. The titles aimed at older readers, *Girl* and *Jackie*, offer a range of narratives in which agency is attached to what might be considered more realistic, indeed, achievable aims, should readers decide to emulate them. Further, *Jackie* is the exception regarding popular culture, which dominates the title. Like the earlier publications for girls that Penny Tinkler (2000) analysed, these publications are implicated 'in the construction of the 'girl'' (99), both in the shape of the characters within the publications and the external readers. The filtering of popular culture and agency can be seen as an attempt to 'protect' girl readers, positioning them as a passive, vulnerable and homogenous group, likely to be influenced in negative ways by representations; an approximation of media effects.

### **Comics, magazines and resonant images.**

These publications were comics, to a lesser, or greater, degree. This adds another element to their relationship to other popular culture, as comics were seen by many teachers, librarians and others as precisely that, and very problematic. As Gibson (2008a) states, 'Comics have historically been seen in Britain as ephemera for younger readers, or as a threat to literacy and morality, both addictive and corrupting, rather than as a medium that can address any theme or audience' (151)<sup>3</sup>.

British children's comics were compilations of comic strip narratives. However, there were often elements in girls' titles, derived from magazines, hinting at how gender might intersect with format. Of the titles discussed here, only *Bunty* consists predominantly of comic strip

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<sup>3</sup> Given this, a partial rejection of other popular culture may be seen as an attempt to present the comic to gatekeepers as an acceptable alternative to seemingly more dangerous material.

materials. The other titles, in contrast, allowed the possibility of engaging with popular culture and style in pin-ups and other non-comic elements.

These titles for girls were part of a much larger genre, not isolated examples. Periodicals containing comic strips were, between the 1950s and 1980s, a major form of entertainment for girls. As Paul Gravett and Peter Stanbury state (2006), there were over fifty titles specifically created for girls during this period and sales reached up to one million per week for the most popular of these titles. However, this comic culture for girls was replaced in the 1980s by magazines with similar content to those aimed at women, something the success of *Jackie* can be argued to have contributed to.

Given that the titles changed over time they cannot be seen as ideological monoliths providing a single unchanging view of girlhood or popular culture, class and agency. As *Jackie* changed over time, for instance, it began to contain fewer comic strips and the romance narratives they contained also altered in terms of theme, as discussed by Barker (1989). This subsequently helped to establish the magazine as the aspirational format for girls. Comics became associated with increasingly younger audiences and there was also a gender shift so that comics became seen as almost wholly addressing boys. Instead, what the titles discussed here can be seen as creating is what Patricia Holland (2004) calls 'resonant images' (3-4). Shirley J. Pressler (2010) summarises Holland's argument, saying that a resonant image is,

a key public image reflected repeatedly through different pictures, creating a typology and meaning in the collective public consciousness. [They are] dependant on socio-cultural and historical factors, so changes in images can reveal changes in social thinking and vice versa (16).

What these periodicals offer the readers are shifting resonant images of girlhood, associated with changing dominant discourses about behaviours, attitudes and activities usually determined by publishers and policed by other adult stakeholders such as parents and teachers.

Any limitations to the girlhood offered to girls by periodicals may tell us more about adult desires to control the female child than about girls themselves. Tensions with regard to these publications tend to occur when adult commentators saw the content as stepping beyond the

bounds of 'appropriate' or 'respectable' behaviour and attitudes in girls, something which changed over the history of the titles. This is shown by Tinkler (1995) and Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig (1986), in looking at periodicals before the comic, including the *Girl's Own Paper*, (Religious Tract Society, 1880-1956). Over time the market started to divide titles into those for girls and those for women, and class became a factor. For example, 'millgirl papers' (whose themes of isolated girls' struggles re-emerged in comics for younger readers in the 1950s) were wholly aimed at working-class readers in their late teens and early twenties, including Amalgamated Press title *Girls' Friend* (AP, 1899-1931). This means that the emergence of the comic is influenced by earlier constructions of the girl in periodicals, cross-cut by age and class which acted as models, influencing both the content and physical aspects of the titles. Earlier resonant images and discourses of girlhood then, impact upon those discussed below.

### **Why *Girl* is significant.**

The girls' comic appears in the 1950s as part of the expansion of publishing following the relaxation of paper rationing after the Second World War. Generally, the shift to comic strip format was a slow conversion, although initial market leader *School Friend* was re-launched as a comic in 1950 having previously been a text-only periodical (Gifford, 1975: 141)<sup>4</sup>. These titles offered innovations as well as some continuity with the earlier periodicals. For instance, school stories began to focus on children attending state schools as day pupils, which meant that narratives about family life began to appear.

Fashionable activities also featured, including ballet and ice-skating. This engagement with activities considered stylish and appropriate can be seen in a wider cultural context, for instance, through the impact of Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* performed by Nureyev and Fonteyn at the Royal Ballet in 1965 and also through the appearance of films such as *The Red Shoes* (Powell and Pressburger, 1948). Similarly as ballet waned, gymnastics became popular, and appeared in comics, particularly after the televising of the Munich Summer Olympics in 1972 where Olga Korbut made a huge impact. In both cases, then, the comics are responding to cultural change. These shifts in the types of leisure and education featured in comics also indicated the growth of the middle-classes and so they contain many resonant images of middle-class agentic girlhood.

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<sup>4</sup> AP, 1919-1929, story paper and 1950-1965, comic.

The new publications proved very popular, with *School Friend* for instance, achieving a circulation of around one million a week in the early 1950s (Tinkler, 1995: 60). However, in the development of titles aimed at girls, it is *Girl* rather than *School Friend* that is seen as the most significant, partly due to high production values. *Girl* was expensive and was printed on glossy, high quality paper in four-colour rotogravure. The tactile quality of the paper and the quality of the printing can be seen as connoting the class position of the implied reader, as does the broadsheet format in which *Girl* was produced. Sister to the *Eagle*, *Girl* was followed by two more ‘companion papers’, as they were known, *Robin* and *Swift*, aimed at younger readers<sup>5</sup>. It is also important that whilst the other titles are bird’s names, *Girl* is marked as ‘other’ in terms of gender by both title and by the logo, a girl’s head.

*Girl* was also seen as a watershed because the editor, Marcus Morris, was a clergyman. The intention of *Girl*’s producers was to create a middle-class comic which combined adventure narratives with sound Christian (and British) values. They initially attempted to offer a very wide range of images of girl and womanhood. For instance, the cover story of the first edition in 1951 featured a pilot, ‘Kitty Hawke and her All-Girl Crew’. However, these stories were replaced within two years by school-girl investigator stories like ‘Wendy and Jinx’, although these too show girls making a difference and changing assumptions about what girls might be able to do. The change was motivated by the findings of a reader survey, something rarely undertaken, which led Morris to conclude that adventure stories did not translate directly from boys to girls’ comics. In their biography of the publisher, Sally Morris and Jan Hallwood (1998) report that Morris said of these changes that,

[w]e had received reports that quite a number of girls were reading

*Eagle* and drew the wrong conclusion; we had made *Girl* too masculine.

We therefore made it more romantic in its approach, more feminine. (164)

The change of style meant that female protagonists were given personal reasons to act, constructing the girl as, for instance, caring and protective of younger children. This indicates agency on the part of the readers and responsiveness by the publisher, although the result is more conformist regarding constructions of girlhood than the material offered in the original adult-generated content.

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<sup>5</sup> *Eagle* (Hulton, 1950-1969), *Swift* (Hulton Press, 1954-1962), *Robin* (Hulton Press, 1952-1969)

*Girl*'s middle-class ideology could be seen in many aspects of the comic, but also in their belief that girls could have both some control over their own lives and play a part in wider societal changes. This was particularly reflected in stories focused on professions for girls, which dominated the periodical, in turn suggesting agency is possible for the character, and so, potentially, for the reader. These included 'Susan of St. Bride's' about a nurse, 'Tessa of Television', a secretary, and 'Angela, Air Hostess' each predominantly focusing on the working life of the titular character.

For example, in a narrative which begins the start of the 1960s, Susan is seen returning to St Bride's to take up a role as a new staff nurse<sup>6</sup>. Her training complete, Susan finds much has changed, including the takeover of St Bride's by St Botolph's hospital, which has opened a private wing in the town in a contemporary building (Susan notices the building as it has changed how the town looks). The story explores what the takeover means and the impact that the new management team has upon the staff at St Bride's. It is engaged with the contemporary world, but is still didactic regarding the behaviour of characters and, by implication, readers. For instance, in the same story Susan sees another nurse crying, a nurse who is accompanied by a policeman. Curiosity aroused, she firmly tells herself 'Nurses don't pry and gossip – I must try not to look'. Changes bring opportunities, the narrative argues, but also problems, and the overall message is that one should be suspicious of the new.

However, in the same edition, Tessa accompanies Jim Johnson, producer of weekly news programme 'Here and There' and interviewer Nigel Rawlings to Paris to interview Jean Lefevre, a famous actor/producer<sup>7</sup>. When Jim has to leave to deal with a family emergency Tessa successfully takes over. Although exhausted she finds time to do a little tourism with Nigel before they fly back to London. Back home, as she lives with her family, Tessa tells her mother about the trip, and how she hopes it may lead to more exciting work. Here, the narrative focuses on new possibilities open to girls and how they might, in time, lead to other opportunities.

A similar focus on how work opens up possibilities for the young woman is evident in the narrative regarding Angela. It shows her exchanging flights with another air hostess to enable her to visit her friend and potential beau, Ian, in Australia. Whilst most of the narrative sets

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<sup>6</sup> Adam. Ruth, Bailey, Ray and Townsend, Philip. 'Susan of St Bride's in The New Staff Nurse' *Girl* Vol. 9, No.4, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1960. Longacre Press: 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Potter, Diana and Davy, Leo. 'Tessa of Television' *Girl* Vol. 9, No.4, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1960. Longacre Press: 3.

up the dramatic possibility that Ian will not be able to meet Angela in Sydney, due to his work, a sub-narrative focuses on Angela finding out about letters sent to her by Ian that have been hidden by her mother, as she disapproves of him. Here, then, we see the character using the advantages of her job to take control over other aspects of her life<sup>8</sup>.

A working life for women is proposed as ‘natural’, making this a significant title in relation to the changing role of young middle-class women. With their focus on what were seen as exciting, fashionable and attractive jobs, the stories are aspirational, yet also usually ‘appropriate’ in focusing on nurturing, caring and support roles, as explored by Gibson (2008b) in relation to nursing in comics.

Alongside these career-focused characters are stories of private, all-girl schools inherited from the earlier text-based periodicals. There are two types, the first typified by the ‘Wendy and Jinx’ strip which featured longer mystery stories and the second by ‘Lettice Leaf’ a short comedy strip. The continuation of these narratives indicates how girlhood and genre can be seen as intertwined. Publishers seemingly associate certain story types, particularly school stories, with publications for girls. The emergence of ballet as a theme also reinforced the centrality of school stories in offering images of schools devoted to dance, including, ‘Belle of the Ballet’. In this edition, Belle has supported Katie, a ‘poor girl who dreams of being a ballet star’ in encouraging management to make Katie her understudy. However, Belle is ill and likely to be replaced. The narrative explores how one girl might support others when one is in an advantageous position<sup>9</sup>.

The social importance of ballet was further reinforced by *Girl’s* Ballet Scholarship Scheme which began in 1955 in association with the Royal Academy of Dancing and Sadler’s Wells School. By 1957, 150 scholars got free tuition from the RAD and two were full time at Sadler’s Wells (Morris and Hallwood, 1998: 166). This reflects a shift in understandings of dance from being seen as a problematic display of female bodies to being seen as promoting gracefulness and femininity as part of a middle-class leisure activity. However, it is also presented as a career, and being able to apply for scholarship and tuition engages the girl with a direct form of agency. In the edition discussed here, the story about Belle faces a page

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<sup>8</sup> Roland, Betty and Pout, Dudley. ‘Angela Air Hostess’ *Girl* Vol. 9, No.4, 23rd January 1960. Longacre Press: 7.

<sup>9</sup> Beardmore, George and Houghton, Stanley. ‘Belle of the Ballet’ *Girl* Vol. 9, No.4, 23rd January 1960. Longacre Press, p.10.



which centres on a crossword competition in which the main prizes are ballet dresses (11). This reinforces ballet as a practical option for both leisure and professionally for the reader<sup>10</sup>.

Whilst the comic strip was adapted to suit a female audience other aspects of the girls' comic came from women's magazines. For instance, *Girl* introduced the first fashion page in a comic in 1958. Overall, however, there were few actual items on fashion, and limited advertisements, except for Ladybird. In another engagement with the growth of teenage culture, *Girl* included pin-ups in the mid-1950s, the first Tommy Steele and the second Harry Belafonte (images of the royal family also appeared). However, there were limits to who was considered an appropriate subject given the underlying ideology of the publication, so pin-ups were either native or 'colonial' British.

The publishers also engaged with popular culture to a limited degree in the *Girl Film and TV Annual*, a volume first produced in the late 1950s. Making media the focus of a separate book serves to quarantine it, especially given the cost of these hard-back volumes. Further, within these annuals there is a distinct hierarchy. For instance the 1965 edition contains a great deal on theatre, film and ballet. Popular culture appears much less and usually in the form of photo-shoots, such as an item entitled 'The Pop Girls' including Dusty Springfield and Cilla (1965: 24-27), rather than the full articles accorded to the other arts. Popular culture was seen as offering potential employment, so one article features the roles involved in creating a music programme for television, including teenagers acting as programme advisors (1965: 12-16). Similar patterns of content also appear in the general *Girl* annuals. For example, the 1965 annual contains 18 pages on pop culture out of a total of 159. Popular culture features as only a fraction of the content of these books, suggesting the producers' view it as insignificant, but the inclusion of female stars and the emphasis on work is suggestive of agency.

A further significant aspect of the weekly comic of *Girl* was the intention to educate through the inclusion of a number of items such as biographies of significant women, bible based comic strips and adaptations of classic fiction. What is also apparent from reading *Girl* is that the reader is directed towards what might be seen as suitable or improving activities, again linking leisure and constructions of girlhood and class. Overall, this range of stories and activities suggests that *Girl* may have acted as schooling in femininity which reflected

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed my mother trained to be a professional ballerina, an ambition buoyed by both *Girl* and various novels on the topic.

notions of a middle-class Christian ideal, whilst also offering narratives focused on opportunities for personal agency and moving beyond the home.

Certain elements of *Girl* suggest different constructions and understandings of girlhood, from the pin-up with its association with teenage culture, to the narratives about working lives and the assumption that paid work outside the home is appropriate for girls, to problem page 'What's Your Worry?', which often addressed very different issues from the rest of the comic (in the chosen example, the page focuses on shyness (14)). These elements expose tensions and shifts regarding resonant images of girlhood.

'What's Your Worry?' began in response to unsolicited letters received from readers (Morris and Hallwood, 1998: 168). The letters received were very varied and featured, for instance, fashion and beauty queries, but it was those about cases of sexual abuse and requests for information about sex and childbirth that had the most impact upon the staff and prompted them to begin the column (ibid: 169). The problem page, then, was a space in which the voice of actual girls appeared and was responded to. Choosing to write reflected the agency of the readers, and that they had, in effect, created the page, is an intervention regarding content.

Overall, *Girl's* significance was such that it became the model adapted by publishers attempting to draw girls into reading periodicals, a model which only tentatively engaged with popular culture. Whilst the actual readership was across class, the title could be seen as offering an aspirational middle-class ideal and influential resonant images of girlhood and young womanhood. It also engaged with notions of agency in part through focusing on career as natural, and in being responsive to readers.

### ***Princess and Bunty*: Class, format and content.**

Both *Princess* and *Bunty* emerged during a burst of publishing aimed at pre-teens in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The changes in publishing for younger readers were initiated by the Dundee-based DC Thomson whose *Bunty* became the market leader, longest-lived of the genre. Competitor, Fleetway, who had taken over from AP, responded with *Princess* for pre-teens and younger teenagers.

For DC Thomson, launching a comic for girls was a new initiative. They drew staff from the part of the company that produced comics meaning that periodicals for younger girls were separated from the teenage titles which were produced by the woman's magazine department. This had an impact upon content through the dominance of the comic strip. The only pages

not containing comics in *Bunty* were typically the title page featuring the ‘Bunty’ picture story where there are captions, but no speech balloons, competitions to win, for instance bicycles, radios, record players and cameras (implying mobility and agency), ‘Cosy Corner’ which featured letters from readers (typically about stories in the comic, holidays and pets), advertisements for other DC Thomson products and a cut-out doll<sup>11</sup>.

It is in the last item that style, fashion and popular culture were particularly visible in a title which rarely engaged with it otherwise. *Bunty*’s Cut-Out Wardrobe linked with the front page short story and the title to create an identity for the comic. Despite being drawn in very different styles, the cover narrative and back-page doll are intended to be the same person, the titular *Bunty*. Whilst the clothes were sometimes almost parodic in their approximation of fashions, they were significant to readers, reflecting the long tradition of producing these dolls in both Britain and the USA<sup>12</sup>. In the interviews I conducted in relation to my 2015 monograph, 56 readers from across Britain who read comics between the 1950s and early 2000s offered accounts of their engagement with comics and a number mentioned the dolls, such as Fiona, who said, ‘Perhaps the cut out doll, more than anything, inspired my initial career as a designer after studying Fashion at Trent Poly’ (Gibson, 2015: 116)<sup>13</sup>. One could, of course, design clothes for the dolls too, moving beyond the range of options that were offered. A similar doll was sometimes offered with nursery comic *Twinkle* (DC Thomson, 1968-1999), so connecting girls and fashion from an early age. Engaging with the doll demanded dexterity to avoid cutting off the tabs that held the clothing on to the doll, and also destroyed the last page of the comic, so any reader had to decide whether the story or the doll were more important. Whilst one could read the story and then cut out the doll, this meant that re-reading, a common practice with comics, was impossible. Choosing costumes and designing new ones also, of course, engage the reader with making choices and exhibiting agency.

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<sup>11</sup> There are occasional adverts for products like Weetabix, Kodak cameras, chewing gum and postage stamps in the mid-1960s, but they appear rarely.

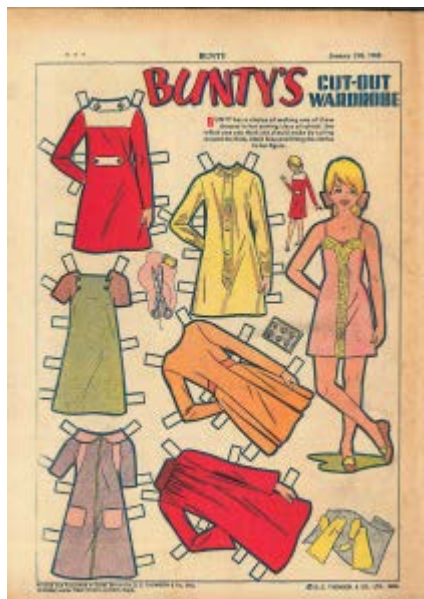
<sup>12</sup> A broad history is offered at <http://www.opdag.com/history.html> and a range of examples at <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/QuanYin5/british-bunty-paper-dolls-international-paper-doll/>

<sup>13</sup> This project has continued to grow, with over 200 readers offering reading autobiographies.

The clothing changed for festivals and seasons, as well as reflecting shifts in fashion over time, as these examples from the Femorabilia collection at Liverpool John Moores University



indicate.





What the dolls also do, in the elements of the page that will be discarded, is show the context for the clothes and additional material, such as the racket, ball and case on the tennis image which was published on May 27<sup>th</sup> 1967. Tennis was a significant activity for girls, with a number of British players proving important at this time, particularly Ann Jones who lost in the Wimbledon Women's Singles final to Billie Jean King later that summer. Consequently, this image could be said to link to female aspiration in sport as well as representing a leisure activity<sup>14</sup>. On the Christmas doll, from the winter of 1967, visiting friends and opening presents are depicted. In addition, a church is featured, which appears to have figures walking towards it. There is an assumption that this too is firmly part of Christmas, reflecting the publisher's religious beliefs.

In Figs. 3 and 4 above, the latter, published in October 1966, gives the reader a brief to choose what Bunty is going to wear to what is described as a 'Pop 'n' Sandwiches Party'. The additional images flag up pop as in music, given the depiction of a radio, but also pop as in drink, and, indeed, pop fashion, neatly blurring the possible meanings of the focus of the party. The former gives a brief for a school sewing class and depicts cloth and a dress pattern along with other accoutrements in a comic published in January 1968. The assumption, of course, is that any reader will understand what these things are, and possibly also have sewing lessons themselves. Choice, creativity and agency are connected, then, in the readers' use of and engagement with the dolls.

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<sup>14</sup> Ann Jones played throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and had a high profile, becoming an early female television commentator on the sport in the early 1970s.

In publishing *Bunty* DC Thomson specifically attempted to appeal to working class readers, so creating new markets by further differentiating the audience for comics and responding to Hulton's development of the middle-class market. Notions of class can be seen in format, in being a tabloid printed on soft newsprint (unlike *Girl*) and in the narratives. For example, in an annual from 1968, which includes a few stories about work, something uncommon in both annuals and weekly comics<sup>15</sup>, the main one is entitled 'Hairdresser on Wheels' and the narrative concerns the owner, Mandy, being asked to trim a poodle<sup>16</sup>. This differs from the roles depicted in *Girl* in that the job roles in *Bunty* can be seen as achievable for a working class readership, or as aspirational for them, whilst those in *Girl* are focused on middle-class aspirations and notions of professionalism. However, Mandy, like her counterparts, shows ingenuity and makes a success out of these unfortunate circumstances. Indeed, the idea of doing one's best in the face of difficulty and overcoming opposition is clear from other narratives, both historical and contemporary, where the main characters include a servant (a role that appeared regularly in the weekly narratives), a cleaner looking for an opportunity to break into acting and a girl in an orphanage who takes care of the younger children. Whilst it is the actions of the girls which result in their successfully helping others, or making their own situations better, the roles are more constrained than that of the girls in the titles for older and middle class readers. There are exceptions, however, in that this annual contains two stories featuring teachers. It is not their professional life that is the focus here, however, but their support of specific pupils through difficulty, again emphasising the construction of the girl as caring for others. Similarly, in one of the weekly comics (May 27<sup>th</sup> 1961) the jobs that appear include youth club leader, flower seller and student nurse, the latter a point of cross-over with the more middle-class titles.

The working roles offered to the reader reflect the way that *Bunty* built on the tradition of the early twentieth millgirl papers, also aimed at working-class readers. Millgirl papers typically featured stories about Cinderella figures working in laundries, factories or shops. *Bunty*, then, owed much of its approach to papers aimed at older readers who were defined as girls in an earlier period, showing some continuity in narratives over time.

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<sup>15</sup> The narratives tended to be set in schools, often on sporting themes, and girl-detective mysteries, plus Cinderella ones, all inherited from the story-papers of the 1930s and on. Work did feature, often with a working-class viewpoint, but were less frequent.

<sup>16</sup> *Bunty* Annual 1968, DC Thomson, Dundee. Annuals contained stand-alone stories which did not necessarily feature characters that appeared in the weekly comics.

Continuity can also be seen in the continued dominance of the school story, most notably through ‘The Four Marys’ which was the most popular strip throughout the life of the comic. Such stories, part of both middle and working-class girls’ papers, can also be firmly linked to changes in education during the twentieth century. *Bunty* and others reworked the schoolgirl stories in response to a changing experience of school in the 1950s, by, for instance, making one ‘Mary’ a working-class scholarship pupil. *Bunty* also had an increased focus on state schools and home life as well as private and boarding schools. Such was its influence that even *Princess* adopted some of the narratives DC Thomson initiated, as in the case of ‘The Happy Days’ which focused on family life<sup>17</sup>. Where *Bunty* differed from earlier publications and those aimed predominantly at middle-class readers was that many of the school stories focused on the problems of being a working-class outsider, as is also the case with many of the work-related narratives. The stories tended to be concerned with the struggle of such outsiders to deal with the snobbery of, and bullying by, both staff and pupils in private schools. Consequently, whilst agency may feature in terms of solving mysteries, most of the narratives are focussed on difficulties regarding access and opportunity, and overcoming huge obstacles, creating an overarching narrative that girlhood exists in a space outside of contemporary life, one which, in addition, does not relate to consumerism or popular culture.

Fleetway’s *Princess* for pre-teens and younger teenagers, in contrast, was a deliberate attempt to court what was perceived as *Girl*’s middle-class market, copying its format, whilst being aimed at younger readers. The construction of the girl reader here is a person who is predominantly interested in pets, nature and outdoor activities, (indeed, one competition offers a pony as first prize, suggesting that the winning family would probably be able to keep a horse, although an alternative is offered of a family holiday in Spain) but also in popular culture<sup>18</sup>. This is, however, a wide-ranging definition, as it incorporates both regular information, features and photographs of ballet stars and ‘Moira’s Notice Board’ a single page looking at ‘news and features around the show business world’ (20)<sup>19</sup>. Another edition offers a double-page spread entitled ‘Moira’s Notice Board Covers the Pop Scene’, the title suggesting that this is an not a regular occurrence<sup>20</sup>. Here news about The Troggs and Manfred Mann are the first items, but again there are elements also devoted to theatre and

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<sup>17</sup> Jenny Butterworth and Andrew Wilson in *Princess and Princess Tina* (1960-1973). Very distinctive artistic style and by far the most popular narrative in those titles.

<sup>18</sup> *Princess*, 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1966, Fleetway publications, p.11.

<sup>19</sup> *Princess*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1966, Fleetway publications.

<sup>20</sup> *Princess*, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1966, Fleetway publications.

film, implying readers able to afford visits to both. Pin-ups do appear, but they too are periodic rather than regular features. This all serves to suggest a slightly distanced and limited engagement to popular culture.

In terms of subject matter, *Princess* was both similar to and different from comics like *Bunty* in incorporating a wide range of non-fiction text and photograph based items rather than stories and comic strips. Where stories do appear they are usually like those in *Bunty*. Further, in comparison *Bunty* there are few comic strip based pages, typically totalling around eight out of thirty to thirty-two pages. The dominance of non-fiction here could be seen as carrying class connotations. In relation to these two titles, the structures differ and so fiction, working-class and entertainment form a binary within gender with one encompassing non-fiction, middle-class and education.

There is more input from readers than in the other two titles above and this serves to offer a number of alternative voices to that of the publishers, although they would, of course, select which letters were published. Whilst there are letters from readers in all of the titles, in *Princess*, readers' questions are focused on homework and careers, as well as pets, aspects of the world outside the periodical, rather than stories within the comic. There are also 'Readers' Photographs' pages, emphasising camera ownership and, emphatically, use<sup>21</sup>. In this example there is, not surprisingly given the time of year, a number of holiday photographs, all sent by 11-14 year olds. This serves to emphasise class and agency, in families being able to afford foreign holidays, including Switzerland, Spain and Holland, and in owning a camera and selecting which pictures to send.

Clothing features in the form of advertisements for various patterns, mostly from De Trevi. In addition, there is occasional advice on hair and other aspects of beauty, as exemplified in item 'Smart Girl', which argues that 'A party is the best excuse for a new hairstyle', adding 'Here is one which is easily set and which you can wear in two ways', giving instructions and diagrams (18)<sup>22</sup>. That this is considered a significant item is shown in the way it is the cover feature, showing a photograph of two girls in rollers talking on the telephone. Other 'Smart Girl' columns include 'seasonal dresses for out-of-school-girls', which focuses on clothing for seven to eleven year olds (contrasting with the ages of the photographers and further showing the complex constructions of girlhood the periodical offers). Here the language used

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<sup>21</sup> *Princess*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1966, Fleetway publications, p.32.

<sup>22</sup> *Princess*, 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1966, Fleetway publications.



suggests a knowledgeable audience (including parents, as there is much emphasis on cost, the range being from 75 shillings to 3 guineas, and washing advice), as, for instance, when the writer emphasises the ‘Op-Art’ design on one<sup>23</sup>. Again, however, these are small in number in comparison to the material on pets, nature and horse-riding. It may be that one can identify a linking of the girl with the natural world, an almost Romantic construction of childhood, in juxtaposition and tension with elements more about consumption and popular culture. This range of material allows the reader to pick and choose, rather than constructing a more unified single identity, as is the case in *Girl* and *Bunty*, emphasising agency on the part of reader, at the level of their engagement with the periodical.

Even the covers offer a dramatic contrast to those of both *Bunty* and *Girl* as they did not feature a comic strip or comic art, but instead staged, formal, full-page photographic images featuring girls, making it look more like a woman’s magazine. *Princess* also mimicked the format of women’s magazines by using full colour on glossy paper for at least some of the contents. Another statement of the publisher’s intent was that the annual was called a ‘Gift Book’, a term associated with middle-class women’s publications.

*Princess*’s magazine format signalled who the intended audience was and offered resonant images of middle-class girlhoods, with many features signalling a degree of agency, although not usually an engagement with popular culture. One could argue that this title encompasses the complex range of interests, engagements and activities of actual readers, rather than providing a more unified and singular construction.

The title was clearly intended as a challenge to comics like *Bunty*. The success of *Princess* implied that even at a point where girls’ comics were the more dominant of the two formats, it was the magazine that would become central to girls’ culture, with its associations of adulthood (especially womanhood) and sophistication.

### **Jackie ‘for go-ahead teens’<sup>24</sup>.**

The strap line ‘for go-ahead teens’ which existed for the first twenty issues of *Jackie*, before it became so established that such a claim was no longer needed, is an assertion of modernity, of activity, of agency and the attachment of that to a specific age range. For example, the cover of the second edition, (Fig 5) contains two images, one of a fashionably dressed

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<sup>23</sup> *Princess*, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1966, Fleetway publications, p.18.

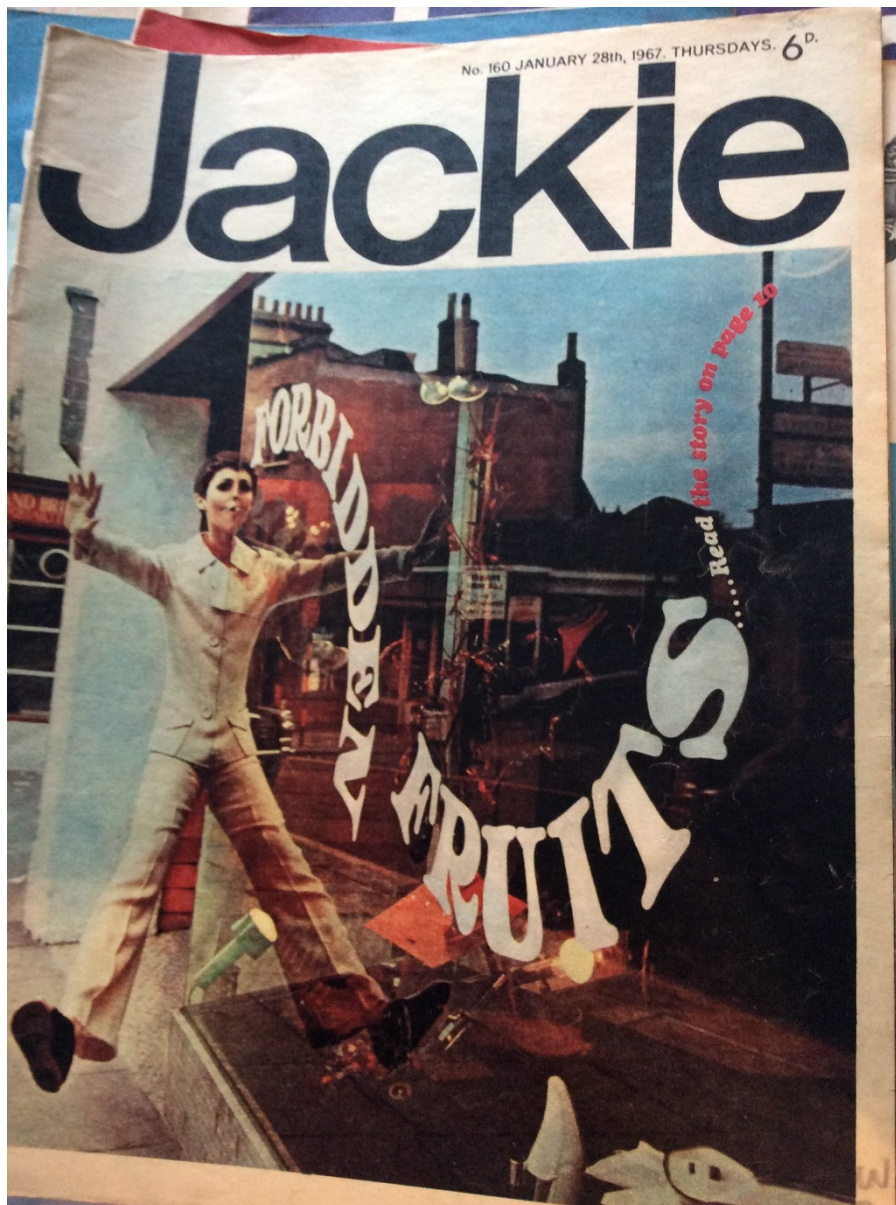
<sup>24</sup> *Jackie* 18<sup>th</sup> January 1964, No.2, DC Thomson, cover page.

teenage girl doing a high-kick, the other of Heinz Burt, best known for the single 'Just like Eddie'<sup>25</sup>. The cover design and layout is intended to illustrate the energy of the title and can be contrasted to the considerably more formal ones offered by the others. Later editions reflect those of *Princess* in frequently featuring girls on the cover, who could be readers, or be idealised selves, sometimes with boys, but usually alone, either in city settings or engaged in a number of activities. It is significant that these were not studio photographs, but looked much more informal, again contributing to the identity of the periodical and the implied reader (Fig 6).

Looking at range of covers, there are a number of different layouts used throughout the 1960s. Whilst the lettering of the title quickly settled on a single style (see Fig 6) suggesting continuity and a fixed identity, other design elements, both on the cover and inside, were used to suggest the overall dynamism and diversity of *Jackie*, even when the contents themselves were formulaic.



<sup>25</sup> Although more, perhaps, for having been 'championed' by Joe Meek.



In addition, the various features described on the cover (Fig. 5) indicate the level of involvement with popular culture and consumption. The cover blurb mentions there being a number of pin-ups, beauty and fashion features and interviews with stars, along with a horoscope and 'pop gossip'<sup>26</sup>. The use of slang, something not used in the other titles, reflecting beliefs about bounded girlhood and propriety, also sets it apart. The later cover (Fig.6) has no need to establish content to such an extent, although the shop's name links with that of a narrative inside. Instead, the emphasis is on style, playfulness and consumption.

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<sup>26</sup> The format of the pin-ups was A3, sometimes double that if the centre double-spread was used. This is itself was a selling point.

Like *Princess*, *Jackie* contains a range of material, much of it non-fiction, with fewer comic strip and fictional materials (the former are described on the cover as ‘pic love stories’ which makes genre more conspicuous than format). However, unlike *Princess*, it does focus on a specific age range.

The voice of the reader is also emphasised, in that even in the 1964 edition, there is a letters page on the reverse of the cover. In the other titles letters tend to be towards the back of the publication, but this positioning makes an argument for *Jackie* as a whole as a ‘voice’ for young women. The title ‘Your Letter Page with Samantha in Charge’ uses the word ‘your’ to personalise the periodical, and to address every reader as, as it were, an individual, drawing readers into a more intimate relationship. The use of a female first name also suggests that the creators and editors are just like the reader, which, indeed, they were, to an extent, in being young women with a degree of independence, engaged with popular culture and working. The letters page remained in the same position into the 1970s, arguably making readers’ voices central to the appeal of the periodical.

This very different approach originates with *Jackie* being created by a woman’s magazine department rather than a children’s comic one. It was also a title which had a large number of young women on the staff. *Jackie* also, of course, appealed to younger readers, who were not yet working, but could see the possibilities for personal change in the examples set by those who created the periodical. The idea of the title as the ‘voice’ of the young woman is also evident in a response to one of the letters which purports to come from a male reader (1964: 2). This reader argues that all girls look alike when they adopt fashions in dress and make-up and says that a natural look reflects intelligence and independence. The editor’s comment, clearly aimed at building female solidarity (and house style), encouraging further discussion and, indeed, contributing to the idea of the fashionable girl as independent, says simply ‘I’m open for replies’.

A similar voice appears on the problem page (so showing that the title offers additional opportunities for readers to engage) unlike the one that appears in *Girl*, where the un-named advisors seemed older, more authoritative and didactic. Here the persona is more of a sister, or young aunt, someone slightly older, but not out of touch. Questions about relationships dominate, as is typically the case in similar pages in women’s magazines, although not in the other titles discussed, but advice is also sought regarding training and careers. Comments tend to be pithy and often assertive, such as the response to a letter asking what to do if a

boyfriend were to ask someone to prove their love. The response, far from suggesting this is acceptable, states 'I'd say, 'Why should I be a mug. I've more self-respect.' And I'd think twice about calling him my boy friend too!' (1964: 16). Here again, agency is positioned as significant, even though some of the other advice does suggest patience and passivity, indicating a rather different construction of girlhood to that seen earlier.

The comic strips in *Jackie*, as Barker (1989) proved, did not offer a monolithic ideology of girlhood. These resonant images or constructions of girlhood change over time, as do aspects of the other content. What these stories do have in common is their singular genre, romance, something very different from the wide-ranging narratives offered in the other titles. However, there are underlying elements about working life, family and friendships. For example in one narrative, entitled 'Like Crazy She Fell' the central female character is head-hunted by an air transport firm, although overall it remains a romance, as the title suggests (1964: 20-21)<sup>27</sup>. In another of the narratives, 'A Girl Can Dream' about having a crush on a pop star who turns out to be nice, and very ordinary, work also features in the background, as it makes it hard for the central character to get tickets for the show in which he is appearing, or get to it on time (1964: 3-5).

These narratives do focus on romance, but also on understanding oneself, or improving oneself, whether through education or fashion. Similarly, although some of the make-up and fashion items do make attracting a male the point of altering oneself, as in, 'Who's the girl with the kissin' lips?' (1964: 6) and the feature on wearing glasses (1964: 9) (although it could be argued that the article is rare in positioning glasses as an attractive addition to how one looks), others are described as simply about wanting to a different look for one's own satisfaction. The centre page spread, for instance, offers seven different styles featuring checks and moves between the idea of clothing as attracting male attention and feeling comfortable with yourself.

*Jackie* offers a distinct and singular voice, unlike the other titles, which is seemingly that of a young woman. Popular culture is central, as well as style and consumerism. The title articulates agency through the employment of female staff and readers' voices, suggesting the potential to influence content, as well as through the idea of consumer choice, but also, although less frequently, via advice on work and other aspects of life beyond the periodical.

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<sup>27</sup> There are no writer's or artist's names given for either this or the following, as was typical practice for that publisher.

## **Conclusion.**

Despite a degree of consistency in what is seen as appropriately 'girlish' there are shifts across time and specific inflections in these texts depending on publishers' assumptions about the age and class of the reader. The comics show how girlhood as a structure was cross-cut by class, with different expectations and possibilities offered to working and middle-class girls. Further, aspirations were often class specific, as depicted in the comics, although social mobility for working class readers did feature.

Tinkler (2000; 98), suggests periodical publishers were, 'amongst the first to recognize the commercial possibilities of 'girls' and 'teenagers' as distinct from 'children' or 'women''. The emergence of girlhood as a cultural construct has, then, as the content of these titles suggests, economic and ideological determinants.

*Girl, Bunty, Jackie* and *Princess* offer some continuity of the attitudes, ideologies and subject matter found in the earlier publications for girls. Simply the title of *Princess*, for instance, has connotations of traditional femininity that are partially supported within the text. However, as explored, they offer varying depictions of agentic girlhood and popular culture, whether through narrative or other elements. They offer a shifting range of resonant images of girlhood, and feature the social voice of the girl, responding and contributing to a number of gradual transformations in the target audiences (and the social definition of girlhood) regarding, for example, education and the growth of consumer culture in relation to young people.

The analysis of these periodicals may be seen as reflecting Tinkler's (1995: 183) argument that girlhood is, 'a cultural construct, one which embodies the cross cutting of gender by age'. Concerns about how to both mould and appeal to girls make these periodicals a tool in the management of change around gender and class.

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