Representation and Reception:
An Oral History of Gender in British Children's Story Papers, Comics and Magazines in the 1940s and 1950s

Boys reading comics in a tenement doorway, c. 1954. *Source*: www.gettyimages.co.uk

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation and reception of gender in British children's reading material during the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter One traces the methods and concepts I have used to investigate an audience history of reading. The relationship between gender and memory in oral history and the uses of audience reception theory are considered. Chapter Two considers schoolboy story papers and comics and the tension between middle-class and working-class masculinities presented in the material. Chapter Three focuses on the changing representations of femininity in three groups of material for girls: the schoolgirl story paper and comic; 'erotic bloods'; and women's service magazines.

Chapters Four and Five reposition the actual readers at the centre of the text using oral testimony gathered in Glasgow and Mass-Observation replies to a directive on childhood reading. Chapter Four focuses on the memories of male narrators' reading experiences as young boys. The chapter considers the relationship between class and masculinity as experienced and identified by the readers in response to characters from the story papers and comics. Chapter Five is divided into two sections. The first considers women's memories of reading story papers and comics intended for both schoolgirls and schoolboys. The second section considers women's memories of reading older women's magazines at a young age to negotiate the transition from girlhood to womanhood. In addition Chapters Four and Five reflect upon wider activities associated with reading such as the acquisition of papers, the place of reading and the games and roles developed from the material. The gendered myth systems surrounding the activity of reading and how female and male readers negotiated, accepted and rejected these myths are also considered.

In conclusion this thesis addresses the relative 'absence' of children's reading culture from earlier work in cultural historical studies, a cross-gendered consideration of popular childhood reading material and the wider relationship between gender and memory in oral history.

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CHAPTER 1

Methods and Concepts

Audiences are very active at the moment. From the *X-Factor* on ITV to *Strictly Come Dancing* on BBC and Channel 4's *Big Brother*, television audiences are encouraged to take an active role in determining the final result of the competition by phoning in and voting for their favourite singer, dancing couple or housemate. Reading (and by association listening) audiences have also been invited to cast their votes. BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* recently ran a competition to find the top ten books that have 'changed the way' women look at themselves (or men's understanding of women).[1] The "Women's Watershed Fiction" competition attempted something different from the annual Man Booker Prize Award and stepped beyond the BBC's Big Read campaign of 2003. The traditional critic or author did not judge the watershed competition and the short list did not have celebrities championing each title. Instead, the contest focused on the opinions and experiences of actual female (and male) readers. The radio audience could listen live, or catch up on the website, to programmes where readers detailed why they were supporting a particular book and how that book had had an influence on their lives.

Audiences are also beginning to take centre stage in historical studies: the British Film Institute is gathering cinema audiences' memories from 1920 to 1960; the British Library is currently collecting oral histories of theatre audiences in Britain between 1945 and 1968 and the National Fairground Archive includes an extensive collection of fair-goers' reminiscences of shows.[2] Concern has shifted from the spectacle to the viewer. Audiences are no longer considered passive recipients of predetermined media messages. The question is not what did the media do to the audience but what did the audience do with the media? This is also the case with reading audiences. Within many literary studies the relationship between a text and a reader has traditionally been conceptualised by textual analyses without considering the social audience. More recently, within cultural studies, contemporary audiences' reception of popular fiction has been explored.[3] There are, however, few investigations of actual historical reading audiences.

[1] www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/2004_37_tue_01.shtml
[2] www.bfi.org.uk/; www.bl.uk/projects/theatrearchive/homepage.html; www.shef.ac.uk/nfa/.
[3] T. Modelski, *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (London, 1982); J. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (London, 1984).

This thesis focuses on audiences of British juvenile popular literature between 1930 and 1967. I began by trying to locate memories of childhood reading in Paul Thompson's collection, *The Edwardians: Family Life and Work Experience before 1918*, to see if and how people recalled their childhood reading experiences. The interview schedule for that project included the question 'Were there any books in the house?' To which there was a variety of replies. For example Stanley Bailey, a carpenter born in 1892, recalled that he

> Always used to buy *Comic Cuts*, *Chips*, Tom Merry, *Sexton Blake*. Always had, we had, you know, Tom Merry, as, I think it's, it's Billy Bunter and all them sort of lot of things you see [...] all had their own characters and when they come out we all used to have 'em, used to pass 'em round. See we had a fine time. Well... I used to buy them myself because I used to, buy the, my mother used to give me enough money to go down the, *The Tottenham and Weekly Herald* office where they used to print the weekly paper, buy so many, you got so much for a shilling, you got two or three extra, which you made your money out of... I used to go down Bruce Grove station and sell these, about half past six in the morning, sell these papers, get the odd money out and she, mother, what I made my mother used to give me so many coppers back...[4]

In contrast Mrs Lambert, born in 1902 and whose father owned a business, 'wasn't allowed to read newspapers. I used to occasionally, but I wasn't supposed to because you didn't read about murders and sex and things [...] I wasn't allowed to read any books either, unless, I showed them to them [her parents] first and got permission.'[5] The testimonies in the Edwardian project did not relate to my period of interest. However, they did highlight the agency of readers, the richness of reading memories and the importance of considering different classes and gendered experiences.

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[4] P. Thompson, *The Edwardians: Family Life and Work Experience before 1918*. National Sound Archive: QD1/FLWE/296J1

[5] *The Edwardians*: QD1/FLWE/MUC/2049

With this in mind I asked a male respondent who I had interviewed for a previous project to take part in an in-depth pilot interview about his boyhood experiences in order to explore further the idea and possibility of a reader-focused oral history.[6] This pilot interview, which has been included for analysis in the thesis, highlighted popular literature such as D.C. Thomson's *Rover* (1922-1961) and *Wizard* (1922-1963) as specific sources of masculine discourse, read by this narrator in the 1940s.[7] After the pilot interview I familiarised myself with other story papers and comics intended for boys which were common during that period.[8] At this point textual analysis of the material was not carried out. The sole purpose of familiarising myself with the story papers was to gain a basic knowledge of the material in order to form and devise pertinent questions and aid understanding of the narrators' testimonies.

I conducted five more interviews with men at this point. The style and format of their narratives were similar. The narrators positioned their experiences of reading in the wider context of boyhood and were often able to define what they read at different ages. The narrators tended to focus on central characters and series from specific comics, such as Alf Tupper, 'The Tough of the Track', from the *Rover*, or Dan Dare, 'Pilot of the Future', from the *Eagle* (Hulton Press, 1950). The interviews with the men highlighted a discrepancy between the intended readership and actual readership of story papers for boys. Boys from different social backgrounds would, it seemed, actively choose which story papers and comics to read and avoid. How

[6] Ronnie Paterson, 17 May 2002. Hilary Young, 'Hard Man, New Man: An Oral History of Masculinity in Glasgow, c. 1950 – 2000', Unpublished Honours Dissertation, Department of History, University of Strathclyde, 2001.

[7] A central source of Victorian and Edwardian masculine discourse has been shown to be popular literature. K. Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855 – 1940* (Hampshire, 2003); R. Macdonald, 'Reproducing the Middle-class Boy: From Purity to Patriotism in the Boys' Magazine, 1892 – 1914,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989); P. Dunae, 'Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870 – 1914', *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1980).

[8] This thesis uses the terms story paper, comic and magazine to refer to different types of publication for boys and girls. A story paper was a text based periodical of adventure, school stories or romance stories which usually contained one illustration of each story. The term comic refers to 'juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer' S. McCloud, *Understanding Comics: the Invisible Art* (New York, 1993), p. 9. The first British publication to use the term comic to refer to this style of publication was *Comic Cuts* (Amalgamated Press 1890-1953). It also epitomised the other meaning of comic and was funny. However, McCloud's definition above splits form from content, defining comics as a medium rather than a genre and attempts to quash assumptions that comics have to be humorous. The term magazine refers to publications published weekly or monthly which carried numerous advertisements for consumer durables.

each narrator recalled the different masculine ideals presented in each story paper or comic emphasised an area of interest to me. The narrators appeared to engage with a popular memory of characters such as Alf Tupper and Dan Dare.

Presentations of my preliminary analysis of the men's interviews and the boys' story papers attracted considerable feedback and positive responses when presented at conferences. Notable response came from older women who also recalled reading the *Eagle* and other publications for boys. Readership surveys of the period noted that boys' publications did attract a significant female readership.[9] However, historians concerned with the cultural re-construction of girlhood throughout the twentieth century have tended to focus solely on publications for girls.[10] The cross-gendered reading of gender specific popular comics and magazines in this period has not been addressed in the secondary literature. Following the response and interest I received from women about the project, I was encouraged to conduct pilot interviews with women about their girlhood reading.[11]

The women's narratives contrasted significantly with the men's in terms of the variety of material they had read as young girls. The narrative style that the women used to talk about their childhood reading experiences was also different. The women talked less about specific characters, and more about the gendered dimension of their reading material as a whole. Age, as a specific marker of genre and readership, was blurred in the women's narratives and highlighted how using only popular literature aimed at girls to re-construct a discourse of girlhood in the mid twentieth century was difficult. Women's magazines, such as *The People's Friend* (DC Thomson, 1869), *Red Letter* (DC Thomson, 1899) and *Woman* (IPC, 1937), as well as boys' popular literature, needed to be taken into account alongside traditional publications such as the *Girl's Own Paper* (Lutterworth Press, 1880) and the *Girls' Crystal* (Amalgamated Press, 1935).

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[9] A. J. Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read?* (London, 1940), p. 217.
[10] P. Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood Popular Magazines for Girls Growing Up in England, 1920 – 1950* (London, 1995); Penny Summerfield noted that a number of women interviewed during her research on education and gender recalled reading boys' comics, 'An Oral History of Schooling in Lancashire 1900-1950: Gender, Class and Education', *History Workshop Journal*, 15, 2 (1987), pp. 19-31; Mel Gibson addresses this issue specifically in '"You Can't Read Them, They're For Boys!" British Girls, American Superhero Comics and Identity', *International Journal of Comic Art*, 5, 1 (2003), pp. 305-324.
[11] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003.

The contrast of experiences and the difference between the male and female narratives highlighted by the pilot interviews revealed that a cross-gendered approach to a readership history of British children's popular literature in the mid-twentieth century would be valuable. A readership history that is sensitive to the gendered perspectives on a leisure pursuit such as reading is timely. Untargeted readers of popular literature are rarely addressed in historical analysis, whether they are girls poring over boys' comics, working-class people reading publications intended for middle-class audiences, girls using women's magazines or boys surreptitiously perusing their mothers' magazines. A gendered approach to oral history is important and exciting as it shows the differences in men and women's experiences and how memories have been shaped by prevailing ideas of gender-appropriate behaviour and values. Leydesdorff, Passerini and Thompson lamented in 1996 that 'Cross-gender studies remain [...] regrettably rare, and very few feminists or oral historians have approached the problem of gender and memory in this way.'[12]

The Glasgow Childhood Reading Oral History Project

In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-three people for the Childhood Reading Oral History Project: this figure included twelve women, who were born between 1921 and 1955, and eleven men born between 1919 and 1947. Interviewees' dates of birth range between 1919 and 1955, with the majority clustered between 1930 and 1945. A cut off year of 1945 was originally aimed at since a number of titles ceased publication and new titles appeared in the 1950s and early 1960s. Two people interviewed were born in the late 1940s and early 1950s and provided a breadth of experience at the point at which the genre was changing.

Glasgow was chosen as the main location for the project primarily because my previous research explored the construction of Glaswegian men's identities as fathers and husbands. I wanted to complement this research by considering boyhood masculinities in Glasgow. In addition, historical consideration of D.C. Thomson publications for children in Scotland has been overlooked. George Moonie, editor of various D.C. Thomson publications for boys and girls between 1930 and 1983, explained that:

[12] 'Introduction' to S. Leydesdorff, L. Passerini, & P. Thompson (eds.), *Gender and Memory* (Oxford, 1996), p. 7.

> We really had to gear... to the English market because that's where the large percentage of readership lay. If you look at the middle belt of England, the industrial belt – Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Manchester, Nottingham, Northampton – these big places, very heavily populated, [were] your first target. Then the south coast of England, a great place. Scotland was only six million or so population; most of it was [in] London.[13]

Despite the emphasis placed on the English market, D.C. Thomson periodicals did find a market in both urban and rural Scottish environments. A number of people were interviewed who did not grow up in Glasgow but moved to the city later. Their experiences of reading in a different setting contrasted to the urban Glaswegian experience and merit a more focused consideration than this thesis can allow. (For demographic and biographical information of the narrators see Appendices 1 and 2).

A number of other research projects concerned with reading have recruited respondents for in-depth interviews from libraries or from existing reading groups.[14] I wanted to avoid limiting my sample to regular users of libraries and the implied categories of 'reader', 'literacy' and 'fandom' attached to these in order to explore a variety of reading experiences.[15] Therefore, recruitment for the project was done in three ways. Firstly, the Glasgow local press carried short articles about the project, seeking respondents.[16] Secondly, poster campaigns in both local libraries and community centres in Glasgow were used. And thirdly, the Govan Reminiscence Group and the West of Scotland and Glasgow Family History Society invited me to present my research at their meetings and subsequently from the audiences a number

[13] Interview with George Moonie by Joseph McAleer, cited in J. McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing In Britain, 1914 – 1950* (Oxford, 1992), p. 168.

[14] Janice Radway recruited her respondents from one small town in America who all frequented the same bookshop for *Reading The Romance;* Mairead Owen recruited readers from a public library, 'Re-inventing Romance: Reading Popular Romantic Fiction', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20, 4 (1997), pp. 537-546.

[15] Henry Jenkins defines 'fandom' as a subculture surrounding a particular text and concludes that 'fan culture differs in a qualitative way from the cultural experience of media consumption for the bulk of the population' and that 'the fan audience is in no sense representative of the audience at large, nor can we go from an understanding of a specific subculture to an account of the active spectator', Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London, 1992), p. 286. There are a number of comic discussion forums on the internet which provide a space for past and current comic fans to discuss and reminisce about comics. However, they are heavily dominated by male readers www.comicsuk.co.uk.

[16] *The Glasgow Evening Times*, 12 December 2000; *The Glaswegian*, 23 November 2001.

of people volunteered to take part.[17] A conscious effort was made when recruiting respondents not to alienate people who had not read comics or magazines when young or to stereotype a perceived idea of what they should have read as children. This was to encourage a diversity of experiences. In order to attract both 'readers' and 'non readers' the focus of the project was explained initially to be childhood activities and experiences attached to growing up in Glasgow.

During the interview recruitment process, I received correspondence, enquiries and information from people interested in the project by telephone, email and letter. Those who wrote sometimes included long descriptions of their background and childhood, as well as lists of comics and magazines read. Not everyone who expressed interest in the project was willing to be interviewed. However, many were willing to take part in a postal questionnaire. The questions were kept short and designed to allow the correspondents to record general information of childhood background and specific childhood experiences of reading (see Appendix 3). During interviews some narrators also produced more material such as old comics and magazines. All of this extra material will be stored and archived with the transcripts of the interviews (see bibliography).

The place where an interview is conducted can have an impact on the interview. The interviews were carried out in four different types of location depending on the respondents' wishes: seven women and four men agreed to be interviewed in their homes; five people preferred to be interviewed in a room in the History Department of Strathclyde University; four people involved in the Govan Reminiscence Group were interviewed at the Govan Old Hill Trust School where the group conducted their meetings and one man was interviewed in his local pub.[18] Each narrator provided informed consent giving permission for use to be made of the interview in research and publication, stating their preference for their name or a pseudonym to be used in the referencing, archiving and publication of the material.

The interviews took the form of free flowing conversations in order to allow the narrators to talk about areas of significance to them. While the interviews

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[17] The Govan Reminiscence Group has deposited its collection at the Glasgow University Business Archive. Within the collection is a tape of the group reminiscing about children's comics ACCN2491 COMICS CD251. The people who volunteered to be interviewed for this project included some of the same people who had taken part in their reminiscing session.

[18] See Young, 'Hard Man, New Man', for more context of this interview relationship.

covered preset topics, questions were open and non-directive and narrators were not discouraged from talking about other topics. Originally I had intended to do two interviews with each narrator. The first interview was to take the format of a life history interview, placing reading into context of the narrators' everyday life. The pattern of questioning was to move from the general to the specific: for example from discussions about childhood experiences of family and schooling to discussions about what someone read and where. An oral history of childhood has to consider the possibility that people's memories of childhood may be too old, or hidden in their memory, making it hard for the narrator to recall them. Yet some oral narrators have many aids to memory. Stories are re-told over and over and discussed in-depth within their community. Many people keep diaries, letters and photograph albums, even comics, in order to remember.

Initially I had intended to leave visual material such as comics and magazines with the narrators to be discussed in a second interview. I had thought that by creating space between the interviews the narrators would have time to reflect, both on the first interview and on the visual material. People's responses to this differed significantly. Some accepted the material willingly, having hoped I would bring copies of old comics with me. Some narrators declined the opportunity to take the material: either, the narrator's eyesight had deteriorated and he or she was unable to read the material, or some narrators acknowledged that they wanted to maintain a distance between how they remembered the material and the actual material. They did not want to upset their memories. Of those who did view the material, one narrator showed awareness about concerns over the quality of the comics explaining 'I'll probably be horrified that I ever read that! Just look at that [the *Girls' Crystal*]'.[19] Another narrator highlighted how she was very nervous at re-reading the material in case she was disappointed.[20] To overcome these difficulties I amended the interview format to one interview, unless it proved necessary to continue the interview. In the new format the visual material was produced in the middle or towards the end of the interview with the interview continuing from that point. This method still captured the narrator's reactions and instant reflections about the

[19] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 25.
[20] Hilary Young Research Journal, narrator's comments after interview, Irene Young, 16 February 2004.

material. The visual material was used discreetly to avoid 'leading' people's memories.

Visual aids can be extremely useful to stimulate memories, especially when the research is concerned with childhood which for some participants in this project was more than seventy years ago.[21] In one interview the visual material did stimulate the narrator's memory. When asked if she could recall titles of magazines and comics she used to read as a child, Elizabeth Baine born in Govan in 1925, explained that was difficult: 'No. Nothing special, ma mind wont go back that far... if you had something that came on telly ah would "Oh ah remember that!" but offhand I can't, my memory is not as good as it used to be.'[22] Later in the interview I produced copies of the *Girls' Crystal* from 1950 to show the narrator. Her reaction to the material was as she had predicted: 'Oh *Girls' Crystal*! That was ma favourite that was great. Ma mother bought us that one. *Gosh* that brings back happy memories, the *Girls' Crystal*.'[23] The visual aid had the desired effect of stimulating the narrator's memories of reading as a child and allowed me to pursue the topic further with questions relating to that specific material. Oral historian Ken Howarth also acknowledges that 'there is huge potential using the interview process to understand (or interpret) documents, diaries, photographs, objects, costume, buildings' and other historical material, 'rather than just a way of stimulating memory.'[24]

The visual material I used was bought from a number of second hand comic shops. The acquisition of the material was random and based on what was available. Therefore, not every narrator's choice of comic was represented in the selection. This meant that some narrators expressed disappointment that I had not brought an example of their favourite comic. Some narrators reviewed the comics critically, guiding me through how they would read them now and in the past. Others were more selective, reading only the stories they used to like or could remember. However, the majority of the narrators responded enthusiastically to the material and

[21] See S. Lindquist, 'Dig Where you Stand' in P. Thomson & N. Burchardt (eds.), *Our Common History: The Transformation of Europe* (London, 1982), p. 326 for usefulness of visual material in oral history interviews.
[22] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004, p. 6.
[23] Ibid., p. 12.
[24] Ken Howarth, H-Net Oral History Discussion Network reply, Monday 3 May 2004, in response to Hilary Young's query 'Visual aids for interviewing' posted Monday 3 May 2004. See also K. Howarth, *Oral History - a handbook* (Stroud, 1998).

more contextual and peripheral information was usually presented once the visual material was produced offering a deeper understanding of the narrators' attitudes and memories.

The women who decided to participate in the oral history project did so for a variety of reasons. Some agreed because they thought they had an interesting and important story to tell. Some believed it was their responsibility to preserve the past for future generations to understand. Some of the women showed an understanding of their place in history and their importance as historical actors, while others were more demure about their significance. The interview for some was an opportunity to tell the younger generation about how life used to be and to articulate a lost past. The interview also provided a chance for some to record changing experiences of childhood and girlhood and the struggle women endured to achieve things that they believe younger generations now take for granted.

Some of the male narrators had a strongly developed class-consciousness and feelings of class antagonism and belonged to associations whose aims were to further working-class interests. Other narrators' class-consciousness was not as 'vocal' although they made it clear that they were aware of differences in status. The narrators related their status to the place where they grew up, their mother and father's occupation and the family's economic position. The narrators used the languages of class within their narratives to discuss the relationship between themselves, the act of reading and the reading material. The women and men who were actively involved in family history and local reminiscence groups placed a value on history, on recording, and on the 'ordinary' historical voice.

Mass-Observation Childhood Reading Directive

Having started the oral history project I visited the Mass-Observation Archive (M-O) at the University of Sussex and was offered an exciting opportunity to take part in a directive.[25] Prior to my trip I was unaware of the ongoing project in which

[25] The M-O Archive was founded in 1937 by Tom Harrison to give recognition to the experiences of "ordinary" people, in the making of histories. Hundreds of ordinary people in Britain were encouraged to write down their everyday experiences and opinions on a wide variety of subjects and send them to the M-O offices in London. People chose to write in different forms; some kept diaries and forwarded those, others responded to open-ended monthly questionnaires sent to them by M-O. The Archive also had paid teams of field workers observing everyday life. The material from the volunteers was used to

the Archive still has a group of correspondents writing in response to directives.[26] I became very interested in the Archive and its activities in gathering life history and began to think about the potential of commissioning a directive on childhood reading experiences. While the director, Dorothy Sheridan, in consultation with the staff of the Archive traditionally chooses the directives, outside researchers can suggest a theme, or even collaborate on the production of a directive.

The directive with which I cooperated, was focused on childhood reading experiences and was the second part of the autumn 2003 directive. The first part of the directive was also devised in collaboration between another researcher and the Archive (see Appendix 4). The average response to a given directive is around fifty percent, with my directive following form. As can be seen from Table 1.1 forty-eight percent of the correspondents replied.

Table 1.1: *Replies to the Mass – Observation Directive 70, part. 2, Childhood Reading, Comics and Magazines*

	Total Correspondents	*Responses To Directive*	*Per cent*
Men	98	38	39
Women	262	136	52
Total	360	174	48

Source: Mass-Observation Archive

The Archive's panel of writers is not a representative cross section of British society, nor is it intended to be. All writers are volunteers and therefore self selected for the project. As a result the composition of the panel is weighted in specific ways. The project consistently attracts more women than men. Women are three times

complement quantitative social research methods. A series of books appeared and a number of research reports. In 1970 the Archive was established at the University of Sussex as the repository of these surveys and records gathered from its original investigators between 1937 and the early 1950s. Since 1981 the archive has functioned as a national writing project, engaging people once more in recording their experiences of everyday life. Since 1981, over 2,800 people have been involved, and the current mailing list contains between 400 and 500 people.

[26] The term "correspondent" is preferred, as opposed to "observer", for its association with a 'sense of mutual relationship', D. Sheridan, '"Damned Anecdotes and Dangerous Confabulations": Mass-Observation as Life History,' Mass-Observation Archive Occasional Paper No. 7, University of Sussex Library, 1996, p. 30.

more likely to volunteer than men, and people over forty years of age outnumber those under.[27] Correspondents are assigned a number which they must attach to their replies instead of their name to facilitate anonymity. Dorothy Sheridan suggests that the mix of public writing with anonymity guaranteed might explain the project's appeal to women.[28] Another explanation for this is possibly that within the family women tend to be the 'archivists'- they maintain family and social networks through letter writing and keep all types of journals and diaries. Therefore M-O is more likely to appeal to them as it builds on, and possibly legitimates and extends these practices. People's writing is based on observation, personal opinion and subjective experience while simultaneously it is received as a valuable document for public use. The richness and detail of the replies to my directive warrant an independent study which cannot be fully accommodated here. However, I have included some replies to the directive where they supplement or illuminate the discussion or contrast in some way with the oral testimonies.

This is a thesis about the experience of reading; therefore the author's own practice of active reading should not be overlooked. As I have read my way through a number of different methodological and conceptual texts during the course of the research for this thesis, I have actively rejected some, negotiated some and embraced others in the development of my work. While all theories and concepts I have read undoubtedly shape my consciousness as both a reader and a historian, I would like to focus on two key areas that fundamentally inform this thesis. Significant developments in oral history and audience research have focussed my thinking about the methodology and analysis of the resulting material. It is these two areas that form my conceptual and analytical toolkit.

Readership Histories and Oral History

Oral history offers the historian of readership a key way to explore children's historical reading culture. However, historians have preferred to use more traditional methods to interpret readings of texts and locate readers. When researching boys'

[27] D. Sheridan, 'Mass-Observation Project: Recording Everyday Life in Britain since 1981' information sheet, p. 1.
[28] D. Sheridan, 'Writing to the Archive: Mass-Observation as Autobiography', *Sociology*, 21, 1 (1993), p. 22.

popular fiction Jeffrey Richards claimed that it is pointless to ask for first hand accounts from ordinary people.[29] Richards relied on early criticism of oral history to justify his opinion. He argued that people are prone to forget what actually happened and misremember events; distance, between the event and the recollection or retelling of the story, affects the memory; the presence of the interviewer may influence what is recalled and 'anecdotal' evidence is unrepresentative beyond the individual. Penny Tinkler found that 'recollections of popular magazines tend to be rather vague.'[30] In her study of girls' popular reading between 1920 and 1950 Tinkler conducted a number of interviews with women but concluded that the women interviewed were unable to recall their own reading material and instead confused it with their children's. 'A confusion amplified by the similarity of magazine title and the vast number of issues that many girls, particularly elementary schoolgirls, seem to have consumed in their youth.'[31] Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron, concluded from their interviews with women that readers were actually very conscious of women's magazines as 'bearers of particular discourses of femininity.'[32] Yet Ballaster *et al* remained anchored to their own analysis of the text 'based mainly upon our own readings of magazines, shaped by our social and historical circumstances.'[33] They asserted that making meaning 'goes on at some level of consciousness to which the researcher cannot gain access.'[34]

Traditional histories of readers have used readership surveys to quantify readership but when attempting to explore the act and practice of reading in children's everyday lives such surveys have limited scope. Advertising and publishing companies in Britain began to conduct readership surveys from 1928 onwards to gauge consumer potential.[35] The early surveys, as Tinkler has

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[29] J. Richards, *Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction* (Manchester, 1988), p. 2.
[30] Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood,* p. 59.
[31] Ibid.
[32] R. Ballaster, M. Beetham, E. Frazer & S. Hebron, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine* (London, 1991), p. 127.
[33] Ibid., p. 42.
[34] Ibid., p. 41.
[35] Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, pp. 59, 78. The earliest readership survey, *Press Circulation Analysed*, was conducted in 1928 by London Research Bureau (LRB). The Incorporated Practitioners in Advertising (IIPA) produced further readership surveys in 1934, 1939 and 1947. Hulton Press published the *Hulton Readership Survey* in 1947, 1948 and the *Hulton Child Readership Survey* in 1950.

highlighted, were 'heavily biased against' people from semi-skilled manual and unskilled manual occupations and under-represented or missed completely young working-class women's reading habits.[36] These reading surveys also silenced or misrepresented children's experiences as they often asked mothers and housewives to participate and speak on behalf of their children. This may have led to comics and magazines that children read surreptitiously being excluded from analysis and also may have underestimated the number of publications children consumed which were accessed through swapping networks.

Jonathan Rose recently readdressed the dearth of audience histories of reading by following methods similar to those used by other historians of reader response research.[37] Rose attempted to qualify autobiographical accounts of reading by working-class diarists and memoirists with educational records, library records, sociological surveys and contemporary opinion polls. He succeeded in providing a sweeping look at the responses of working-class readers to numerous literary and cultural genres, including 'classic' literature, and 'popular' culture. However, his broad approach quickly glossed over delicate nuances within the subject, such as gendered readings of material. Traditional archival methods of seeking readers' experiences do not limit bias and omission. Recent developments in the practice of oral history allow these gaps to be explored and show how the supposed unreliability of oral sources can be a resource rather than a problem in historical research.[38]

Oral sources of reading experiences compensate time with a much closer personal involvement.[39] Oral histories of childhood provide a means to fill the gaps and omissions in other personal accounts written by mainly middle-class adults, some working-class men and a few working-class women. The importance of oral testimony in a history of reading may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as 'imagination, symbolism and desire emerge'.[40] As well as the numbers of books, comics and magazines read, their meaning to, and the needs and

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[36] Ibid., p. 78.

[37] J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London, 2001); David Vincent reconstructed reader's responses through school records and nineteenth century working-class autobiography in *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750 – 1914* (Cambridge, 1989).

[38] For a discussion of the achievements, practice and criticism of oral history see P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, 2000) 3rd edition first published 1978.

[39] A. Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different?', in R. Perks & A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998), p. 68.

[40] Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), p. 100.

expectations of, the readers were also discussed by the narrators in this study. James Fentress and Chris Wickham argue social memory is least reliable at the level of information, but most informative when used to consider shared meanings and remembered things.[41] Memory introduces emotion, fear and fantasy, which some historians have been too anxious to exclude from their formal accounts. Recent developments in oral history have been important in my exploration of experiences of childhood reading. Literary analysis in oral history, and consideration of how memories are shaped by gender inform my critical thinking.

Literary Analysis in Oral History

Alessandro Portelli notes that 'oral sources are *narrative* sources. Therefore, the analysis of oral history materials must avail itself of some of the general categories developed in the theory of literature.'[42] Jan Vansina also argues that 'no utterance whatsoever falls outside a *literary genre*' therefore, study 'form and structure first, because they influence the expression of the content.'[43] Feminist practitioners of oral history have also embraced the linguistic turn and shown that the transcripts they accumulate are not just simply a reproduction of reality, but rather texts in need of analysis. By paying attention to the structure of the narrative we can attempt to understand hidden pressures upon a person's choices and options that she or he had to make during her or his life. The symbolism, language and narrative of a testimony reconstruct what the narrator thought he or she was doing, the desires they had and emotions felt.

Of equal concern in this thesis is as much *how* people talk about their childhood reading habits as *what* they say about it. The focus of narrative analysis is the oral text itself and emphasis is placed on the language, themes, repetitions, images, anecdotes and silences within each testimony. Oral historians sometimes pay very little attention to the linguistic elements of oral history testimony.[44] Once we transcribe the interview into the 'useable' format of the transcription, we very seldom return to the source, the tape or aural recording, when analysing the material.

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[41] J. Fentress & C. Wickham, *The Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford, 1992), p. 4.
[42] Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', p. 98.
[43] J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London, 1985), p. 21.
[44] Editorial, *Oral History*, 32, 1 (2004).

Yet 'the original tape is the primary document... Anything which comes after that can only be by definition an edited or interpreted version.'[45] The analytical process begins at this point, as soon as we start to translate the sound into a textual form. Oral historian Krista Woodley transcribed her interviews into poetic form to see if it could aid her in the process of analysis or provide a different interpretation to the traditional prose format. In conclusion Woodley felt that 'as an analytical method, shaping a poem aids close textual analysis and offers a form that recognises issues of authorship, history-telling and literariness.'[46] How text is arranged and displayed have serious implications for how a reader will understand the narrative. Cutting out pauses and repetitions can easily lose the emphasis of the original testimony.

I have not used poetic form in the analysis of the interviews I conducted due to the breadth of material generated in the interviews and to space constraints. I have attempted to include as much detail from the recordings in my transcription process as possible to aid the reader's understanding. I have included the narrators' pauses, repetitions and hesitations as I feel they emphasise the narrators' meaning and thinking process. In the excerpts quoted in this thesis, where ellipses occur in brackets, for example [...], this means some text from the transcription has been omitted. When ellipses occur without brackets ... this represents a slight hesitation when talking.[47]

Gender and Memory

The form as well as the content of oral history is gendered. Penny Summerfield has explored the ways gender intersects with memory and culture in her work with both women's and men's life stories and experiences of Britain in the Second World War.[48] The main difference between women's and men's testimony cited by (mainly) feminist historians is that women's narratives tend to be structured around the home and family life. A female respondent would place herself in context

[45] R. Block, 'Comments on Kate Moore's "Perversion of the Word: the Role of Transcripts in Oral History', in *Words and Silences: Bulletin of the International Oral History Association,* 1 (June 1997).
[46] K. Woodley, 'Let the Data Sing: Representing Discourse in Poetic Form', *Oral History,* 32, 1 (2004), pp. 52, 57.
[47] All of the interviews conducted for this thesis have been fully transcribed. No qualitative data analysis software was used.
[48] P. Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History,* 1 (2004), pp. 65-93.

within her familial role, a traditionally feminine private space. Caroline Daley's female respondents told stories about home and family, religion and community and presented themselves as home loving, law abiding religious and tolerant citizens.[49] Similarly, Gwen Etter-Lewis highlights that some studies have found 'women's narratives' to be more characterised 'by understatements, avoidance of the first person point of view, rare mention of personal accomplishments and disguised statements of personal power.'[50] However, this does not appear to be the case in Julie Cruikshank's analysis of Northern Canadian native women's histories.[51]

Testimony of male respondents is characterised as more of a public performance where they place themselves within the world of work and their public roles. With a male interviewer a male respondent may be defensive or less forthcoming. With a female interviewer a male respondent may feel the need to provide detailed explanations of labour processes.[52] Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame first observed when ordinary people tell life stories men are more likely to use the direct active subjective mode 'I', while women are more likely to use the indirect, reflective 'we' when recalling past events.[53]

Focusing on the narrative style and genre of oral testimony has proved beneficial to the oral historian when considering how people make sense of their own lives.[54] One way I have attempted to trace the gendered form of memory is by following four types of memory through the narrators' testimonies: anecdotal, habitual, impersonal and past/present. Annette Kuhn uses this approach in her research into cinema-going in Britain during the 1930s, to explore how narrators were 'staging their memories' in interviews. [55] Oral and cultural historians have emphasised the usefulness and significance of the anecdote as a memory device in

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[49] C. Daley, '"He Would Know, but I Just Have a Feeling": Gender and Oral History', *Women's History Review*, 7, 3 (1998), pp. 343-359.
[50] G. Etter-Lewis, 'Black Women's Life Stories: Reclaiming Self in Narrative Texts', in S. B. Gluck & D. Patai (eds.), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (London, 1991), p. 48.
[51] J. Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like A Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Lincoln, 1990).
[52] Young, 'Hard Man, New Man'.
[53] I. Bertaux-Wiame, 'The Life Story Approach To The Study Of Internal Migration: How Women And Men Came To Paris Between The Wars' in P. Thompson & N. Burchardt (eds.), *Our Common History* (London, 1982).
[54] See M. Chamberlain & P. Thompson (eds.), *Narrative and Genre* (London, 1998).
[55] A. Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London, 2002), pp. 9-10. Instead of habitual, Kuhn uses the term repetitive.

oral testimony and autobiography.[56] From Kuhn's use of memory tropes and Simon Dentith's analysis of the anecdote, it can be suggested that gender, social class and location do have an impact on the form of memory recalled.[57] Therefore, considering other styles of narrative alongside the anecdote in a cross-gendered oral history may bring out important distinctions in how men and women recall their reading experiences.

Memory is not regarded as representing the past as it happened. Instead the past is mediated, or produced, in the activity of remembering. Narrators tell stories in specific ways in particular contexts, especially in interviews. 'Composure' relates to the way subjective identities are constructed in a life-story narration. 'Composure' has a double meaning in life-story telling, as Graham Dawson highlights in *Soldier Heroes*. Composure occurs initially when a narrator arranges, or composes, a story about herself or himself. The second act of composure is when the narrator seeks a sense of 'composure' and creates an acceptable self-image for the story being told, in the situation it is being told.[58] Composure and cultural representation meet at the point public discourses are drawn upon to compose a story about the self.[59] In a recent oral history of readers in Australia, Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taska looked for evidence of sexually stereotyped attitudes towards readers, for example the 'female as a superficial reader of "light" or romantic fiction'.[60] They found that female narrators played down their reading habits as children in the interview as a waste of time. Male narrators created and used a conventional myth system to disguise or reject their own reading. Sport and the outdoor life were allegedly incompatible with reading for these men when growing up.[61]

Some of the female narrators interviewed for this project initially questioned the importance of their memories of reading and were intrigued that research into

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[56] T. G. Ashplant, 'Anecdote as Narrative Resource in Working-Class Life Stories: Parody, Dramatization and Sequence' in M. Chamberlain & P. Thompson (eds.), *Narrative and Genre*, pp. 99-113; Simon Dentith, 'Contemporary Working-Class Autobiography: Politics of Form, Politics of Content', in P. Dodd (ed.), *Modern Selves: Essays on Modern British and American Autobiography* (London, 1986), pp. 60-80.
[57] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 10; Dentith, 'Working-Class Autobiography', pp. 70-1.
[58] G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*: *British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), p. 25.
[59] Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p. 69.
[60] M. Lyons & L. Taska, *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading, 1890 – 1930* (Oxford, 1992), p. 6.
[61] Ibid. p. 7.

children's comics and women's magazines was considered legitimate and worthwhile.[62] The male narrators also initially reacted to the project with a little scepticism but were enthused that a young woman was interested in and reading boys' comics.[63]

For some narrators their childhood was a distinct period in their life over 70 years ago. Times have changed and the construction of today's meaning of childhood has also changed. Penny Summerfield stresses that, 'subjectivities are rarely constituted through a single unified dominant discourse.'[64] Discourses may have different meanings for men and women of different generations, background or social class. Discourses of time remembered (the past) may be different from the time in which events are being recalled (the present). By the term 'discourse' I mean the changing systems of meaning expressed through language that people use to make sense of past and present experiences.[65] For example, the narrators have constructed their narratives of childhood in response to an awareness of childhood today, notably a perceived concern about a loss of childhood innocence and how 'things are easier' for children today. A number of narrators noted and lamented this change in childhood. The discourse surrounding reading and magazines is also important to this study. Some of the narrators were aware of the variety of magazines on offer to both girls and boys today and acknowledged a concern over the content of these magazines for young readers, seeing them in direct opposition to their own childhood reading material.

The discourse surrounding men and their leisure pursuits is also a concern of this thesis. Throughout the twentieth century the feminine connotations of consumption were pronounced and thus ensured that consuming remained an uncertain field for men keen to establish their credentials of solid, heterosexual manhood. There has tended to be a division between 'feminine' consumption and 'masculine' production. However, due to the abundance of men's lifestyle

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[62] Hilary Young, Research Diary, conversations with Dorothy Bell and Irene Young prior to starting the interviews, 27 October 2003 and 16 February 2004.
[63] Hilary Young, Research Diary, conversation with John Robertson 29 July 2003. I also experienced the same reaction from the comic dealer I purchased boys' comics from. He explained that he was happy to help 'a girl' who was interested in boys' comics. Hilary Young Research Diary, September 2001.
[64] P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Live: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998), p. 12.
[65] C. G. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (Harlow, 2005), pp. 59-65.

magazines currently on the market, such as Condé Nast's *GQ* (*Gentlemen's Quarterly*, 1988) and EMAP's *FHM*, (*For Him Magazine*, 1990), the discourse surrounding consumption in general, and magazines specifically, and gender is changing. It is with an awareness of this current discourse of consumption and childhood that the narrators of this project have composed their identities as readers.

I wanted to explore this particular 'cultural circuit' surrounding the activity of reading. How do past and present experiences of reading, childhood and gender inform narrators' memories of their childhood reading? In his work with Australian Anzacs from the First World War, Alistair Thomson identified what he called 'the cultural circuit'.[66] What he meant by this term was that personal accounts, such as the oral history interview were informed by 'public legends'. He found that Anzacs composed narratives about their past in relation to the public discourse which affirmed their identity through comradeship, endurance and national identity. Other experiences of Anzacs, which did not sit comfortably with the public legend, were marginalized. The interviews I conducted emphasised that memories of reading were composed in response to both past and present discourses of gender and childhood. Simultaneously, the narrators also composed their narratives in relation to specific characters within stories such as Dan Dare and Alf Tupper, the genre of comic or magazine, whether the story paper they read was meant for middle-class children or whether a magazine was meant for wives and mothers. I looked to audience research to find a way of considering both the readers' experiences as well as the text.

The Uses of Reception Research

Audience research is a growing area of interest in historical studies.[67] Contemporary audience research has tended to focus on film, television and advertising rather than reading, with a few notable exceptions.[68] Most research into women, children and the media viewed mass-media communications to be a major influence in reproducing either patriarchal or subversive social relations. Key

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[66] A. Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne, 1994), p. 215.
[67] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*; J. Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London, 1994); S. J. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship: from Dracula to the Dead End Kids* (London, 2005). These studies are concerned with cinema audiences of women and children c.1930s.
[68] A. McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: from 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (London, 1991); M. Barker, *Comics: Ideology, Power and the Critics* (Manchester, 1989); E. Frazer, 'Teenage Girls Reading Jackie', *Media, Culture and Society*, 9 (1987) pp. 407-25.

assumptions were that mass media images were unrealistic messages, with straightforward and unambiguous meanings; that women and children passively absorb these messages; and that researchers are equipped with the relevant knowledge to be able to recognise and resist such images.[69] Since the early 1980s gender has become a central concern of many feminist media researchers who have explored the way women acquiesce to or oppose patriarchal portrayals of gender relations.[70] Feminist media researchers, informed by postmodern theories, argued that the meanings of women's magazines – or any other form of culture – were not pre-existent messages waiting to be 'discovered' by the researcher. They began to consider the meanings of women's magazines as 'dialogical' and in potential conflict with other historically and culturally specific systems.

Stuart Hall's *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* was one of the first models to create a space for the concept of active audiences.[71] His approach has informed audience research since the 1970s by arguing that cultural products are highly structured systems of meaning 'encoded' by producers and 'decoded' by viewers.[72] The focus of interest is the individual media user who is viewed as someone who has acquired 'codes' or 'interpretative repertoires' within their own social and cultural experiences. It is assumed that the individual will use his or her own repertoires of experiences to construct a unique meaning of a text.

There are numerous critiques of Hall's 'encoding/decoding' model, including that the model is narrowly concerned with class to the exclusion of other categories of analysis such as gender, ethnicity and age.[73] The concept of a 'preferred reading', which is central to the encoding/decoding model, has also been subjected to

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[69] G. Tuchman, A. K. Daniels & J. Benét, *Hearth and Home: Images of Women and the Media* (New York, 1978); M. Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (London, 1983); Ballaster *et al*, *Women's Worlds*, p. 1.

[70] I. Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London, 1985); D. Hobson, *Crossroads: The Drama of Soap Opera* (London, 1982); A. Gray, *Video Playtime: The Gendering of a Leisure Technology* (London, 1992).

[71] S. Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, CCCS Stencilled Paper 7. (Birmingham, 1973)

[72] S. Hall, 'Encoding/decoding' in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (eds.), *Culture/Media/Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972 – 79* (London, 1980), pp. 128-38.

[73] D. Morley, 'The *Nationwide* Audience: A Critical Postscript', *Screen Education*, 39 (1981), pp. 3-14; M. Barker & K. Brooks, *Knowing Audiences: Judge Dredd* (Luton, 1998), p. 93.

numerous criticisms.[74] Martin Barker argues that the 'idea of a 'preferred reading' is only an analyst's construct.'[75] But despite these shortcomings of Hall's model the concept does offer a framework to consider readers' experiences. Audience reception research includes both the analysis of the media text and the study of audience practices and primarily assumes that the audience never accepts meaning from media without active negotiation.[76] These are concepts that this thesis has developed in relation to historical readership.

The qualitative turn in audience research has meant media researchers have embraced interpretative and ethnographic methodologies. If the meanings of magazines were produced through discursive formations, it was argued interpretative ethnography offered potential for discerning how particular readers make women's magazines meaningful in specific social and historical contexts. Joke Hermes challenged the assumption that women's magazines can in some ways 'harm' readers:

> I have always felt strongly that the feminist struggle in general should be aimed at claiming respect. It is probably for that reason that I have never felt comfortable with the majority of (feminist) work that has been done on women's magazines. Almost all of these studies show concern rather than respect for those who read women's magazines.[77]

Although I have not conducted an ethnographic study, I found Hermes' research on women's magazine audiences valuable as she focused solely on the

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[74] D. Morley, 'Changing Paradigms in Audience Studies', in E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner, & E. Warth, (eds.), *Remote Control: Television Audiences and Cultural Power* (London and New York, 1989), p. 18.

[75] Barker & Brooks, *Knowing Audiences,* p. 95.

[76] 'Reception Research' is critical of both 'Effects' and 'Uses and Gratifications' for not exploring everyday contexts in which meanings and uses of media appear. But is less stringent than media ethnography and does not assign a primary role to the everyday life. 'Effects' study, first used by media researchers in the 1920s and 1930s, broadly sees the relationship between the media and audience as cause and effect for example G. H. Pumphrey, *What Children Think of Their Comics* (London, 1964). 'Uses and Gratifications' research reversed the question posed by 'Effects' research, asking 'What are people getting out of the material they choose to consume?' instead of 'What are the media doing to people?' However, 'Uses and Gratification' research ignores the meanings in media which create the gratifications and also assumes that needs, inherent in the use, are met. 'Ethnographic' audience research combines qualitative methods such as participant observation with quantitative methods such as surveys.

[77] J. Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines: an Analysis of Everyday Media Use* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 1.

reader and their experiences and '[appreciated] that readers are producers of meaning rather then the cultural dupes of the media institutions.'[78] However, having carried out seventy-five interviews with women and men, Hermes was initially disappointed with her interviewees' responses: 'the emancipated audience didn't strike me as all that active and celebrating. Nor did the interviews, at first sight, make any clearer how women's magazines or other media are made meaningful.'[79] The people Hermes interviewed had very little to say about the magazines, and sometimes were unable to recall what they had read. Instead, readers gave meanings to women's magazines which Hermes found to be quite independent of the text, employing them at particular moments as tools in the formation of fantasy and imagined 'new selves.' In response to this Hermes questioned the assumption that texts must mean something to their readers and instead invoked how readers made, and sometimes did not make, reading meaningful. Janice Radway also found when conducting interviews with female romance readers that the study gradually became 'less an account of the way romances as texts were interpreted than of the way romance reading as a form of behaviour operated as a complex intervention in the ongoing social life of the interviewees.'[80] She then refocused her study towards the readers' consumption of the material. I found both Hermes and Radway's studies helpful when considering the interviews I had conducted as they made me aware of the potential wider significance the practice of reading may have had in children's everyday lives.

The pilot interviews I conducted highlighted a variety of memories in relation to childhood reading and signalled that the meanings people attach to reading are not stable. The experience of reading comics included for some narrators swapping comics and magazines, acting out roles and talking about them with friends. Other narrators emphasised how financial and living conditions restricted what they could read. These memories of everyday practices were recalled just as vividly as the physical description of the comics and, in some cases, detailed storylines and character type. The narrators emphasised both everyday practices of reading and the content of the material. Therefore, I also needed to consider both when analysing the

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[78] Ibid., p. 10.
[79] J. Hermes, 'Media, Meaning and Everyday Life', Cultural *Studies*, 7, 3 (1993), p. 495.
[80] Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p. 7.

interviews. Recent developments in audience research provided me with a flexible framework in order to explore both the text and the meanings associated with reading comics.

In audience research the idea that a text holds a single, preferred meaning has given way to textual analysis that recognized the possibility of multiple cultural readings of a text. As David Morely argues 'Messages propose and prefer certain readings over others, but they can never become wholly closed around one reading. The 'polysemy' of a text or, the openness of the text, allow numerous readers to interpret different meanings of texts based on their own experiences. They remain polysemic.'[81] This is important when thinking about children's use of reading material that was not always intended for the actual reader. The categories applied in Hall's model to decode a text became difficult to use when the reader was not the intended reader. I have employed and developed the concept of 'polysemy' to explore other activities attached to reading such as children's comic swapping networks, games and discussion. In order to prioritise the narrators' own perceptions of the texts I decided to conduct only a rudimentary analysis of the comics and magazines prior to conducting interviews to be able to facilitate the interviews.[82] I did not want my own understandings or a 'preferred reading' of the texts to cloud the interviews or the narrators' own construction of meaning. Once the interviews were conducted I then went back to the texts to explore the textual properties of the comics that had triggered and shaped the narrators' memories.[83]

Thesis Overview

The principal aim of this thesis is to explore how male and female readers recall their childhood reading activities in Britain during the 1940s and 1950s, with a particular focus on gendered experience. The thesis employs a fresh approach as outlined above to considering a readership history by focusing on the experiences of

[81] D. Morley, *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London, 1980), p. 10.
[82] A systematic survey of the primary material was difficult due to the ephemeral and low status given to story papers, comics and magazines. The National Library of Scotland does not hold some juvenile or women's titles from the period being studied despite being a copyright library since 1925. The British Library holds the most complete, but not full, collection. Only D. C. Thomson has the complete collection of their children and women's periodicals access to which is limited.
[83] This was the method used by Justin Lewis in a study about the reception of British TV news, *The Ideological Octopus: an Exploration of Television and its Audience* (London, 1991).

actual readers as well as on the content of texts. The changing representations of gender in the boys' and girls' comics and magazines are the subject of Chapter Two and Chapter Three respectively. Both chapters consider the story papers, comics and magazines that were the most popular during the period and also tended to be those that the narrators mentioned specifically in their interviews. The language and specific characters in the material have been used to focus on the discourses of gender and class.

Chapter Two opens with a discussion about the relationship between boys' story papers and manliness since the late nineteenth century. It then focuses on several representations of masculinity between the interwar period and 1967. The first section explores superman characters in D.C. Thomson publications; the second section considers working-class heroes and the representation of the 'hooligan' in the *Rover*; thirdly, the middle-class representation of the 'MUG' in the *Eagle* is discussed. Finally, the cowboy as the new adventure hero in boys' comics of the 1950s is introduced. The chapter also explores how the *Eagle* presented reading comics as a legitimate site of masculine consumption and simultaneously created a community of readers.

Chapter Three is divided into two sections. The first section introduces the variety of popular literature girls were reading between 1930 and 1963. The second section outlines the changing discourse of femininity firstly in schoolgirl story papers and comics; secondly, in 'erotic bloods' and thirdly in women's service magazines. Finally the chapter introduces the new teenage weeklies of the mid 1950s. Specifically, the chapter investigates how the publications addressed their intended readership and traces the changing representation of femininity throughout a period of significant social change using the fiction, non-fiction articles and if they were included, career advice, problem pages and beauty tips.

Historians have investigated some of the material in Chapters Two and Three before. However, Chapters Four and Five explore new directions. Where traditional readership histories have been primarily concerned with identifying readership through textual analysis, the fourth and fifth chapters present actual readers' experiences. Chapter Four is a continuation of themes from Chapter Two. The chapter focuses on the men's oral testimony and their experiences of reading story

papers and comics while growing up. The gendered differences between experiences of reading and composure of narratives of reading are further explored in this chapter. Composing suitable identities as male readers was important to the majority of the male narrators. The men recall using and negotiating tropes of masculinity from the story papers and comics throughout their experiences of boyhood and growing up. The narrators also circumvented the myth of reading as a private, passive, indoor activity to compose suitably masculine identities for themselves as active readers. The ways in which reading comics impacted on boyhood culture at play contributed to the composure of masculine identities within the interview. The transition from boyhood to manhood is noted as a significant juncture in the men's narratives of reading. And it is at this point that the chapter then considers the possibility of discomposure and re-composure of masculine reading identities within the men's narratives.

Chapter Five focuses on how female narrators used girls' reading material positively and negatively to construct suitable life narratives for themselves. The chapter considers readers' experiences of reading both schoolgirl and schoolboy papers, as well as magazines intended for young and married women. The chapter contends that the women used a variety of publications sometimes not intended for them to negotiate the transition from girlhood to womanhood. The chapter also includes a discussion of how some women struggled to negotiate the discourse of femininity provided in the material they read or rejected the ideals story paper heroines presented all together.

CHAPTER 2

'Supermen' 'Hooligans' 'Mugs' and 'Cowboys'
Changing Representations of Masculinity

> They are certainly read by working-class boys... They are generally on sale in the poorest quarters of big towns, and I have known them to be read by boys whom one might expect to be completely immune from public school 'glamour'. I have seen a young coal miner, for instance, a lad who had already worked a year or two underground, eagerly reading the *Gem*.
>
> George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', *Horizon* (1940) in Orwell & Angus (eds.), *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* p. 512

The British male press has not been completely ignored by historians. Most scholars have focused on the earlier periods of boys' periodicals to develop an understanding of the relationship between imperialism and popular culture. Patrick Dunae and Louis James have focused on Victorian and Edwardian publications while John Springhall has explored the moral panics surrounding the 'penny dreadfuls' of the time.[1] Kathryn Castle, Claudia Nelson and Robert MacDonald have used boys' story papers to consider aspects of imperial and family ideology.[2] More recently Kelly Boyd has traced the changing image of manliness from Victorian to Edwardian to inter-war models through boys' periodicals.[3] Historians and sociologists have also considered the periodicals intended for older men in Britain.[4] Yet few scholars have considered publications intended specifically for boys after the Second World War.

This chapter focuses on how masculinity was defined in the *Wizard* and *Rover*, the *Eagle* and the *Boy's Own Paper* between 1928 and 1967. Through an examination of typical stories and characters, various types of masculinities represented to young readers are revealed. To begin with the story papers and comics will be introduced by engaging with the discourse of manliness from the Victorian

[1] 'Penny dreadful' was a derogatory term applied to nineteenth century story papers, printed on cheap pulp paper, which cost a penny and were intended for a male working-class audience. The stories included reprinted Gothic tales and new crime fiction. See L. James, 'Tom Brown's Imperial Sons', *Victorian Studies*, 17 (1973), pp. 89-99; P. Dunae, 'Penny Dreadfuls: Late Nineteenth-Century Boys' Literature and Crime', *Victorian Studies*, 22 (1979), pp. 133-50; Dunae, 'Boys' Literature', *Victorian Studies* (1980); Dunae, 'A New Grub Street for Boys' in J. Richards (ed.), *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989), pp. 12-33; J. Springhall, 'Healthy Papers for Manly Boys: Imperialism and Race in Harmsworth's Halfpenny Boys' Papers of the 1880s and 1890s' in Richards (ed.), *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, pp. 107-25; J. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gansta-rap, 1830 – 1996* (London, 1998).

[2] K. Castle, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonisation through Children's Books and Magazines* (Manchester, 1996); C. Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls: the Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857 – 1917* (New Jersey, 1991); R. MacDonald, 'Reproducing the Middle-Class Boy: From Purity to Patriotism in the Boys' Magazines, 1892 – 1914', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989), pp. 519-39.

[3] Boyd, *Manliness and the Boy's Story Paper* (Basingstoke, 2003); K. Boyd, 'Knowing Your Place: The Tensions of Manliness in Boys' Story Papers, 1918 – 1939', in M. Roper & J. Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991).

[4] J. Greenfield, S. O'Connell & C. Reid, 'Fashioning Masculinity: *Men Only*, Consumption and the Development of Marketing in the 1930s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10, 4 (1999), pp. 457-76; J. Bengry, 'Not Just for He-*Men Only*: The Making of the Male Consumer in Britain, 1935 – 1939' paper presented at Social History Society Conference, University of Reading, 2006; K. Breazeale, 'In Spite of Women: Esquire Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 20, 1 (1994), pp. 1-22; B. Crewe, *Representing Men: Cultural Production and the Producers in the Men's Magazine Market* (Oxford, 2003); P. Jackson, N. Stevenson & K. Brooks, *Making Sense of Men's Magazines* (Cambridge, 2001).

period to the interwar period. The chapter is then divided into sections: the first section considers representations of 'supermen' in the *Rover* and *Wizard*; the second explores alternative working-class masculinities such as the 'hooligan'; the third section investigates middle-class representations of masculinity in the *Boy's Own Paper* and *Eagle* such as the 'MUG'; the final ideal of masculinity that is discussed is the cowboy. All of the characters and issues analysed here were identified by the male narrators (and by some of the female narrators), as important to their own construction of masculinity (and femininity) and their experiences of growing up.

Boys' Story Papers and Manliness, c. 1850 – 1940

Periodicals for boys continually changed format and emphasis from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.[5] However, John M. Mackenzie suggests that it is possible to presume that there was continuity in the fundamental ideas of boyhood reading from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s.[6] The adventure found in the 'penny dreadful' and the tone of morality of previous children's literature were combined from the mid-nineteenth century by publishers like Samuel Beeton (1831-77) and Edwin J. Brett (1828-) to produce boys' story papers such as the *Boy's Own Magazine* (1855-62) and *Boys of England* (1866-1899). During the Victorian period story papers were crammed with athletic, chivalrous, aristocratic boy heroes whose manly virtues were combined with their upper-class position, superiority and moral rectitude. After the manly conditioning of public school, aristocratic Victorian boy heroes then qualified to travel the Empire in a further effort to prove their masculinity.[7]

As education and new printing techniques expanded and a mass market for reading matter was identified, individual publishers began to cease production. Alfred Harmsworth (1865-1922) and the Amalgamated Press (AP) began to

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[5] For a detailed discussion of the changing nature of children's literature from the eighteenth century see K. Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751 – 1945* (New Haven, 1988); G. Avery, *Childhood's Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and the Heroines of Children's Fiction, 1770 – 1950* (London, 1975); A. Ellis, *A History of Children's Reading and Literature* (Oxford, 1963); J. S. Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (London, 1981).
[6] J. M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880 – 1960* (Manchester, 1986), p. 224.
[7] See Boyd, *Manliness and the Boy's Story Paper in Britain* for a wider discussion of the portrayal of manliness in Victorian boys' story papers.

dominate the market at the turn of the century with story papers such as *Marvel* (1893-1922) and *Magnet* (1908-1940) that challenged the 'penny dreadful' tradition. The *Magnet* and *Gem* (1907-1939) featured a number of school stories by Frank Richards.[8] They emphasised the moral element of the publications and exploited middle-class parents' anxieties and concerns about the nature of boyhood. The *Boy's Own Paper* was published in 1879 by the Religious Tract Society also in response to the perceived corrupting effects of the 'penny dreadful'.[9] The paper became a favourite with middle-class parents, educationalists and children alike, with circulation figures reaching 200,000 a week.[10] The Religious Tract Society distributed thousands of free copies of the paper to London Board schools in the late nineteenth century to ensure a wider readership, as the price of one penny may have been prohibitive to some. Each issue of the *Boy's Own Paper* had a variety of articles on hobbies, sport, nature, interviews with famous people and long-running serials by a clutch of successful boys' writers such as Jules Verne, G. A. Henty and Talbot Baines Reed.

Stories in Edwardian boys' papers were set predominantly in a local situation rather than some outpost of the Empire in order to acknowledge the growing working-class readership of the periodicals. By the 1920s aristocratic boy heroes still appeared in the boys' story papers but lower middle-class and artisan protagonists such as factory workers, engine drivers and clerks also joined them.[11] A tension developed between an individual character's endeavours and community obligations. Edwardian heroes of boys' story papers were more community focused, compared to the individual superiority of their aristocratic predecessors.[12] There was an inherent knowledge of the characters' limitations and at no point did they challenge authority. Heroes' actions were subject to restrictions imposed by the state and society and

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[8] Frank Richards was the penname of Charles Hamilton (1876-1961) who wrote the Greyfriars series featuring Billy Bunter in the *Magnet.* He also wrote the St Jim's school series in *The Gem* as Martin Clifford and the first Cliff House boarding school series for girls in the *School Friend* under the penname Hilda Richards.

[9] See Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics* for a discussion on the perceived influences of 'penny dreadfuls'.

[10] R. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass-Reading Public, 1800 – 1900* (Chicago, 1967), p. 395.

[11] Kelly Boyd argues that the valourization of working-class characters in boys' story papers between 1890 and 1918 was a reaction to temper the growing trade union movement, *Manliness and the Boys Story Paper*, p. 177.

[12] Boyd, 'Knowing Your Place', p. 145.

class boundaries were rarely crossed by heroes. Their masculinity was forged through hard work and acceptance of society's rules as opposed to the innate masculine ability that many Victorian heroes were born with. By the inter-war years however Amalgamated Press publications and the *Boy's Own Paper* began to falter.[13] A new brand of boys' story papers appeared that was to contest the boys' story paper market throughout the twentieth century.

William Thomson, a wealthy Scottish shipping manager, and two sons, David Couper and Fredrick, formed the publishing house D.C. Thomson of Dundee in 1905. In 1921 the first of the company's story papers, the *Adventure*, aimed at the male juvenile market was published, and was quickly followed by the *Rover* (1922-1961), and the *Wizard* (1922-1963). The *Skipper* then appeared in 1930 until it ceased publication in 1941. In 1933 the *Hotspur* was added to the D.C. Thomson stable. This collection of story papers was and still is fondly known as 'The Big Five'. For tuppence each, a young reader would receive an eleven-by-fifteen inch tabloid format journal with a colourful front cover and twenty-eight pages of vivid articles plus detective, science fiction, adventure, and school tales. The *Rover*, *Wizard*, and *Hotspur* accounted for between half and two-thirds of all story papers bought by twelve-year olds, while through the 1930s the weekly circulation for *Wizard* alone was 800,000.[14]

Thomson's ability to attract a sizeable and consistent readership has been attributed to a number of factors including the introduction of friendly editorial pages that encouraged readers to write in with letters, queries and stories. Instead of speaking down to readers the Thomson editorials addressed them as 'pals'. Interesting and exciting giveaways and prize competitions were included to entice readers. D. C. Thomson representatives also performed market research through newsagents, schools, cinemas, other periodicals, radio and later television in order to keep up to date with boys' interests.[15] The D.C. Thomson editorial department was

[13] See McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing*, pp. 205-43 for a discussion of the changing publishing strategies employed by the Religious Tract Society to stave off the decline of the *Boy's Own Paper*.
[14] K. Carpenter, *Penny Dreadfuls and Comics: English Periodicals for Children from Victorian times to the Present Day* (London, 1983), p. 89.
[15] McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing*, pp. 177-80.

'modernised' by staffing it with younger men as opposed to other publishers who continued to rely on 'older traditions' of writing for boys.[16]

Older periodicals continued to portray previous 'romantic' notions of masculinity, like those forged on the battlefield, as righteous, justified, heroic and exciting despite the realties experienced and detailed between 1914 and 1918 by the poet Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) amongst others. According to the historian Michael Paris 'there was more fighting, bleeding and brutality in the pages of the inter-war story papers than ever before.'[17] For example *Chums* (Cassells 1892-1932) continued to encourage the martial spirit through its rousing battle narratives and recruiting propaganda for the armed forces. Interwar writers of juvenile fiction for Amalgamated Press publications made little attempt to portray war in a less romantic manner despite pacifist pressure.

Historian Kelly Boyd suggests that the nature of the hero in boys' story papers of the interwar period did change. In contrast to young, independent, Victorian heroes who had proved their masculinity across the Empire in periodicals such as the *Boys Own Paper*, more traditional sources of guidance on manhood were employed between 1918 and 1939 in boys' story papers, namely D.C. Thomson's 'Big 5'. Fathers, employers and teachers appeared alongside schoolboy or young apprentice heroes in local environments.[18] Although strength of body and mind continued to organise the definition of manliness, Boyd argues that acceptance of society's rules was crucial and characters that represented state and society appeared in order to guide young heroes in the acquisition of masculine values. She defended this by arguing that D.C. Thomson could not question the status quo, as 'They were committed capitalists who espoused conservative values and dedicated their publications to preserving their ideology.'[19] Yet characters that did not seek guidance or remain within society's rules did exist within D.C. Thomson's story papers of the interwar period.

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[16] W.O.G. Lofts & D. J. Adley, *The Men Behind Boys' Fiction* (London, 1970), p. 13.
[17] M. Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850 – 2000* (London, 2000), p. 164.
[18] Boyd, *Manliness and the Boy's Story Paper*, p. 108.
[19] Ibid., p. 180.

'Supermen' in the *Rover* and *Wizard*, c. 1928 – 1945

The character of 'Morgyn the Mighty', first appeared in D.C. Thomson's *Rover* in 1928. He strongly resembled Edgar Rice Bourroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes*, which was first published in America in 1914.[20] Marooned on a desert island for thirteen years, Morgyn developed super strength, but still shaved, trimmed his hair and maintained a respectable identity. Eventually he escaped the island and embarked on adventures in America and Africa combatting gangsters and savage tribes. He rarely killed his opponents but as Drotner points out, the stories centred on fighting, because his 'paramount strength formed the basis of his appeal.'[21] Another superhuman character, 'The Black Sapper', first appeared in *Rover* in 1929, dressed entirely in black and the inventor of the 'Earth Worm', an underground boring machine that enabled him to function as a human mole (see illustration 2.1). Born of a noble family the Sapper was an outsider, essentially on the side of justice but not above making a profit for himself. These superheroes of the interwar period operated outside 'the law', which was often portrayed as corrupt. They tended to have a lack of respect for established authority and were represented as good 'bad men' with their own moral code. Both Morgyn the Mighty and The Black Sapper, survived the Second World War and continued to appear in the *Rover* until the late 1950s.

War stories set in foreign countries dominated the early period of the Second World War, with stories becoming more fantasy based as the war proceeded, in order to avoid dealing with the brutalities of real life. Simultaneously, and perhaps in direct response to the violence of modern warfare, new super heroes began to emerge who again challenged the discourse of manliness into the 1950s. The characters that appeared during and after the Second World War were similar to Morgyn the Mighty and The Black Sapper. They worked against the system, performed within their own moral code and questioned the status quo. But there were some significant changes in the image of masculinity these new characters presented.

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[20] American superhero comics were on sale in Britain just prior to the Second World War, yet import restrictions, paper shortages, and the price would have made them difficult to purchase. Notably 'Superman' first appeared in *Action Comics* in America in 1938.

[21] Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines*, p. 228.

Illustration 2.1: The Black Sapper had an underground boring machine and worked against the law when it failed to be just. *Source: Rover*, February 1933 from K. Drotner, *English Children and their Magazines, 1751 – 1945*, p. 226.

The superhuman character of Wilson first appeared in the *Wizard* in 1943 and was later continued in the *Hotspur*. In 'The Man Named Wilson' series the masculine experience of strength and ability were still present. The story contended that 'men could be almost as gods if they only trained themselves to give forth their best.'[22] Wilson was a super athlete who had mystical powers and was immortal. The stories were set both in exotic locations such as Egypt and Tibet but also in the local area of Yorkshire. A journalist called Webb told the stories of Wilson in the third person. The adventure story centered on Wilson's bravery in response to superhuman tasks he encountered. Through Webb's narration a sense of awe was created as he offered direct flattery of Wilson to the reader. He emphasised Wilson's skill and masculine character. In one episode on a trip to Egypt Wilson was propositioned by a local, 'brawny' young man to race to the top of the pyramids. Wilson accepted. Webb commented in his narrative that 'running up the pyramid was a specialised art, for which a man had to be as hardy as a mountaineer.'[23] The stories set the narrative and questing pattern around real life events or scenarios happening at the time of writing the story. In the same story a Sheik had watched Wilson's performance of running up the pyramid and challenged him to the ultimate test of mental and physical strength: to jump a pit of fire twenty-nine and a half feet wide. The world record for the long jump at that time of writing was less than twenty-seven feet. Wilson accepted the challenge willingly and won.[24]

'The Truth About Wilson' series was based on fantasy solutions to challenges that required overwhelming strength and agility. When Wilson jumped the pit of fire Webb commented that 'Wilson seemed to possess some power of will that spurred his body on past the limits of ordinary human endurance'.[25] Indeed his physical appearance was described first in terms of an inanimate object that suggested speed and precision. The human feelings of the feat were then expressed:

> The fire turned him a sombre red *as he shot like an arrow* over the flickering flames. Onwards he soared, and was approaching the end of the pit when he began to fall. *His contorted face*

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[22] *Wizard*, 15 October 1949, cited in D. Jackson, *Unmasking Masculinity: a Critical Autobiography* (London, 1990), p. 236.
[23] *Wizard*, 30 July, 1949.
[24] Cited in Jackson *Unmasking Masculinity*, p. 236.
[25] *Wizard*, 30 July, 1949

showed the supreme effort he was making to hold the jump. He was over – yeah he was over! His feet were on the ground an inch or two beyond the pit as he dropped sprawling full-length on the ground. He had done it![26] [*my emphasis*]

Wilson appeared to possess self-confidence and power. He was unafraid and totally at ease in every threatening circumstance. His character offered an example of iron self discipline, physical toughness and endurance. Despite this, the physical descriptions of his body throughout the series did not conform to the usual superman image. In contrast to Morgyn the Mighty, who had appeared physically imposing, the supermen who appeared in the boys' story papers from the mid to late 1940s looked more like ordinary young men and did not possess a 'strong man' physique. The oversized supermen figures favoured in the interwar period were deflated and their tough muscular bodies were downsized during the Second World War (see illustrations 2.2 and 2.3).

Wilson and Joe look similar in the image below. Wilson was not physically different or dramatically more muscular than Joe. They trained for the hurdles in a field; they used a wicket fence in place of real hurdles and ran in their bare feet. This suggested that training and competing in sport were possible for the majority of young readers. Wilson and Joe were positioned beside each other in the image which signified a level of equality. In contrast with the illustration of Morgyn the Mighty, Morgyn was positioned to the front of the image and the younger, smaller boy stood behind him in a passive position. The physical representation of Wilson, who had superhuman drive, contrasted significantly with the earlier image of Morgyn the Mighty bending iron bars. The three boxes to the right of Wilson's image showed athletes competing at the Olympic Games in the hurdles event. The athletes' perfected style of hurdling contrasted with Wilson's rougher technique.

Although Wilson had superhuman abilities, his physical appearance was quite 'normal'. He did not possess a physically enhanced body which was unobtainable to a young boy. Instead his appearance blended in:

> Wilson standing still was not an impressive figure. He was not very tall and he was thin, with his head seeming a little

[26] Ibid.

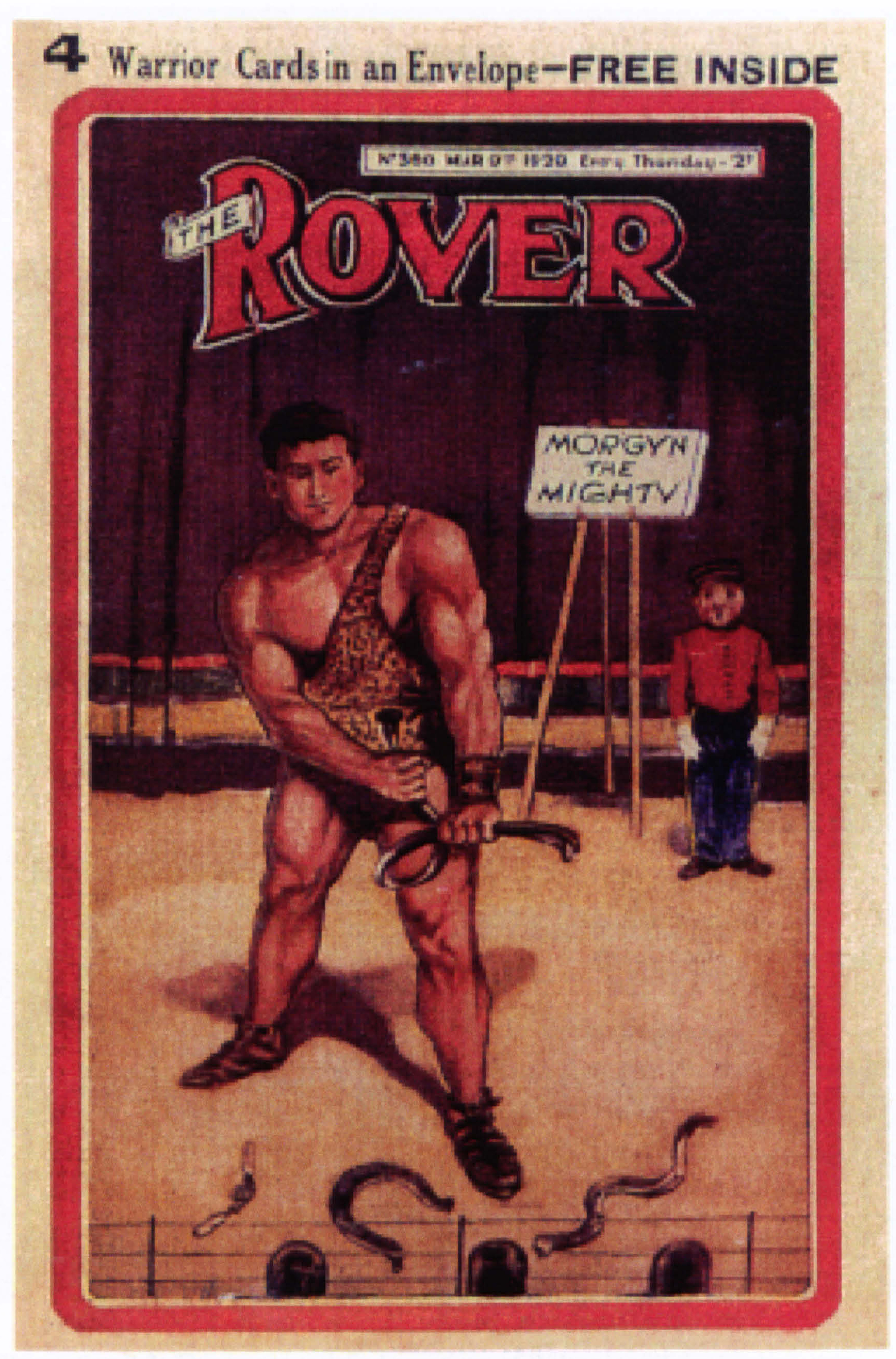

Illustration 2.2: This image shows Morgyn The Mighty, a Tarzan like superman.
Source: *Rover* 1929 from R. Sabin, *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels A History of Comic Art* (London, 1996), p. 46.

" Where is the boy that looks after the sheep? He's——" being trained to be a champion hurdler by Wilson. And you'll find the reason below.

THE TRUTH ABOUT WILSON

The Yank At Stamford Bridge

SINCE the publication of my revelations about Wilson began, I have received many letters concerning the most famous of British athletes and his astounding performances in pre-war days. Among recent communications was the following:—

To W. S. K. Webb, Care of " The Wizard."

Dear Sir,—I have followed your articles about Wilson with great interest, especially as I saw all his record-breaking feats in this country though I did not have the luck to see him run abroad as you have recently been describing.

What I want to ask you is why Wilson never took part in a hurdle race. I always thought he would have excelled in the hurdles and I have often been puzzled as to why he never showed any keenness to " go over the sticks."

As you knew him better than anyone else, perhaps you could write something about this. Hoping it is not troubling you. With best wishes.—A Manchester Reader.

Well, I will give the answer to this letter straight away. Wilson did run in the hurdles.

I am glad now to be able to tell the full story of how Wilson did run the hurdles, having obtained the ready permission of Joe Fielding, the hurdles champion, to break a silence extending over the years of war.

Just a personal word. In those days I was a reporter on the sporting staff of the " London Daily Clarion," and I made my first contact with Wilson when he ran his sensational record-breaking mile at Stamford Bridge. Subsequently, by a stroke of luck, I tracked him down to the desolate moor in Yorkshire where he lived a hard life in the open. I then returned to him an old notebook containing a list of herbs, which he had lost. He was grateful, and, acting as his link with the outside world, I gradually came as near friendship as possible with a man of such reserve.

Now to return to the hurdles.

It begins with the crack of a starter's gun.

At the bang, six runners got off the mark and the fifty thousand spectators at Stamford Bridge hushed with excitement. Their stares were fixed on the tall, dark-haired figure of Verne Ramon, world champion hurdler, on his first appearance in Great Britain.

Verne Ramon's claim to fame was the fact that he had just established the world record time of twenty-two and three-fifth seconds for the 220 yards hurdles at San Francisco. His manager, Dave Katz, was set on getting publicity for his man and I'll say straight away that I liked neither of them. It was my conviction that Ramon's skill at hurdling had become a money-making business in the States.

Ramon was to make several appearances in England and Scotland. This, at a London Athletic Club's meeting, was his first. Chief of his opponents was Larry Clint, of the Wessex Harriers. Wilson was not among those present, but a letter had been sent to him, through me, inviting him to compete against Ramon either at Birmingham or Glasgow.

Prejudice against Ramon did not blind me to the great start he made. He was well in his stride before the crack of the gun had ceased echoing round the stadium. He was in front as he bore down on the first of the ten 2 ft. 6 in. hurdles.

Frank Ducker, a former amateur boxer and a member of the British Athletic Association committee, turned to me.

" He's got style," said Frank.

I watched closely as Ramon approached the first hurdle. He did not jump. His right leg went high and he threw out his arms as balance to prevent breaking his stride. Without a falter in his rhythm he was over and running on.

The spectators appreciated the timing and grace of his movements and began to applaud.

Larry Clint was coming along hard and was running at Ramon's shoulder. The rest of the hurdlers were already " also rans."

Then, in his smooth, polished style, Ramon began to draw right away from the Britisher from the half-way mark and he more or less had the place to himself when he cleared the last hurdle. Then he accelerated into a sprint and flung out his arms in a triumphant gesture as he broke through the tape.

There was a slight pause before the loudspeakers announced that Ramon had equalled his own world record time of twenty-two and three-fifth seconds. Clint's time was twenty-five seconds—a big, big gap.

Dave Katz, in a pearly grey suit that was too tight round the waist, placed a vivid crimson gown round Ramon's shoulders and led him towards the group of reporters who were gathered on the turf. They both ignored Larry Clint..

" What did I tell you, boys ?" Katz exclaimed smugly. " You haven't forgotten that I said Verne can equal that record just when he pleases."

Ramon looked at the crowd.

"Sure, I showed them," he said. "And I'll show them again."

" Good boy, Verne," oozed Katz.

" Modest violets, aren't they ?" growled Ducker.

Katz patted the flower in his buttonhole—it had the size and brilliance of a geranium.

" I'm going to tell you boys something," he said. " Before Verne goes home he's aiming to beat his own world record for the 220 yards low hurdles——" He paused impressively. " Listen and I'll tell you something else. Verne is also after the 120 yards high hurdles record which is at present held by Red Clemsen, the Finn. Clemsen's time stands at fourteen seconds, but Verne will knock two-fifths of a second off that piece of clockwork for certain, and I shall be disappointed if it isn't three-fifths."

Ducker drew me aside.

" They haven't encountered Wilson yet " he said grimly.

" We haven't heard whether he's going to run yet. There's a chance that his reply will be at the office," I said. " I wrote several days ago."

At the Clarion office we found that our journey had not been wasted. An envelope addressed in Wilson's thin handwriting lay on my desk. As I read the letter my face must have shown surprise—certainly I felt it.

" Won't Wilson hurdle ?" Frank asked tensely.

" Read it," I said.

My friend pored over the letter. It was as follows:—

" Dear Mr Webb,—I thank you for the intimation that the British A.A. would like me to run in the hurdles at Birmingham or Glasgow. I shall not be running, but I shall be obliged if you would enter Joe Fielding for the races. Yours faithfully.—W. Wilson."

Frank frowned.

" I've never heard of Joe Fielding," he said.

" Neither have I," I exclaimed.

" It's up to you, Bill," Frank declared. " Go and find out."

The Startling Shepherd

NEXT morning I got to Stayling, the small Yorkshire village below Amberside Moor, the moor where Wilson had made his home.

Fred Tutton, the broad and breezy landlord of the Stayling Arms Inn, appeared in the porch as I stopped my car outside.

" Here again, Mr Webb," he called out. " Looking for Wilson, I suppose ? That's usually what brings you to Stayling."

" Right first time," I said and got out of the car. " Have you seen him about recently ?"

" Not for three or four days," Tutton said. " I think he came down into the village to post a letter."

" That was for me," I grunted and stared at the moorlands, undulating away in heathery masses to the horizon.

" D'you know anyone here called Joe Fielding ?" I asked uncertainly.

Tutton gave a nod.

" Everyone here knows Joe Fielding," he said.

" Well, who is he ?" I asked impatiently

The landlord smiled.

" Joe is Farmer Oake's shepherd," he told me. " A big hefty lad. He plays centre-half

Illustration 2.3: This image satisfied questions of Wilson's abilities by depicting him alongside a young male character who did not possess any superhuman qualities. *Source: Wizard*, 27 August 1949.

> too large for his body. His brown hair had a fringe. His eyes were deeply set. Joe Fielding was six inches taller than Wilson. You would have called him just a hefty country lad with fresh cheeks and strong muscles.[27]

In another episode Wilson's 'thin, wiry body' was contrasted with his opponents 'muscular torso.'[28] Wilson was depicted as a sickly, weak character, ('his eyes were deeply set'; 'thin, wiry') in contrast with the emphasis placed on his opponents' physical bodies ('strong muscles'; 'muscular torso'). Wilson did not measure up against the traditional sporting male. It was from this point that the narrative emphasised alternative masculine ideals. Wilson did not look for personal reward or self-gratification from the feats of physical endurance that he performed. He often attributed his wins to someone else or did not accept the prize at the end of the story, because 'to have made the jump is the only reward he sought!'[29]

When Joe won the race Wilson's reaction was described: 'Never had he shown emotion at one of his own triumphs, but now his cheeks were flushed and he was obviously jubilant at Fielding's success [...] The great athlete seemed to show real warmth towards the youth.'[30] This action placed Wilson among other boy heroes who practiced restraint and responsibility, rather than aggression. The hero's own definition of masculinity became sharper without ever being explicitly presented as such. He was a hero with not only superhuman physical strength but also a hero who exercised moderation, self-discipline and responsibility, all ultimate manly values.

The character of Wilson belonged to the working-class hero model that Boyd identified was important within the Edwardian period of papers. Yet he also subverted the societal norms and rules attached to the working-class hero who worked with the system. When Wilson competed with the British Athletic Association 'everyone – except Wilson – wore the official blue-and-gold tie of the United British Athletic Association and a similar ribbon round his sun hat. Wilson wore neither a tie nor a hat. He had on a rough, homespun suit and thick-soled

[27] *Wizard*, 27 August 1949.
[28] *Wizard*, 30 July 1949.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 27 August 1949.

boots.'[31] This type of individual working-class, anti-hero was championed further in D.C. Thomson's *Rover* after 1945.

At the end of the Second World War working-class male youths posed a concern for educationalists and moral reformers. Rising rates of juvenile crime, dramatised by repeated panics surrounding metropolitan youth cultures, focused attention upon young men's socialisation into 'normative' masculinities.[32] Vociferous critiques of the transition from post-war austerity to 1950s affluence sharpened concern about the male youth.[33] In 1951 'A Study of Glasgow Boys' was published which, based on the experiences of 1, 349 Glasgow lads, was concerned with their future prospects. The report indicated that despite the numerous social organisations 'run by churches, social agencies, and other autonomous bodies, and supplemented more recently by a Youth Service provided by Education Authorities and led by Youth Service officers [...] there is a failure to guide the interests and ambitions of youth into channels of social usefulness and their mental and physical energies into productive work.' 'Glaring' records of 'hooliganism and gangsterism' were cited as evidence of the youth problem.[34] D.C. Thomson & Co. responded to the concern surrounding male youth after the Second World War by introducing anti-heroic, male working-class characters into their story papers for boys.

'Hooligans' and Working-class Heroes in the *Rover*, c. 1949

Alf Tupper 'was regarded as a hooligan' in the *Rover*.[35] 'Alf Tupper - The Tough of the Track' series first featured in D.C. Thomson's *Rover* in 1949 and continued as a comic strip in the *Victor* until the 1980s.[36] The Tupper series focused on Alf's hard fought achievements in athletics. However, the character of Alf

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[31] Ibid., 30 July 1949.
[32] The uniqueness of the post-war 'phenomenon' of male subcultures has been questioned by G. Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London, 1983); J. Gillis, 'The Evolution of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1890 – 1914' in *Past and Present*, 67 (1975), pp. 96-126 and J. Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain 1860 – 1960* (Dublin, 1986).
[33] R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1957).
[34] T. Ferguson & J. Cunnison, *The Young Wage Earner: A Study of Glasgow Boys* (London, 1951), pp. 24-5.
[35] *Rover*, 18 June 1949. The term 'hooligan' was first used to describe gangs of rowdy youths in 1898 and was said to have originated as a corruption of 'Hooley's gang', which operated in south London at the time. See Pearson, *Hooligan*, p. 74.
[36] The *Wizard* and the *Rover* were merged in 1970 to form *The Wizard and Rover*. In 1973 the *Victor* and *Wizard* were also amalgamated.

subverted established ideas and narratives, and undermined previous story paper representations of masculinity and class. The label 'hooligan' produced the image of a rough working-class youth, a sign of moral decline and cultural disintegration, who required control and regulation.[37] This concern for order and control was highlighted by the attention young working-class youths achieved at the time from a range of official organisations, such as boys' clubs and from contemporary social scientists.[38] Stephen Humphries' work on working-class youth culture and the complex issue of class conflict allows a distinction to be made between the concept of a 'hooligan' and a 'rebel'.[39]

Setting the 'Tough of the Track' series in a northern, industrial working-class context, (a fictional manufacturing town called Greystone[40]), instantly created a departure from previous boys' sporting stories set on the playing fields of public schools, locations favoured in the *Boys' Own Paper* and earlier in the *Magnet* and the *Gem*. In the early twentieth century 'in England, urbanisation was associated with the weakening of manhood, and playing fields were thought to be ideal for the reconstitution of masculinity.'[41] The backdrop of a northern manufacturing town provoked some interesting conflicts and class antagonisms. The factory working class initially started existence doubly segregated, morally and physically cut off in smoky towns from the rest of the nation. By moving the 'playing field' and the action into an urban environment the manly ideal became more accessible to working-class boys, at a time when the traditional 'playing field'[42] for British masculinity of the colonial state was in doubt.

This alternative setting stimulated the idea of Alf as a working-class anti-hero and offered a contested and subverted language of class. His character did not resemble the previous aristocratic boy heroes let alone the working-class characters who had accepted authority in the Edwardian and inter-war period. Alf slept in a

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[37] The *Victor* included a prequel to the 'Tough of the Track' series in 1973 called 'The Rough Tough Boyhood of Alf Tupper'. Alf was an orphan and sent to an 'Industrial 'School' for 'care and attention'.
[38] Pearson, *Hooligan*; E. Yeo, 'The Boy is the Father of the Man': Moral Panic Over Working-Class Youth, 1850 to the present', in *Labour History Review*, 69, 2 (2004), pp. 185-199.
[39] S. Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels: An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889 – 1939* (Oxford, 1981), p. 10.
[40] *Rover*, 30 December 1950.
[41] A. D. Downes, 'From Boys to Men: Colonial Education, Cricket and Masculinity in the Caribbean 1870 – c. 1920', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22, 1 (January 2005), pp. 6-7.
[42] Ibid., Downes suggests that the playing field was a metaphor for the colonial state, p. 9.

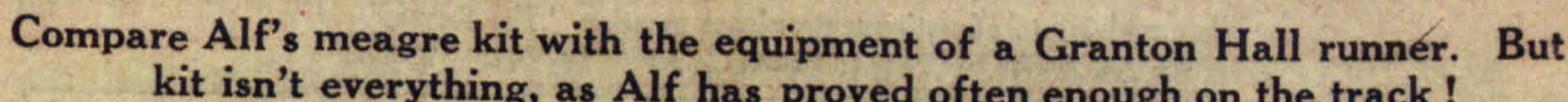
disused barge on the canal, worked as a plumber's handyman, earned 25 shillings a week, pawned his running prizes and lived off fish and chips. Instead of offering a view of the class structure from the viewpoint of the middle and upper classes, the story created a space for those from below to construct their own suitable, sometimes defiant, language of class. Alf continually showed disrespect for agencies of social control and power. He was not obedient and did not compromise or submit to the assumed greater knowledge of his elders and their community. The image created of Alf Tupper throughout was of a strong-minded, independent young man who did not fit easily into the traditional middle-class or working-class discourse of masculinity previously upheld in boys' story papers.

Class distinction was flaunted in the series. As a working-class 'hooligan' Alf competed and was compared with the middle-class athletic 'swanks' of Granton Hall Athletics Club. The term 'swank' was commonly used then as an informal disapproval when someone acted too confidently. This class tension was highlighted in a number of ways. Alf's clothes objectified his working-class position. His 'brown paper package' contained his old running shoes, which he tied on with old bits of cord, and his running vest contrasted strongly with the 'swanks' 'dark red blazers and white flannel trousers.'[43] (See illustration 2.4)

The different journeys that Alf and the 'swanks' made to competitions emphasised the class distinctions between the two. In one episode Alf travelled to a competition in Brussels via a ferry, bike, foot and hitched a ride on the tailgate of a lorry and eventually arrived late. In contrast the 'swanks' had a comfortable journey on 'an airliner that flew smoothly over [Alf] on the same course.'[44] Despite the 'swanks' attempts to sabotage Alf's chances of competing in races, Alf was resourceful and always managed to get out of whatever situation he found himself in. This narrative of resilience emphasised key working-class masculine attributes such as independence, hard work and strength.

Sport offered the most prominent area for heroic achievement. For young boys who were growing up in the 1950s becoming a professional sportsman may have been attractive compared with the privations they were still experiencing. Tales

[43] *Rover*, 1 October 1949.
[44] Ibid., 18 June 1950.



THE WHITE CITY SPORTS.

ALF TUPPER, the tough of the track, jogged along through the streets of Greystone. He turned into a side street and soon a railway viaduct loomed against the sky.

Alf was nearly home. He lived in the viaduct archway that his employer, Ike Smith, rented for a welding shop.

Alf did not, however, go straight on up the alley. He turned into Sam Kessick's small café on the corner.

"I'm starving," Alf said on entering. "Let's have some fish and chips and a cup of char, Sam !"

The tea, quickly followed by the fish and chips, came across the counter. Alf reached for the vinegar bottle.

"There's a bit in the paper about you to-night," Kessick remarked.

Alf spoke with his mouth full of chips.

"What have I done now ?" he asked.

"It just says you've entered for the Mile Open at the British Amateur Athletic Association sports at the White City on Saturday week," remarked Kessick.

"That's right enough," said Alf. "I've been training specially for the race for weeks now."

Kessick wiped the counter.

"Do you think you stand a chance ?" he asked.

"I hope so," said Alf. "I've run one or two not-so-bad Miles this year. Who's running for Granton Hall ? It won't be Clem Gatacre because he's gone to South Africa."

Kessick had another look at the paper. "Here it is ! It says that Archie Jarman will run in Granton Hall colours."

Alf was interested. Granton Hall, in the suburbs of Greystone, was the finely-equipped centre opened for the improvement of British athletics.

"I heard Jarman was coming over from Belfast to stay at the Hall," he said. "I guess they want to sharpen him up for the race. He'll take some beating but he won't be the only one. Ritchie, of Cammerford Corinthians, and Backstone, of London, have both broken four minutes twelve seconds for the distance."

With the fish and chips a happy memory, Alf left the café and went on up the alley.

He pushed the archway door open, switched on the light that shone dimly and filled the workshop with shadows, filled a bucket at the sink and used a handful of cotton waste as a sponge to wash himself.

Then he pulled his mattress out from under the bench, unrolled it, and laid it on the floor in the corner farthest from the door. After exchanging his running togs for his shirt, he lay down and covered himself with sacks.

Within a minute he was asleep.

SPEED TRIAL.

ON the following afternoon, Fred Green, a back-street newsagent, was sticking papers into the rack outside the shop when he heard a clanging and banging. The sound was familiar. Alf was coming up the street shoving a hand-cart laden with metal boxes.

Alf turned the hand-cart into the side of the road.

"I had a surprise this morning, Fred," he said to his friend. "I thought that Granton Hall wouldn't be too friendly as I didn't run for them in the road relay, but Commander Churcher sent me a postcard. He writes that he's noticed I'm to run at the White City and says that I can use the Granton Hall track for my practice."

Fred Green gave an appreciative nod. Commander Harold Churcher, the old British Olympics relay runner, was Warden of Granton Hall.

"Are you going to accept the invitation ?" Fred asked.

"Why not ?" retorted Alf. "I can go up there in the evenings when the field isn't being used." Then he came to the point. "I thought of giving myself a full trial to-night, Fred. How about coming along and timing me ?"

"I'll come along when I've delivered the papers," said the newsagent. "It will be after seven."

"It'll be light enough," replied Alf. "I'll meet you up there."

There were always lectures or film shows at Granton Hall in the evenings, so Alf and Fred Green had the field to themselves.

Fred Green wound up his stop-watch. Alf jogged about till he was thoroughly warmed-up.

"Feel okay ?" his time-keeper asked.

"I've never felt better," said Alf, and trotted to the starting line.

"Get set !" Green called out, and Alf got down. "One—two—three—go !"

Alf was away. Green, who had done some running in his time, could not fault the start. He palmed his watch and watched as Alf strode away on his first circuit of the quarter-mile course. His style was rough and ready and he gave the impression of butting his way along.

Alf came round, moving easily. There was no strain on his face as he approached.

Green snatched a look at the watch.

"You're slow !" he shouted as the runner strode by.

Alf sped on and ran the second lap. He came in strongly. Green had the time for the half-mile.

"You're still too slow," he called out.

Alf's feet pattered fast on the grand track. Running was no trouble that evening. His figure receded, took the first curve, entered the second straight, and grew large as he again approached.

"I'll keep quiet about his time," Green decided, and contented himself by yelling "Last lap !"

He could tell that Alf was going all out. From every point of view except the important one, the lone wolf of the track was in good trim.

Alf ripped round the circuit and raced in. He had judged things just right. He had spread his energy out and was able to come in with a spurt.

"How did I do, Fred ?" he panted.

"You took four minutes twenty-nine seconds !" exclaimed Green.

Alf gaped.

"There must be something wrong with your watch, Fred !"

Green shook his head.

"It's no use blaming it on the watch," he said.

Alf stooped and picked up his jacket.

"It's queer," he growled. "I ran that Mile just as I wanted to. Hello ! See who's coming ?"

Commander Harold Churcher, wearing the dark red blazer of Granton Hall, walked out from the buildings towards them.

"I'm glad to see you using the track, Tupper," he said. "How did you get on ?"

"Not very well," Alf answered glumly. "I was only a second under four and a half minutes. It's shaken me."

"I shouldn't worry," replied Churcher. "It isn't easy to run a full trial on your own. You need the spur of competition. I'll tell you what. Archie Jarman is having a full run on Saturday afternoon. It will do you both good to run together. Montgomery, another new chap, will be running, too, but he's no more than moderate as yet."

Alf gave a nod.

"I'll be along, mister," he said.

THE PRACTICE MILE.

ALF arrived at Granton Hall on Saturday afternoon, and put on his strip in the well-equipped changing-room.

Illustration 2.4: The masthead of 'The Tough of the Track' series changed weekly. This one compared Alf's meager kit of one pair of running shoes, shorts and hand painted running vest wrapped and carried in a brown paper package with the Granton Hall runner's professional kit of tracksuit, multiple pairs of shoes and shorts complete with trowel, slippers, suitcase and blazer. *Source*: *Rover*, 1 October 1949.

of soccer and boxing would appeal to a reader by their associations with the reader's own activities and freedoms. Victor Kiernan acknowledges that the 'cult of sport' was 'an important go-between of the classes'.[45] In this light, sport, or more specifically athletics or football, could be seen to highlight a common language. Through the constant trope of a sporting hero different classes were able to find an outlet for their aspirations and hopes. Kiernan is quick to point out that hero worship should not be mistaken for the sum total of working-class allegiance or aspiration. Instead, it represents a 'sturdy independence, deserving of respect in a world of increasingly machine-made values.'[46]

Sport was revered in male juvenile literature and celebrations of the skills developed by participation were further emphasised in editorials and informative articles. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century team sports were viewed as essential to character building as they employed an ethos of team spirit, loyalty and manliness while simultaneously replicating the choices and situations young men may have faced on the battlefield. Historian Richard Holt suggests that the common idea of popular sports in the early twentieth century was that 'workers make their own culture rather than having their play organised for them.'[47] For Alf, competing independently in athletic tournaments was fun. Athletics was a hobby that kept him busy after the hours of work. He acknowledged that he'd 'be bored stiff without a bit of racing.'[48] He seldom accepted prize money: 'Running's my sport. I don't want a penny for this.'[49]

John Robertson wrote for D.C. Thomson's syndicate of boys' story papers and worked on the 'Tough of the Track' series from 1954 until 1985. He recalled the character of Alf Tupper:

> If we take Alf Tupper, Alf Tupper was a loner, who by sheer guts and determination got himself to the top and despised officialdom and bureaucracy. He had an old vest with a

[45] V. Kiernan, 'Working Class and Nation in Nineteenth Century Britain', in M. Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and their Causes: Essays in Honour of A. L. Morton* (London, 1978), p. 136.
[46] Ibid.
[47] R. Holt, 'The Batsman as Gentleman: Inter-War Cricket and the English Hero', in G. Cubit & A. Warren (eds.), *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester, 2000), p. 135
[48] *Rover*, 30 December 1950.
[49] Ibid., 10 September 1949.

wolf's head [painted] on it and he was a loner in a situation where you had increasing clubs and coaches.[50]

Conscious of the elaborate emblems on the other teams' kit Alf reacted by painting the motif of his employers company "Moggs & Co.", a wolf, on his shirt with black paint borrowed from the groundsman.[51] This emblem marked him out as the subversive 'lone wolf runner' and not a member of the pack.[52] Alf was self-sufficient, 'in fact he was a one-man team.'[53] He competed alone and was not a team player.

In contrast it is easy to spot the middle-class professionalisation of sport in the 'Tough of the Track' series. Alf's opposition, the 'swanks' from the athletics club, employed two eminent scientists who hoped to 'make a real science of athletics.'[54] Their coach, Commander Churcher, was also a former Olympic relay runner, which echoed of rules and regulations of a governing body. He was considered an 'expert opinion'.[55] His name even combined references to the military and Christian morality. Churcher did not support Alf's independent attempts to race and succeed. Professionalisation equated to a ruling voice of authority, which dictated the correct and legitimate demeanour of those who were highly trained and disciplined. They regulate every aspect of an athlete's training regime, which would not endorse a staple diet of fish and chips. Despite this Alf usually succeeded and won which undermined established order and bureaucracy.

Independent working-class recreation was at odds with rational recreation under middle-class control. Alf's strong independence and nonconformity were constantly in conflict with the official discourse of middle-class respectability and normality. In the context and language of 'The Tough of the Track', Alf was labelled by the dominant powers as deviant, a radical, a minority or as an outsider, an 'other'. He was not included in their ideal. He did not conform to their notion of 'normal'. Indeed, Alf 'regarded being hard-up as the normal state of existence.'[56] The 'Tough of the Track' series resisted the civilizing process of fair play and sportsmanship and

[50] Interview with John Robertson, 18 March 2005, conducted by Hilary Young.
[51] *Rover*, 22 July 1950.
[52] Ibid., 10 September 1949.
[53] Ibid., 22 July 1950.
[54] Ibid., 30 December 1950.
[55] Ibid., 10 September 1949.
[56] Ibid., 18 June 1949.

transgressed the limits of decent involvement in terms of middle-class standards of language, gesture and style. As opposed to traditional middle-class ideals of athleticism and respectability, the character of Alf could initially be understood as deviant because he undermined middle-class expectations:

> Alf Tupper, the welding-shop apprentice whose one great interest in life was athletics, put a sack down on the counter of the pawnshop. He took out a chiming clock and two big cabinets of fish knives and forks.
>
> 'How did you get hold of these?' asked Dan Sherwin, the pawnbroker.
>
> 'If you think I pinched 'em you're wrong,' snapped Alf. 'They're all prizes I've won for running. I want six quid on them.'[57]

The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) provided a framework for amateur status in 1948. The regulations included a wide range of activities which rendered an athlete ineligible to compete which included selling or pawning prizes.[58] In spite of the rules and regulations of the governing body and the middle-class derision towards pawning, the character of Alf operated outside of 'the law' in order to emphasise his economic independence and self-determination. The series showed a clash between the independent traditions of working-class youth and the attempts to control and discipline it by the complex web of educational, welfare, penal, military and religious institutions. Alf Tupper was a rebellious character. Persistent rule breaking and opposition to authority characteristic of working-class youth culture has traditionally been viewed as undisciplined and delinquent.

The language employed in the story also emphasised Alf's defiant, irreverent attitude towards middle-class cultural authority. Alf's onomatopoeic and colloquial language such as 'snapped', 'growled', 'chipped', 'grunted' worked as an affront to official established authority throughout the stories. But historian Stephen Humphries urges that these cultural forms be acknowledged as class resistance. Thus,

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[57] Ibid.

[58] M. Polley, 'The Amateur Rules': Amateurism and Professionalism in Post-War British Athletics' in *Contemporary British History*, 14, 2 (2000), p. 93.

the character of Alf moulded himself as a rebel in the sense of someone who resisted and resented class authority, as opposed to a hooligan or a street tough vandal.

Alf's body was also used as a site of contest within these stories for young boys. Where previous concern had laid emphasis on the degenerating inefficiency of working-class males the story papers post 1945 readdressed the issue and focused instead on the 'normal' male youth opposed to an idealised, perfect, manly body. Constructions of the body, clean, healthy and strong versus dirty, unhealthy and weak, continually reappeared throughout the 'Tough of the Track' series but instead of criticising this physically weaker representation, it was championed as an achievable reality. Body measurements that compared Alf to his competitors were positive motifs within the narrative of the Tough stories. Often the shorter Alf outpaced the tallest competitor: The six-foot Australian 'had given his long legs too fast a pace to maintain.'[59] Alf portrayed working-class men as physically able, independent winners. In one episode Alf competed in the Midland Works Athletic Association annual sports meet:

> Alf was tackling a big thing. As the only representative of Moggs and Co. in the Inter-Works Contest for the Wilden Cup, he had entered for the 100 Yards, the 220 Yards, the Quarter-Mile, the Mile, the Jumps and the Hurdles. In fact he was a one-man team. Up against him were teams from at least twenty big factories.[60]

Ideologically, the independent man was up against the collective corporate might. Having entered as many competitions as he could in order to gain the maximum number of points, the hero had to compete in each qualifying heat back to back. Alf was described physically:

> Alf's shoes felt gritty. They had collected a lot of sand in the pit and he had not had time to knock it out. His damp hair flopped over his face. The paint was smudging on his singlet. Spectators who got their first close look at him laughed at he went by [...] He was smothered in dust and

[59] *Rover*, 22 July 1950.
[60] Ibid.

> sweat and his mouth was a wide gape but he wouldn't let go
> and he wouldn't ease off.[61]

The physical description of Alf, the working-class self-governing hero, contrasted significantly with his sponsored middle-class rivals: one 'looked a smooth-limbed, streamlined athlete as he stepped out of his track suit', and the other was 'thickset and broad chested'.[62] The physical masculine image that Alf portrayed was possibly more accessible to young boys. Alf was just an ordinary young man. He did not possess any superhuman powers. While Wilson had embodied superhuman power the Tough series emphasised that in order to win, 'You have to train till you're sick of it and then start again.'[63] Alf's physical suffering was not hidden:

> He was *staggering* towards the tape just ahead of the Swede. Alf *tottered*. A yard from the line he *fell* on to his knees. On his knees he *crawled* over the line while above him Clemmsen broke the tape.[64] [*my emphasis*]

Alf was a strong willed and determined working class lad, who showed stamina, courage and defiance against established authority. Through Alf, an independent integrity was aired which established him as an ideal working-class rebel and anti-hero. The 'class' antagonism in the 'Tough of the Track' series created a space for working-class characters in boys' popular literature and negotiated a definition of class and also masculinity. Ideological construction of masculinity was extremely evident in 'Tough of the Track' series through devices such as fantasy of class defiance, opposition to established authority, but also through fantasy of redressing wrongs through physical strength, grit and determination.

Alf Tupper appeared alongside other working-class characters in D.C. Thomson publications for boys in the late 1940s and 1950s. Although these other characters were not classed as 'hooligans', as working-class men they also had the potential of subverting established discourses of masculinity and class. The character of Matt Braddock, a Sergeant-Pilot in the RAF from the series 'Fly with Braddock' which first appeared in the *Rover* in 1952 'represented a tradition of working-class

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 10 September 1949
[64] Ibid., 18 June 1949.

antipathy to authority with which many young readers, resentful of the discipline imposed by school, or looking ahead to a stint of national service, could identify.'[65] Born in Walsall, Braddock was initially apprenticed to an engineering firm. However, convinced that war was inevitable he learned to fly despite having little education. He knew that his working-class background would be unacceptable to the RAF so he paid for his own flying lessons and discovered a natural talent. The D.C. Thomson storywriter, John Robertson, explained that 'Braddock the great flyer, he was never more than a sergeant because once again the same thing comes in, he despised upper authority. He wasn't a good committee man, none of them [the D.C. Thomson characters] were.'[66]

Another prominent working-class setting for stories was the coalmine and such a series appeared in the *Rover* in 1950 (see illustration 2.5).[67] Through the narrative descriptions the story detailed the strength and camaraderie that was required of a team of men to work in a coal mine:

> Six of the original seven were practical miners, although it was years since Dave Oakroyd, the overman, had worked at the coal face. Dingwell's responsibility at Pit 19 had been connected with the general lay-out, surveying, leveling, and the ventilation [...] This left Cragg and Cowan, who were hewers, and Dobson and Norris, who were back rippers. They made a strong working team.[68]

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[65] Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 235.
[66] John Robertson, 18 March 2005.
[67] 'Only a Collier Lad', *Stories of Pluck* (1903); 'Black Strike; or, The War of the Workers', *Boys' Friend*, nos. 665-85 (1914); 'Disaster Pit', *Boys' Friend*, nos. 656-67. These tales emphasised the role of workers performing their jobs. See Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper*, f. n 55, p.202.
[68] *Rover*, 22 July 1950.

Miners have a plan for clearing a fall of rock. Here you see it in operation as the search goes on for the missing men.

THE MENACE IN PIT 19

THE VOICE FROM NOWHERE.

COUGHING and spluttering because of the coal-dust, Frank Dingwell and his six companions stopped at last and listened to the last trickle of loose earth and stones running down into the far end of the tunnel.

The men wiped the grit from their eyes.

"Was that done on purpose?" asked Noah Dobson.

"Don't ask me!" The surveyor, Dingwell, sounded bitter. "There are things going on down here that I don't understand. That 'hand' which came through the side of the tunnel was the fore-foot of a mole, but a hundred times larger than normal."

Frank Dingwell and six miners were searching in Pit 19, one of the Cragsbank group of mines, for three miners who had disappeared mysteriously.

Strange tunnels which the men could not account for had appeared underground and the seven men now believed they had been made by giant moles.

"I tell you it can be nothing else!" went on Dingwell. "It explains those burrows. The mole is the perfect tunneler."

"Aren't moles blind?" demanded Jim Brett, who was already again looking towards the lower workings, from where the search party had heard shouts.

"There's some argument about that. Their eyes are tiny and almost buried in their fur, but some naturalists say they can tell light from darkness. At least they seem to see and find the worms that they feed on."

"Worms! Would a mole six feet high eat worms?"

There was an uncomfortable meaning in Jim Brett's words, and they all had a brief memory of the skeleton of James Windle.

Dingwell shuddered, and turned abruptly.

"No good looking at that blockage. We'll never get through there without a week of digging. We'd better try to join up with the others. Give them another shout."

But there was no response to their bellowing. They went slowly along the main tunnel.

The crunching of their feet and their hard breathing was the only sound the party could hear. Buried there a thousand feet below ground, the outside world was shut off from them as completely as though they were in a tomb. The pit they were in was no longer worked, and the silence was oppressive. It was twelve years since chains of tubs had trundled along those rails to the bottom of the main shaft.

Thanks to the downcast shaft behind them the air was good. Dingwell fancied there was a draught, but could not tell in which direction it flowed.

Then the light of their solitary lamp in use showed another gallery running away to the left from their own.

It was what they had been seeking. It was possible that it led by way of later workings to the main shaft. They turned left with increased hope. Jim Brett, father of one of the lost miners, continued to shout.

This part of the pit was damp. Water dripped from the walls and roof. There were deep puddles through which they had to wade, and at the edge of one of these they spied footprints into which the water was even now slowly draining.

"Freshly made," grunted the overman. "They can't be far ahead."

There were numerous branch tunnels running at right angles, but they ignored these, although Dingwell usually shone the light into them in passing. It was as they stopped to test the depth of one extra-large pool which completely barred their way that they heard the whisper in their ears—

"I can't go any further, honest I can't! My boot's full o' blood. Can't we stop?"

The sound seemed to come from nowhere in ghostly fashion, but Jim Brett uttered a great cry—

"Danny! That's Danny's voice! Hi, Danny!"

He began to run forward and to shout. He had one of the portable electric lamps which had been supplied to them before they had left Pit 19, and now he switched it on, playing it on the long tunnel before him as he splashed heedlessly through water to his knees.

"Come back, Brett!" shouted the surveyor. "They may be half a mile away. The tunnel acted as a whispering gallery making it possible to hear a voice far away. Danny isn't anywhere near, but we'll find him in due course. Brett, come back!"

The miner half-turned to make reply, stumbled, and collided with one of the main props. There was a snapping sound, and they saw him take a prodigious leap forward. Then the roof above where he stood began to sag, and the next moment down it came, shaking the ground beneath their feet with the thunder of it.

The fall lasted for no more than half a minute, but the gallery was completely blocked. There was no sign of their comrade.

"Did — did it get him?" murmured Sim Norris.

"I don't know. He may have jumped clear in time, but in any case he's cut off from us. If only he'd waited for us!" Frank Dingwell sat down on a huge chunk of coal the size of a small boulder. "It's one thing after another. I believe this gallery would have led to the shaft. Now we're blocked in again."

It was not often that he gave way to despair, but he was on the point of exhaustion.

It was big Dave Oakroyd, the overman, who now took over. If his legs were tired, he did not show it. His light blue eyes were as resolute as ever.

"We'll rest here awhile, and then we'll see if there's no way of getting through," said the overman. "We'll have a bite to eat as well. Luckily, there's no shortage of water, but it's a pity we cannot have tea."

His calm words soothed everyone. They put the lamp on a ledge and made themselves as comfortable as possible. Some more of their small store of food was consumed.

They ate in a silence broken only by the steady drip-drip of the water from the roof. They eyed the mass of rock, earth, and coal before them, and wondered if the mangled form of Jim Brett was underneath, or whether he had managed to jump clear in time. Had he got clear, he would go in search of his boy.

Oakroyd, who, by his experience, was beginning to assume command, suggested that they stop awhile to get some rest.

The light was put out to save the battery, and the six men settled down for an uncomfortable doze.

Oakroyd was the only one who had thought to wind his watch all through the long underground trek, and it was he who later roused the party, telling them they had been there four hours, and that it was time they got to work.

Stiff with cold, their teeth chattering, they blinked at each other in the dim light, and were glad to get busy. So far as they knew, the only way out was through that mass of fallen debris in front of them.

Oakroyd called the men around him, and they began to discuss the best way of tackling the job.

THE RAID OF THE RATS.

SIX of the original seven were practical miners, although it was years since Dave Oakroyd, the overman, had worked at the coal face. Dingwell's responsibility at Pit 19 had been connected with the general lay-out, surveying, levelling, and the ventilation. Brett could no longer be counted. This left Cragg and Cowan, who were hewers, and Dobson and Norris, who were back-rippers. They made a strong working team.

Oakroyd organised everything quietly. He first made sure that they had an adequate supply of props. These were brought from

Illustration 2.5: The coal mine often featured as a setting in boys' story papers. This series was based in fantasy as the miners dealt with oversized rats in the mine shaft. *Source: Rover,* 22 July 1950.

Yet ultimately the leadership qualities of the lead man or overman of the group were depicted as crucial to the survival of the team: 'It was Dave Oakroyd, the overman, who now took over. If his legs were tired he did not show it.'[69] Detailed descriptions of the workings of a mineshaft were included for young boys who had not yet experienced working in a coal mine:

> Everything went smoothly. Props were used as soon as the burrow was long enough to need them. When dealing with loose debris, the risk was far greater than with untouched soil for it was for ever on the move.
> But they persevered, and, as fast as one tub was loaded, it was pushed well clear of the workers.
> The two pairs of miners changed places from time to time, for it was hot, cramping work in the tiny tunnel which they were constructing. The heat was oppressive.[70]

Although the tale emphasised the excitement and adventure of working underground, the physical effect coal mining had on male bodies was not hidden in these texts: 'Coughing and spluttering because of the coal-dust, Frank Dingwell and his six companions stopped at last.'[71]

These tales that involved working-class heroes whether based in the coalmine, in athletics or in the RAF emphasised various attributes of working-class manhood: independence, leadership, loyalty, decency and strength of mind and body. The 'hooligan' or anti-hero was juxtaposed and advocated against the 'swank' or official representation of masculinity which was portrayed as an ironic self-deprecating model. After the Second World War and in a period when intense emphasis was placed on the role of the citizen, D.C. Thomson provided a place in popular literature for working-class heroes. However, this juxtaposition between the 'hooligan' and the 'swank' and concern about working-class youth was reworked again in 1950 when Hulton Press published a new boys' comic.

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[69] Ibid. Oral testimony has highlighted how lead men were viewed by themselves and other members of the team as the strongest man. See A. McIvor & R. Johnston, *Miners' Lung: a History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining*, (Forthcoming 2007).
[70] *Rover*, 22 July 1950.
[71] Ibid.

MUGS, the *Eagle* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, 1950

'MUG' represented a positive masculine identity versus the negative ideal, a 'Spiv', according to the *Eagle* in 1950. The *Eagle* revolutionised the boys' periodical: it was a comic, it was tabloid size, it cost 3d, it had impressive artwork and used photogravure colour. These features all marked it out as different in form and quality to the text based story papers that had come before.[72] The *Eagle* was aimed at boys of ten to fifteen years of age and initially had a circulation of close to a million, which settled to around 750,000 for several years.[73]

The founder and editor of the *Eagle*, the Reverend Marcus Morris, an Anglican priest, had formed the 'Society for Christian Publicity' in the 1940s as a forum for Christian discussion.[74] Morris was primarily concerned about the morality of youth and wanted to create a wholesome comic or magazine 'founded on strong Christian principles as a counteraction to the American crime and horror comics which were beginning to flood the country.'[75] Morris detailed in an article for the *Sunday Dispatch* his concern about the power and influence of American horror comics to incite British children to commit crimes of violence. His article concluded with a clear moral programme of reform:

> I shall not feel I have done my duty as a parson and a father of children until I have seen on the market a genuinely popular children's comic where adventure is once more the clean and exciting business I remember in my own schooldays... Surely, there is adventure enough for any boy or girl in the lives of men like Grenville of Labrador? And some of the daily dangers of St. Paul met would make even Dick Barton look a cissy [sic]. There is a healthy humour that does not involve a bang on the head with a blunt instrument. Children are born hero worshippers, not

[72] The *Eagle* survived until 1969 when it merged with IPC's *Lion* (1969-1970). A spinoff radio programme complimented the publication, 'Journey into Space' by Charles Chilton, and various memorabilia were available to purchase. Dan Dare featured in the first edition of *2000AD* from 1977 to 1978. The *Eagle* comic was re-launched by Odhams/IPC 1982-1994 and later as a T.V cartoon in 2001.

[73] Ellis, *Children's Reading and Literature*, p. 202.

[74] In response to his belief that the Church was not communicating to and reaching the audiences it should, Morris started a magazine called *The Anvil* to 'hammer out important issues of the day', A. Crompton, *The Man Who Drew Tomorrow* (Bournemouth, 1985), p. 26.

[75] *The Times*, Frank Hampson, Obituary (10 July 1985), p. 14.

born ghouls. They will admire what they are given to admire. It is up to us – whether or not we go to Church each Sunday – to see they get a glimpse of what really brave men have done in this world, and share laughter that comes from the heart, not from the gutter.[76]

Morris wanted to create a publication that endowed national heroes with a Christian ethic of manliness. His publication found favour with parents and the educational press, illustrating he was not alone in his concern for the moral well-being of the British youth. The Times Literary Supplement hailed the *Eagle* 'a succcss' after the first ten instalments had been published:

> It seems likely that *Eagle* which overtly sets itself a standard as high as can be consonant with a national circulation among children from every type of home, will perform a most valuable service of offering plènty of unpretentious entertainment and a little unobtrusive instruction without tumbling into reckless sensationalism at one extreme or vapidity at the other.[77]

Writing in *Picture Post* in 1952, Peter Mauger asserted that 'we must act now, before the moral values of our young people have become perverted by this degraded and degrading substitute for healthy enjoyment.'[78] Morris' opinions about the negative impact of American horror comics also found a common cause with the ideas of American psychologist Frederick Wertham author of *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954).[79] The campaign against American horror comics culminated in their being banned in Britain by the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act, 1955.[80] Although Morris deplored the American comics because 'often their content was deplorable, nastily over-violent and obscene' it was clear to Morris that 'here, surely was a form which could be used to convey to the child the right kind of

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[76] M. Morris, ' "Comics" That Take Horror into the Nursery,' *Sunday Dispatch*, 13 February 1949, p. 4

[77] *Times Literary Supplement*, June 16 1950.

[78] P. Mauger, 'Should U.S 'Comics' be Banned?', *Picture Post*, 17 May 1952, p. 35.

[79] F. Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (London, 1954).

[80] For a deeper discussion of the moral panic surrounding American horror comics and the subsequent ban in the UK of American imported comics in 1954, the Children's and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act, see Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics;* M. Barker, *A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign* (London, 1984).

standards, values and attitudes, combined with the necessary amount of excitement and adventure.'[81]

The *Eagle* readdressed the traditional discourse of manliness throughout its pages. To do this it employed a variety of techniques such as comic strips based on science-fiction and westerns with strong heroes as well as non-fiction articles on sport, travel and science. The representations of manliness in these fiction and non-fiction segments were ultimately based on how the *Eagle* wanted to define and address its readership. The foundation for this was laid in the *Eagle's* club.

The *Eagle* encouraged an active dialogue with its readers and attempted to establish a community of readers. Publishing readers' letters alongside an editorial letter reinforced the dialogic principle. The club, for readers to join and participate in events, developed this relationship further.[82] According to Morris the *Eagle* club was 'to link together those who read and enjoy *Eagle*' and was to be 'one of the most important features in the paper.'[83] In the first edition Morris detailed the rules of the club:

> Just like any good club it has very definite aims and standards, and a member has to agree to the club rules. Here are the most important of them.
> *A*: Enjoy life and help others to enjoy life. They will not enjoy themselves at the expense of others.
> *B*: Eagle club members will make the best of themselves. They will develop themselves in body, mind and spirit. They will tackle things themselves and not wait for others to do things for them.
> *C*: Work with others for the good of all around them.

[81] M. Morris, *The Best of Eagle* (London, 1982), p. 3.
[82] The *Eagle* club was one of the earliest forms of its kind for children. Membership cost one shilling and for the first four weeks the *Eagle* badge was free, thereafter it cost 6d. 60,000 children applied to join in the first week. The first hundred members were given free trips to Farnborough Air Display, the Silverstone Grand prix, the West Indian Test Match or the Highland Games depending on where they lived, S. Morris & J. Hullwood, *Living With Eagles. From Priest to Publisher: The Life and Times of Marcus Morris* (London, 1998), p. 139.
[83] *Eagle*, 14 April 1950.

D: Always lend a hand to those in need of help. They will not shirk difficult or dangerous jobs.[84]

To join the *Eagle* club was only the first step. There was a second kind of membership: to become a 'MUG' and not a 'Spiv'. The *Eagle's* moral code contrasted the 'ideal' gentleman with what was determined to be deviant or 'other':

> There are really only two kinds of people in the world. One kind are MUGS – The opposite of the MUGS are the Spivs – also called wide boys, smart boys, hooligans, louts or racketeers. The MUGS are the people who are some use in the world; the people who do something worthwhile for others instead of just grabbing for themselves all the time.
>
> Of course the Spivs snigger at that. They use the word MUG as an insult. "Aren't they MUGS?" they say about people who believe in living for something bigger than themselves.
>
> That is why someone who gets called a MUG is likely to be a pretty good chap. For one thing he's got to have guts because he doesn't mind being called a MUG. He likes it. He's the sort who will volunteer for a difficult job and say cheerfully, "Alright, I'll be the MUG." That doesn't mean he is stupid. It means he's got the right ideas and doesn't think it is at all clever to be a spiv-type.[85]

Morris wanted to subvert the definition of the term 'mug', traditionally used to define someone who was easily deceived. He used the term ironically to appeal to a group of readers who had possibly been in a situation where their goodwill had been ridiculed (see illustration 2.6). Morris intended the term to provide an understanding of what it meant to be manly: brave, independent and thoughtful. The club and 'MUG' system highlighted the *Eagle's* concern for boys' morality and echoed the anxiety evidenced by social scientists in the same period. 'Spivs' had been specifically identified as a specific youth culture in a 1949 Mass-Observation

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

EAGLE CLUB

AND EDITOR'S PAGE

13 *April*, 1951

The Editor's Office
EAGLE
4 *New St. Square, London*, E.C.4

THE time has gone so quickly during the last year that it is difficult to realise that we are now celebrating EAGLE's first birthday.

We little thought a year ago, when the first issue went to press, how widely EAGLE would have spread, and how firmly it would have become established among readers of all ages.

It has been a most exciting time, and one of the best things in it has been the contact we have made with you, our readers – both by way of letters of which we get a great number each week, and also through the various expeditions which EAGLE Club has organized.

We wish we could have given you in celebration of our birthday a bumper number with more pages and many new features. Unfortunately, the paper situation is so difficult that we are only able to give you the usual number of pages, but we have tried to include one or two features of special interest. And on this page we have some specially important announcements to make, which will appeal particularly to Club members.

We are going to celebrate our birthday in four ways.

1 BIRTHDAY PARTIES

We are arranging big birthday parties in six of the biggest towns in the British Isles, to which we are inviting selected members of EAGLE Club. They will take place every day during the week beginning April 23rd, and they will be held at Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and London.

In each of these places there will be a party and entertainment, and I shall be present at each of them, together with Frank Hampson, our *Dan Dare* artist.

We wish it was possible to invite all Club members living in these towns, but there are so many of you that this is quite impossible. So will those of you who live in or near any of these six towns write in to me saying that you would like to be invited. All letters should reach us not later than 17th April.

On the 18th April the letters will be put in a big drum, and I shall pick out one hundred for each town. Those who are chosen will then receive an official invitation telling them where and when the party is to be held. Address your letters to PARTIES, EAGLE Club, Colley House, London E.C.4.

2 PRESENTS

We are going to do something for those who do not win an invitation to the parties. We shall be sending out nearly 3,000 gift parcels to Club members in all parts of the country. These 3,000 will be chosen by ballot.

3 SPECIAL COMPETITION

Here is a special competition open to all our readers. There will be £50 in prizes, but instead of sending money to the winners we are going to give them the choice of a really good piece of sports equipment. There will be 10 prizes awarded. The winners will have the choice of a cricket bat, football, tennis racket, hockey-stick, lacrosse stick.

Here is the competition:– I want you to imagine that these EAGLE characters meet together – DAN DARE, DIGBY, P.C. 49, JEFF ARNOLD, HARRIS TWEED and his boy, and TOMMY WALLS. Write down the conversation that you think might take place between them.

Send your entries to BIRTHDAY COMPETITION, EAGLE, Colley House, London E.C.4, giving your name, address, age and Club number (if any).

4 MORE PRIZES

As this is our Birthday issue we are also for this week doubling the number of prizes for competitions in Competition Corner which you will find on page 5. There will be 24 prizes for each competition, and these, too, are open to all readers.

In addition to these four Birthday extras, we hope you will like the two Special Announcements on this page – and take part in them.

MUG OF THE YEAR

IT was very difficult to decide from among all the MUG awards we have made, the one who deserved the special honour of being MUG OF THE YEAR.

You will see on this page the decision we finally reached. We are inviting John Grimes to London and offering him a holiday at EAGLE's expense. He will also be presented with a special certificate and badge.

We shall, of course, be continuing our MUG Awards during next year, choosing one each month as MUG of the Month. In 1950 MUGS of the Month were, you remember, taken on a holiday to Italy.

EAGLE CLUB PLANS

WE are making lots of plans for Club activities during the coming year – organizing, on an even bigger scale, the various schemes we have carried out during the past year. For example, local visits, holidays at home and abroad, and so on.

We hope we shall get a great many more members of EAGLE Club during the next year. Because of all the things we are planning to do for members, we have had to decide to put up the subscription to the Club to 2/- instead of 1/6. This increase will date from today, so those of you who have not yet joined and want to do so should write to EAGLE Club, Long Lane, Aintree, Liverpool 9, giving your name, address, age and school, and enclosing a Postal Order for 2/-.

Those of you who are already members of EAGLE Club will shortly be receiving from me a special illustrated Report giving an account of our activities so far. This will contain a form for rejoining the Club for another year. So if you are already a member, do not write in to renew your membership until you receive this Report from me.

FORTNIGHTLY COMPETITION

THIRDLY, you know that we have during this last year been running special competitions *for Club members*. We have now decided to have them once a fortnight instead of once a month to give many more of you a chance of taking part in the visits to London and the other prize-winning expeditions we organize.

Here is the first Fortnightly Competition. This is for Club members only. It should appeal particularly to those of you who are interested in motor sports, and there is a thrilling prize.

I want you to write a short story of which the plot deals with some form of motor or motor-cycle racing. The story can be any length up to 2,000 words. Prizes will be awarded for the best written and most interesting.

The senders of the six best entries will have the thrill of being *flown* to the Isle of Man to see the Senior International Tourist Trophy Motor Cycle Race – one of the world's fastest. In addition, we shall choose three prize-winners who live in the Isle of Man.

Send your entries to Fortnightly Competition, EAGLE, Colley House, London E.C.4, to reach us not later than 25th April, giving your name, age, address and Club number.

BERTRAM MILLS Circus will be appearing at Colchester from April 23rd to 25th and we are taking a party of 20 members of EAGLE Club, free of charge, to see the show on April 23rd at 4.30 p.m. This is for members living within 5 miles of Colchester, and those of you who would like to go should write as soon as possible to "Circus", EAGLE Club, Colley House, New Street Square, London E.C.4, giving your name, address and Club number. The first 20 applications opened will be chosen.

Yours sincerely,
MARCUS MORRIS

MUG OF THE YEAR

JOHN GRIMES
7 Beach Grove, Cleaton Estate,
South Shields

Why has thirteen-year-old John Grimes been chosen as MUG of the year? Because he is a first-class example of the sort of person the MUG's badge exists to honour.

John is a cripple and the eldest of a family of six. Many household responsibilities fall upon him as his mother is not too fit. But it was the way he responded to an especially testing time that marks him out as a hero of everyday life. John was working hard to try to qualify for Grammar School Entrance. His mother went sick with quinzy and pneumonia and his brother, Mike, with pneumonia. John stayed away from school to look after them and the home. He stayed up with his brother all night sometimes. He was with him when he died. He tended his mother all night too. Yet, even under this strain – which lasted for weeks – John did what he could to prepare himself for Grammar School Entrance. He was back at school in time for the examination and, out of 500 pupils, he alone gained a special place at Corby Hall School, Sunderland.

Always thoughtful for others, John reacts to difficulties by putting out a greater effort to overcome them. Our heartiest congratulations, John!

TWO SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

FIRST:

EAGLE FAMILY DAY

WE have decided to make April 14th every year (the day on which EAGLE first came out) into EAGLE FAMILY DAY.

The idea is that on this day EAGLE readers should think especially of their own families – parents, brothers, sisters – and resolve to do everything they can to make the day happier for their family.

Most of you will know that for hundreds of years there has been Mothering Sunday when children do what they can to help their mothers, and perhaps give them a small gift of violets or a simnel cake as a sign of their love.

EAGLE FAMILY DAY has the same idea behind it. I am not going to suggest exactly what you should do for your families each April 14th. It is up to you to think how you can help them most. But it should be more than just being ordinarily useful about the house – helping with the washing up and so on – which you probably do anyway.

There are no prizes being awarded for EAGLE FAMILY DAY, but I hope as many of you as possible will write in to me and tell me what special thing you have done on April 14th. The first EAGLE FAMILY DAY is, of course, tomorrow, so you won't have much time to think what you are going to do, but write and tell me about it.

AND:

EAGLE CHRONICLERS

A JOB FOR EVERYONE

WE feel that EAGLE and its readers should play their full part in the Festival of Britain this year. We are, therefore, launching on a nation-wide scale, a brand new scheme to enable *you* to play *your* part, and we hope that all of you will join in. Our EAGLE *Chroniclers Scheme* is something which can last for a very long time, and which can be of real benefit to future generations.

This is how it works:–

How is it that you know that King Alfred burnt the cakes, and that Lady Godiva saved Coventry from excessive taxation? It is only because someone at the time who lived near where these incidents happened took the trouble to write them down, and their records have been passed on to us. But thousands of similar events, which would have been of great interest to us, have been lost because there was no one to chronicle them.

During this Festival of Britain year especially, a great deal of local history may be made. Need the record of all this be lost, or can we EAGLE readers help in chronicling it for the future?

Forming a Group

We suggest that *Eaglers* in the same school or the same district should form a group, and together plan to produce a Chronicle of their own town or district or village. They should invite some one older (perhaps their headmaster or headmistress) to act as Editor-in-Chief, and give advice.

Then each member of the Group, who would be known as EAGLE Chroniclers, should be entrusted with one particular part of the Chronicle. Here are some of the subjects into which it could be divided:–

1. Brief historical notes on your District, including local Notables and Folk Lore.
2. Interesting Architecture of the District.
3. Local Government activities.
4. Plans of your District (with details of population, rates, roads, transport, etc.).
5. Social Life of District (Youth Organizations, Institutes, Literary Societies, etc.).
6. Local Flora and Fauna.
7. Local Art (drawings of beauty spots, etc.).
8. Local Sport (1951 records, teams, etc.).
9. Festival Activities of the District. Notable visitors, etc.

These subjects could easily be divided up into smaller sections, or you may be able to think of many more subjects to deal with. Every section could be illustrated with photographs and drawings.

Twelve Prizes

When you have collected all the material together, you should then hand it over to the one in your school or district who is the best "pen-man", who could write it out neatly. EAGLE will give a prize to the 12 groups who produce the best Chronicle.

This scheme of EAGLE Chroniclers is something in which almost everyone can take part, because it does not matter how big your group is. All you have to do in the first place is to call a meeting of EAGLERS you know and make your plans.

When you have formed your group, the one of you who is appointed as Chairman should write in to me telling me what district you are going to cover. We will give you all the advice and help we can. Later on we shall make arrangements for all the Chronicles produced to be judged to find the 12 prize-winners. We shall, of course, give you plenty of time to make your Chronicle and shall not start the judging until the autumn.

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Illustration 2.6: The *Eagle* included a club page with a letter from the editor. Pictures of the 'MUG of the Month' featured here. *Source*: *Eagle* 13 April 1951.

Report on Juvenile Delinquency.[86] It was subsequently from this group that teddy boys, who presented a concern for middle-class moralists in the early 1950s, 'borrowed large parts of their supposedly unprecedented cultural equipment'.[87] In 1950 a report for the Cadbury Trust on the leisure activities of post war adolescents in Birmingham dolefully reported that they wiled away their time in amusements instead of improving themselves: 'It has astonished us that the standard of writing and spelling among so many young people should be so poor, and that the reading of so many should be limited to 'comics'.'[88] The *Eagle* Club was intended to create a community of morally sound readers. The editors explained that 'We would like to get to the stage when anyone who sees someone wearing an EAGLE badge knows that he or she [sic] is a really useful and reliable person.'[89] Perhaps the ultimate 'MUG' was Dan Dare, the central character of the front page comic strip.

The lead strip of the *Eagle* needed to reflect the new opportunities of the future and a strong character was required whose motives were the best. The editor Marcus Morris and writer Frank Hampson had considered the idea of a female detective Dorothy Dare and a flying padre, Lex Christian, before settling on 'Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future'. Dan was not a superhero. He was intended not to be ordinary, but definitely not extraordinary. He was a skilled pilot, competent and brave. Indeed Hampson said that he planned that Dan Dare should act not as a superman, but 'prevail by intelligence, common sense and determination'.[90] By doing so Dan Dare incorporated the codes of the nineteenth century chivalrous gentleman who was expected to be 'brave, straightforward and honourable [...] He was an honourable opponent and a good loser; he played games for the pleasure of playing, not to win.'[91] Graham Dawson suggests that inherited forms of adventure narratives 'are activated within new social conditions and draw on the imaginaries currently investing them, to produce new kinds of quest.'[92] *The Dan Dare Dossier* described Dare as 'a natural leader and a man who inspires those around him to give

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[86] H. D. Willcock, *Report on Juvenile Delinquency* (London, 1949), pp. 46-50
[87] Pearson, *Hooligan*, p. 22.
[88] B. Reed, *Eighty Thousand Adolescents: A Study of Young People in the City of Birmingham* (London, 1950), p. 47.
[89] *Eagle*, 1 September 1950.
[90] A. Vince, *The Frank Hampson Interview* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 21.
[91] M.Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the British Gentleman* (London, 1981), pp. 57- 8.
[92] G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes* (London, 1994), p. 57.

of their best.'[93] Dan was diplomatic when faced with problematic situations of good versus evil. Initially he would not resort to brute violence to get himself out of situations but would rather attempt to negotiate himself out, and if that failed he would attempt to outwit his enemy. This was a theme pertinent in Victorian boys' magazines, where the show of manly character was best highlighted by the combination of manly strength and ingenuity.

The popularity of the Dan Dare series reflected the growing fascination with the war genre, which had initially decreased after 1945 but was revived again in the early 1950s after the initial impact of the Second World War had dissipated.[94] Boys' story papers of the Victorian period had been imbued with tales of Empire and imperialism. War was worshipped as part of the evolutionary process that led to moral purity, domination and a fully masculine ideal. Poetry, juvenile fiction and magazines are shown to depict the warrior as a national hero, and patriotic death in battle as the finest masculine moral virtue.[95] Brian Edwards suggests that publishers only started to use war as a subject for juvenile story papers and comics again c. 1954 and that 'the contents of the *Eagle* did not include the subject of war unless it was a text-only purely historical article.'[96] However, I would argue that the *Eagle* transformed the war genre via the lead carton strip of Dan Dare into a more accessible form as early as 1950 for the post-war generation.

Frank Hampson, the artist who created Dan Dare, had served in the army during the Second World War and had experienced the bombing of Antwerp. In an interview, Hampson explained how 'most of Dan Dare's adventures take place in 2000 A.D. But they all began really in Belgium in 1944.'[97] Hampson's dreams of the

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[93] N. Wright & M. Higgs, *The Dan Dare Dossier: Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Pilot of the Future* (London, 1990), p. 16.
[94] The Korean War (1950-1953) featured ideologically as the setting, albeit in space for the first Dan Dare series. Dan and his crew were on a mission to recover food from Venus for Britain due to low stocks. Venus was divided in to Northern and Southern spheres by a belt of fire along its equator.
[95] P. Howarth, *Play Up and Play the Game: The Heroes of Popular Fiction* (London, 1973); E. S. Turner, *Boys Will Be Boys* (Harmondsworth, 1976); J.A. Mangan provides an analysis of the cultural creation and conditioning of the 'self-sacrificing elite male warrior' on the playing fields of British public schools during Victorian and Edwardian eras 'Duty unto Death: English Masculinity and Militarism in the Age of the New Imperialism', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12 (1995), pp. 10-37.
[96] B. Edwards, 'The Popularisation of War in Comic Strips, 1958 – 1988', *History Workshop Journal*, 42 (1996), p. 183.
[97] Interview with Frank Hampson quoted in N. Wright & M. Higgs, *The Dan Dare Dossier* (London, 1990), p. 5.

future, idealised in Dan Dare, had been formed by his experiences of the Second World War. Tony Watkins succinctly wrote that

> Dan Dare, Pilot of *the Future*, was a character constructed out of *the past* (especially the mythic and heroic discourses surrounding the experience of World War II) and *the present* in 1950 (in particular, the contradictory discourses of despair and hope that surrounded technology, food supplies, and the possibility of World War III) but presented as a character living in *the future*, of the 1990s.[98]

Hampson acknowledged how he had 'wanted to hold up in science an example of adventuring, like the empire-building sagas of G. A. Henty I had read as a boy.'[99] Dan Dare was created in a period of significant British imperial decline. However, the series emphasised an imperial ethos.

Dan Dare, exemplified the mythic and heroic discourses surrounding the experience of the Second World War by working as part of a group, which was central to the portrayal of masculinity in Second World War films. The Second World War had established the prominence of the 'common man' within society. The myth of the 'people's war' had created the idea of a 'classless' society united in the face of a common enemy. With the introduction of the Welfare State the focus of the British government at the time appeared to be on working people. Popular heroes of both the cinema and boys' juvenile papers, as we have seen, were imbued with working-class traits during and after the Second World War. War films at the time emphasised the importance of the male group as a comforting and homogenous troop, embodying all aspects of ideal masculinity. It was perhaps not possible to embody all the masculine ideals individually, yet collectively across the spectrum of the male group, the characters worked together as one. Christine Geraghty explains that 'in the male groups in films made during World War II, the characters are often typed, particularly those who are not central to the narrative, but taken together they make up a composite, representative man.'[100] The camaraderie within the group also

[98] T. Watkins, 'Piloting the Nation Dan Dare and the 1950s' in D. Jones & T. Watkins (eds.), *A Necessary Fantasy? The Heroic Figure in Children's Popular Culture* (New York, 2000), p. 159.
[99] Frank Hampson quoted in Crompton, *The Man Who Drew Tomorrow*, p. 51.
[100] C. Geraghty 'Masculinity', in G. Hurd (ed.), *National Fictions: Wold War Two in British Films and TV* (London, 1984), p. 64.

emphasised opposing masculine traits. Bravery and cowardice were shown to be valid feelings that all men may feel. To feel one does not rule out the possibility of the other. Problems such as cowardice and irresponsibility were expressed by individuals within the group and resolved with its support.

After 1945 the cinematic representation of masculinity changed from this identity generated by the group to the individual male as the hero. Instead of working collectively for the good of all, the emphasis shifted to personal traits and exclusive masculine identity.[101] The leading men in the films were no longer ordinary working-class individuals but men who were marked out as heroic and distinct from the group by their courage and commitment. The films of the 1940s presented masculinity in a fairly unproblematic way. Class and gender roles were still differentiated but everyone contributed and worked together, while in the 1950s cinema presented the natural leader as the middle-class hero.

This narrative device is also true of the war comic genre in general and the Dan Dare series specifically. The hero was portrayed with a group of friends who morally enforced his actions. By doing so a secondary narrative was developed between the hero, in this case Dan, and his friends, the crew. The group within any given war comic usually contains variations of the following:

> hero, best friend, father figure (often a home front guide or a crusty sergeant), mentor (another officer, usually a trusted subaltern or captain and frequently an older relative), disposable hero (angelic or morally pure figure), and comic relief (typically a working class private often related to the central character either geographically or educationally).[102]

The Dan Dare series remained true to this formula: the father figure role was exemplified by Sir Hubert Guest, the older generational captain; Commander Lex O'Malley fulfilled the role of mentor and Digby, the working-class private from Wigan, provided comic relief. The attributes of these constituent types of masculinity

[101] In the 1950s British cinema began to refocus upon the middle and upper class officer hero again, personified by actors like Michael Redgrave (in *The Dam Busters*) and Jack Hawkins (in *The Cruel Sea*). J. Ramsden, 'Refocusing 'The People's War': British War Films of the 1950s', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33, 1 (1998), pp. 55-6.

[102] E. MacCallum-Stewart, 'The First World War and British Comics' in *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History*, 6, August 2003, pp. 5-6.

evidenced by the group of male characters can be united to produce the spectrum of a coherent masculine ideal within it. Dan Dare represented the middle-class officer hero of the 1950s.

The war story had a regimented structure and formula which the Dan Dare series embodied and reworked for a post-war generation. Most war stories from the period and until the 1970s were based around the Second World War. By employing the Second World War as the basic formula of the story myths surrounding modern warfare, the First World War, and the 'Lost Generation' which would have restricted the plot and narrative were avoided.[103] The recent conflict had ended conclusively and victoriously therefore was easily reconstructed as a positive narrative. Dare dressed in a slightly modified British Army uniform and other members of the crew, notably Digby and Sir Hubert all sported regimental British army dress and thus implied a British imperial stereotype (see illustration 2.7). The Second World War had been a war of movement across many continents incorporating the global, exotic and the unfamiliar all at once. MacCallum-Stewart has highlighted that 'war discourses are frequently relocated in science fiction or fantasy settings whilst continuing to express ideas which bear strong comparison to the idealism of the Great War generation.'[104] The Dare series built on this by setting the action in outer space, the ultimate foreign and unknown location. The United Nations featured throughout the series as the governing body to which Dare was responsible. In the concluding part of the first series when it was clear that the aggressor, the Mekon[105] had been killed in action Dan exclaimed 'Very well on behalf of the U.N. I accept your unconditional surrender.' Once Dan detailed the orders of the armistice, the defeated asked 'You mean you are not going to enslave us or take our land?' In the next frame Dan replied 'And breed another war? No, my friend we of the Earth have learned our peacemaking in a hard bitter school. Now we have a one-word policy for both victor and vanquished – DISARMAMENT!'[106]

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[103] See MacCallum 'The First World War and British Comics', 2003 for a discussion on how the myth of the First World War created self-imposed restrictions on stories of the Great War.
[104] Ibid., p. 2.
[105] The Mekon was an alien and a 'supreme scientist'. He ruled the Treens, a group of aliens who lived in the northern hemisphere of Venus.
[106] *Eagle*, 28 September 1951.

Illustration 2.7: Dan Dare wore British regimental dress as shown in this front cover despite the series being based in space and in the future. *Source: Eagle*, 16 November 1951.

Violence did not feature in the Dan Dare series. Instead the hero negotiated himself out of the situation or outwitted the enemy. The villains usually posed a threat to public rather than private life and therefore the hero was identified with law and order or crime and punishment.[107] The story still exuded some of the Victorian masculine ideals. In one particular episode Dan exclaimed 'Here's the Mekon's deal! If I don't help him in his mad plan to dominate the entire universe he'll scrub us all out!' Sir Hubert, who represented an older version of British masculinity, replied with 'Better death than dishonour Dan!'[108]

Muscular Christianity and the national manly ideal had continued to be heralded in the *Boy's Own Paper* into the 1940s. In February 1943 the *Boy's Own Paper* claimed that 'in every quarter its [the BOP's] standard is the same: straightforward statement true to those instincts of spirit and mind which human experience, profiting humbly from God's guidance, knows to be sound and of good report.'[109] The emphasis on British imperialism and the simultaneous ideal of Christian manliness previously glorified in the *Boy's Own Paper* in the Victorian period had been toned down. Yet the editor still alluded to the past moral ideals of 'muscular Christianity':

> Whatever our job, whether studying for the future or working for a living, in these strenuous days we should try to live up to the great maxim: *mens sana in corpore sano*: a sound mind in a sound body. We ensure soundness of mind through education and especially as a result of good reading. In this we believe the BOP is a national asset, and we hope it will prove equally worth while in its influence on physical fitness.[110]

The *Eagle* was certainly a successor to the Victorian boys' story paper tradition. Marcus Morris muted some of the overtly muscular Christian ideals exemplified in previous periodicals for boys and aimed the *Eagle* at a post-war generation. Boys who read the *Eagle* in the 1950s were to be instructed in morality

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[107] See E. MacCallum-Stewart for a discussion of British comics such as *Battle* and *2000AD* from the 1980s and 1990s on how they subverted the war genre.
[108] *Eagle*, 17 May 1957.
[109] *Boy's Own Paper*, February 1943.
[110] Ibid., June 1943.

but not too obviously. The 'Great Men' series, which featured on the back page of the *Eagle*, typified historical examples of previous masculine exploits and achievements through Christian heroes like 'St Paul the Great Adventurer' and biographies of heroes of British imperialism such as Sir Winston Churchill (see illustration 2.8).[111] Moral lessons were taught through these heroes. Journalistic articles such as 'At Home With the Bedouins' or 'Go To Jericho!' by the *Eagle's* Special Investigator Macdonald Hastings continued the tradition of boys' story papers reporting from a colonial outpost and sustained the definition of masculinity based on dangerous exploits in foreign countries.[112]

Both the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Eagle* emphasised a traditional masculine discourse by including regular tributes to cricketers, footballers and rugby players. Interviews with such individuals were unequivocal in their admiration and the articles detailed particular feats of strength and commitment in support of their hero status. Articles by sporting heroes also featured throughout the *Eagle* and the *Boy's Own Paper* offering tips and advice on sporting issues. The West Indies cricketer, Learie Constantine (1901-1971), who played in the Lancashire Cricket League offered cricket coaching (see illustration 2.9). While Freddie Mills the world light heavyweight champion between 1948 and 1950 detailed boxing tips.[113] In one *Boy's Own* article on cricket the author 'does not think it's a good thing to be a lone wolf and to despise all games. [...] We learn to take knocks and disappointment and to play not for ourselves but for our side.'[114] The ethics of team sports continued to define traditional masculinity in these middle-class publications for boys. Interviews with and articles about sporting heroes epitomised manly qualities of teamwork, dedication and sportsmanship.

The *Eagle* also catered for a young male generation who needed some guidance in their future and the future world they were going to work in. A careers feature called 'He Wants to Be...' provided advice on how to become a bricklayer,

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[111] *Eagle*, 14 April 1950.
[112] Ibid., 5 August 1955, 14 October 1955. Macdondald Hastings (1909-1982) was war correspondent for *Picture Post* during the Second World War.
[113] *Eagle*, 21 July 1950, 29 September 1950.
[114] *Boy's Own Paper*, September 1950.

Illustration 2.8: 'The Great Men' series included life stories of men such as Winston Churchill as shown above. *Source*: *Eagle*, 11 April 1958.

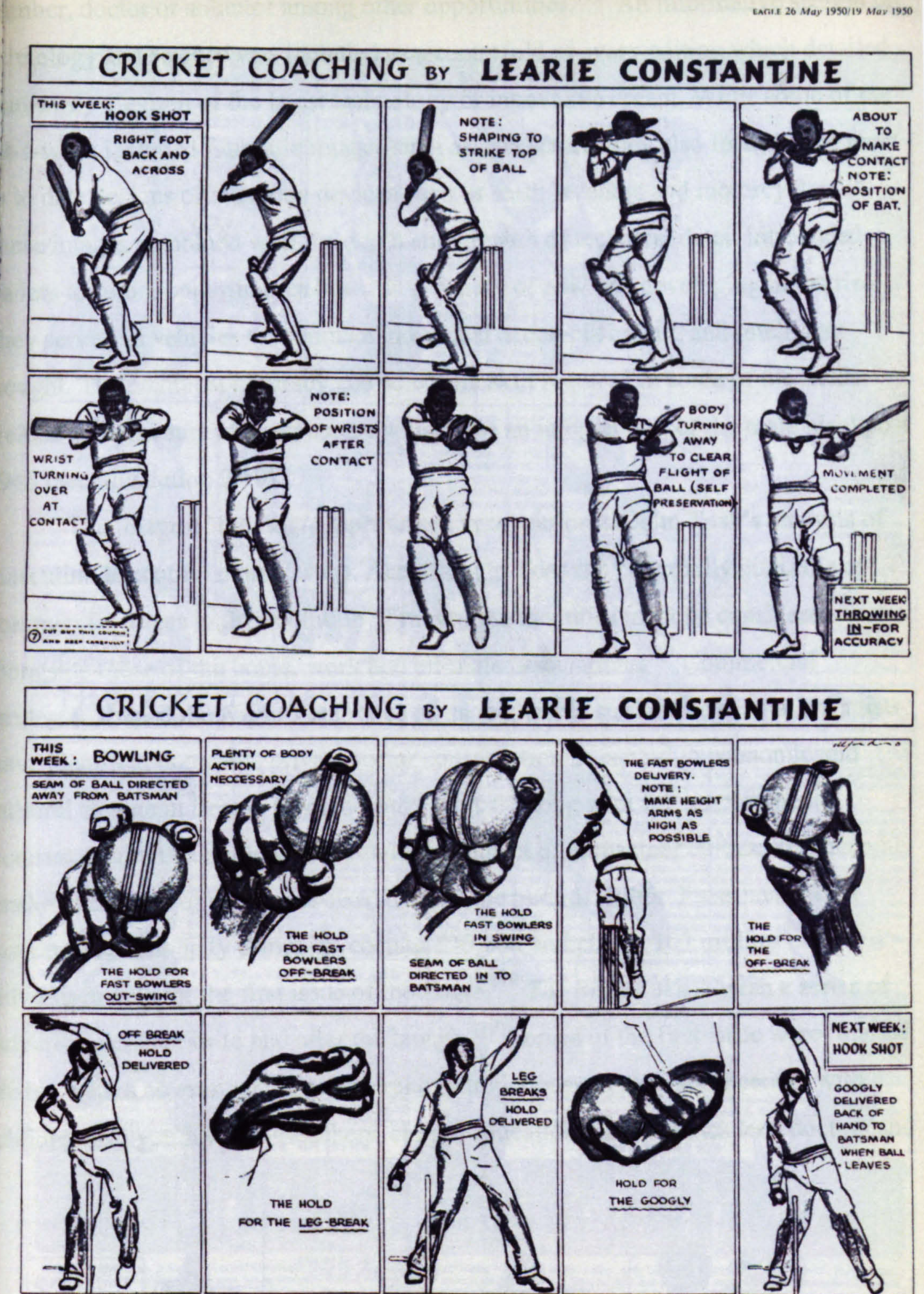

Illustration 2.9: The *Eagle* instructed boys in various sports including 'Cricket Coaching by Learie Constantine', 'Football Hints by Billy Wright' and 'Boxing with Freddie Mills'. *Source: Eagle*, 26 May 1950/19 May 1950/29 December 1950/29 September 1950 from M. Morris (ed.), *The Best of Eagle*, pp. 73-5.

plumber, doctor or solicitor among other opportunities.[115] An informative section on technology and science was included as a centrefold of every edition which detailed a cut-away diagram of the latest technology or innovative dream. While some of the cut-a-ways included futuristic images such as spacecrafts they also featured the most up to date designs of everyday devices such as earth levellers and motorcycles.[116] These images combined with the depth and breadth of technical detail introduced readers to future opportunities based in a variety of new and developing industries. They served as vehicles to stimulate individual accomplishment, and intelligent thought. The technical accuracy and scientific skill required in some of the fields yielded an extra aura of competence which was an integral part of the male ideal post 1945 (see illustration 2.10).

The image of the *Eagle* represented here reinforces John Tosh's analysis of masculine formation in new ways. According to Tosh the potentially vital role of commercial forces in the evolution of masculine identities must be considered alongside those of the home, work and all-male associations.[117] Commercial strategies shaped the *Eagle's* approach to its readers. Historians and social scientists have identified domestic, private sector consumption as central to economic and cultural change in Britain from the early 1950s. Along with full employment, economic growth and the welfare state the impact of 'consumer culture' has become enshrined as one of the master-narratives of the period. Hulton Press launched a countrywide publicity campaign costing £30,000 and placed 107 million advertisements for the first issue of the *Eagle*.[118] *The British Weekly* ran a series of advertisements prior to and after the launch.[119] Copies of the first issue were 'mailed direct, with a covering letter to several hundred thousand people concerned with children and youth work – teachers, clergy, educationalists, club leaders, doctors and

[115] Morris & Hullwood, *Living With Eagles*, p. 143.
[116] *Eagle*, 14 October 1955, 5 August 1955.
[117] J. Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do With Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), p. 181.
[118] E. James, 'The Future Viewed from Mid-Century Britain: Clarke, Hampson and the Festival of Britain', *Foundation*, 41 (1987), p. 48.
[119] *The British Weekly: a Journal of Christian and Social Progress*, 13 April 1950, 20 April 1950.

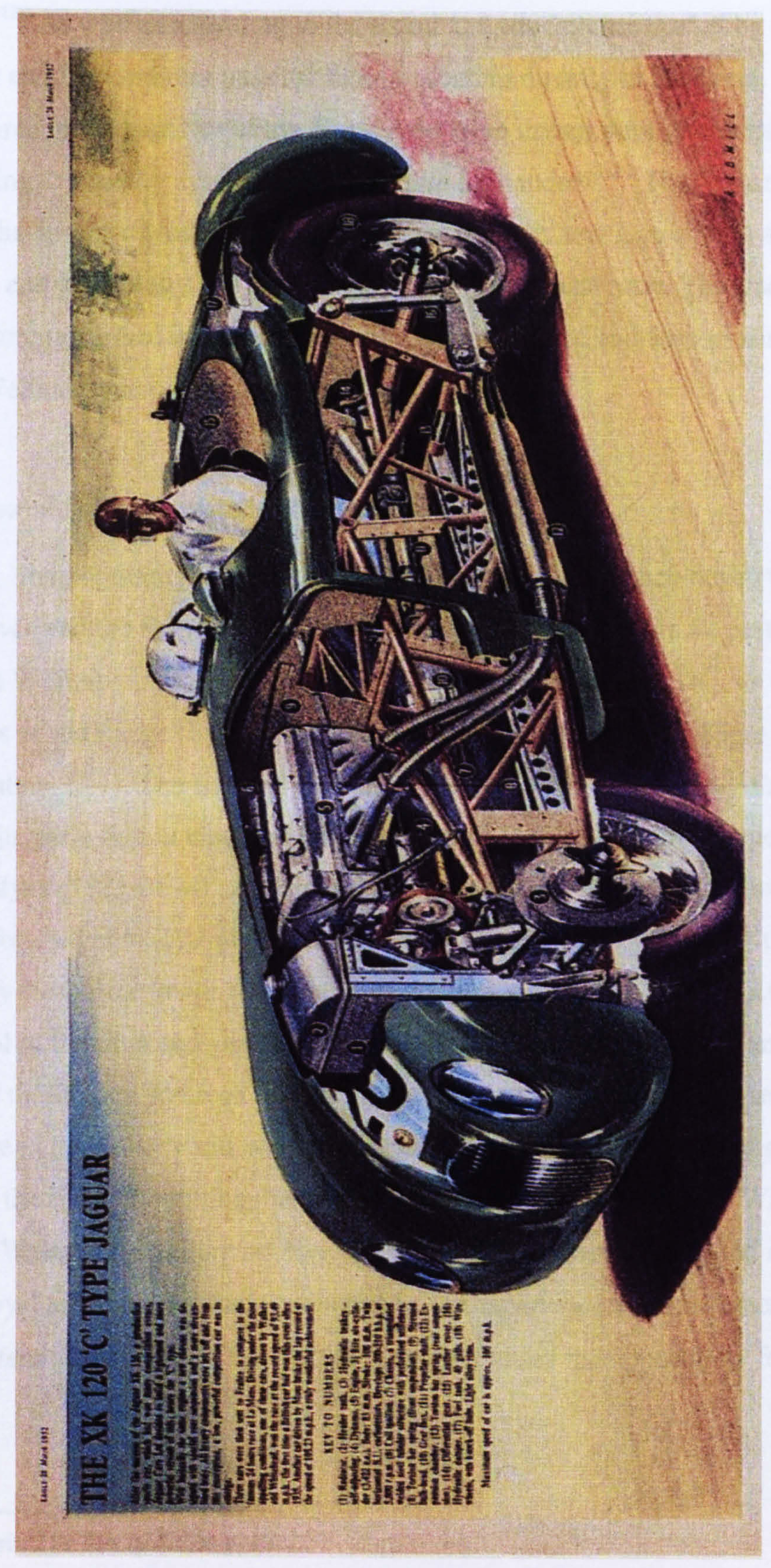

Illustration 2.10: The centrefold of the *Eagle* included in every edition a cut-away diagram of some technological innovation, drawn by Leslie Ashwell Wood.
Source: Eagle, June 1952.

so on.'[120] As well as appealing to the moral and educational market by mail shots, Morris and Hulton Press targeted their readership directly in the street. Cars, adorned with three foot sculptures of the *Eagle* crest were driven through towns and villages heralding, by tannoy system, that the '*Eagle* has landed!'[121] The Victorian ideal of masculinity was reworked for *Eagle* readers through new genres such as science fiction and technology and readers were courted as consumers. The traditional adventure tale based in the Empire was also remodelled and democratised for the new Welfare State period.

'Cowboys' in the *Eagle* and *Rover*, c.1950

The popularity and interest of the Western genre, which began to appear in the *Rover* and the *Eagle* in the late 1940s and 1950s, was no doubt part of the revival of film Westerns in Hollywood from 1939.[122] One of the most famous examples was 'Riders of the Range' by Charles Chilton and Jack Daniel in the *Eagle* (see illustration 2.11). The U.S and Canadian frontier had been a source of adventure in boys' juvenile fiction since the late nineteenth century with authors such as R. M. Ballantyne (1825-1894) and James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) providing the basis for the genre. Trapping and hunting had been an integral part of the nineteenth century masculine image of exploration and adventure. The West functioned as a symbol of freedom and simultaneously an opportunity of conquest. Jane Tompkins argues that 'when you read a Western novel or watch a Western movie on television, you are in the same world no matter what the medium: the hero is the same, the story line is the same, the setting, the values, the actions are the same.'[123] While the motifs of the Western genre may not have altered between the mediums, and reading about cowboys' adventures was an extension of the experience and excitement of watching a Western at the cinema, the written format provided the opportunity for masculine

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[120] Morris, *The Best of Eagle*, p. 15.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Official distribution of American comics in Britain did not begin until 1959, although some titles did enter the country through airbases and ports. Some titles were also reprinted in black and white by British publishers such as Thorpe and Porter, and Miller and Son.
[123] J. Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (Oxford, 1992), p. 7.

Illustration 2.11: The Western comic story relocated the action of adventure stories away from the British Empire to the American Wild West. *Source: Eagle,* 19 February 1954.

ideals, previously located in the colonial discourse of hunting, to shift and re-align with a contemporary model for the representation in the 1950s.

The Western and hunting genre developed over time in relation to the shifts in acceptable masculine representation, notably the shift in masculine idealism from the earnest, expressive manliness of the Evangelical Victorian era to the 'hearty, stiff-upper-lip' alternative in the Kitchener and Baden-Powell era.[124] Hunting trained the mind, body, and character and also equipped men with the skills and ability to face up to the realities of nature best exemplified in war. *Scouting for Boys* (1908) defined manliness via the role of the frontiersman:

> These are the frontiersman of all parts of our Empire. The 'trappers' of North America, hunters of Central Africa, the British pioneers, explorers, and missionaries over Asia and all the wild parts of the world, the bushmen and drovers of Australia, the constabulary of North-West Canada and of South Africa – all are peace scouts, real *men* in every sense of the word and thoroughly up on scout craft, i.e. they understand living out in the jungles, and they can find their way anywhere, are able to read meaning from the smallest signs and foot-tracks; they know how to look after their health when far away from the doctors, are strong and plucky, and ready to face any danger, and always keen to help each other.[125]

The pioneer hunter was a model that embodied the ultimate manly ideals of heroism, knowledge of the natural environment, and stamina. *Scouting for Boys* included a drawing of a 'frontiersman' immediately recognisable as a cowboy from the 'Wild West' in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[126] This highlighted a shift in the representation of the hunter and pioneer. Set within the frontier of America, where East meets West, the Western emphasised leaving behind the industrialisation of 'civilization' for the 'untamed' wild frontier. This setting is reminiscent of the

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[124] Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do With Masculinity?', p. 181.
[125] R. S. S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: handbook for instruction in good citizenship* (London, 1908), p. 3.
[126] R.S.S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: handbook for instruction in good citizenship* (London, 1963), 34 edition, p. 2.

previous Empire tales of juvenile story papers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which were set in Africa and India. The Western continued to embody the colonial discourse of masculinity. The contrast between the domestic East and the wild West, and the different attitudes directed towards each, was a common Victorian theme.[127] Domestic and wild animals were often used as an allegory of the 'civilised' and 'savage' worlds. Wild animals required little attention, yet domestic animals such as ponies were due more sympathetic treatment in return for their service. This theme was continued in the western genre of boys' fiction in the late 1940s and 1950s.

The *Rover* ran a series called 'The Pony Express' in which two adversaries were united in their job to secure the safe passage of mail and other deliveries through the uncivilized and outlawed country. In one episode one of the heroes, Wal Loader, attempted to complete his stage of the journey, however, Indians on the warpath attacked the post at which he was to obtain a fresh horse and stole the replacement horses. The hero was forced to complete his journey on an exhausted pony, with the possibility of being attacked by the same Indians:

> Wal Loader dug in his heels and urged the pony forward. At a time like this, only one thing could save him, speed. If the pony had been fresh he would have had no doubt about escaping, for he knew the ponies he rode were far superior to the scrub, half-broken mounts of the red skins.[128]

Horses played a significant, if silent, role in Westerns. Tompkins suggests that 'the physical presence of horses above all makes them indispensable in Westerns.'[129] Being directly beneath the rider, the horse connected the cowboy directly to the environment and also embodied the human control of nature. Horses were used to prove men's manhood. They were represented as powerful, alive, fast, not human but not beyond human control. The contrast between the wild, and the domestic horse, was extended to the character's sentimentalities:

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[127] J. M. MacKenzie, 'Hunting and the Natural World in Juvenile Literature' in Richards (ed.), *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, p. 155.
[128] *Rover*, 1 April 1950.
[129] Tompkins, *West of Everything*, pp. 93-4.

> But the Pony Express man's luck was in, for the wildly-ridden leading pony suddenly stepped in a hole. If a white man had been riding the beast he would have noticed the hole and swerved the pony round it. The redskin was too busy lashing and shrieking at his mount. The pony doubled up, and the Piute was pitched over its head.[130]

Any identity is partly constructed in juxtaposition to a demonised 'other', an imagined identity composed of all the relevant negatives.[131] British national identities were constructed through powerful notions of gender and racial difference. In the case of the Western genre in boys' comics in the mid-twentieth century, the Native American Indian replaced the Indian and African as the British masculine 'other'. Within the text the Native Indian was depicted as savage and uncontrollable (*'lashing and shrieking'*) in contrast to the composed, restrained 'white man'. It could therefore be argued that in the early 1950s masculinity was still being defined by national and racial differences, where the fully masculine ideals of attitude, discipline, achievement, power and stoicism were still an important part of the dominant male narrative, which was prevalent in boys reading.

Women and the 'Modern Boy' in *Eagle* and the *Boy's Own Paper* c. 1950 – 1967

The traditional approach to representations of masculinity is to compare hegemonic masculinity in opposition to a plurality of 'others', notably women and effeminate men within the British Empire. Kelly Boyd has traced the shifting representations of both women and marginal masculinities in boys' story papers between 1855 and 1940. Victorian periodicals often portrayed women as independent and self-preserving. For example in the tale of Canadian Jack, an adventure tale combined with Victorian melodrama, Jack's love interest, Fanny, was 'kidnapped by Indians, forced into marriage, kidnapped again, drugged and left for dissection.'[132] Boyd highlights that the heroine in this tale repeatedly saved herself from these predicaments, the exception being when 'when she has been rendered unconscious

[130] *Rover*, 1 April 1950.
[131] Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do With Masculinity?', p. 196.
[132] Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper*, p. 155.

and surrendered to the hands of a corrupt institution'.[133] Boys' periodicals of the Edwardian period depicted women in more ambiguous ways emphasising a variety of dichotomies such as the innocent girl versus the bad woman. Frank Richards' school stories illustrated these two kinds of women. Schoolgirls appeared when Richards' introduced Cliff House, an all girl school, next door to Greyfriars, the all boy school in the *Magnet*. The girls matched the boys in terms of school pranks, but required rescuing on occasion.[134] A female teacher who was also a suffragette appeared in Richards' Greyfriars series. As a teacher the schoolboys did not accept her authority and instead they assumed a protectorate role. And as a suffragette they dismissed her again as they believed 'A woman's place is in the home'.[135] During the interwar period, as boys' fiction predominantly began to be set on the sports field or in a work setting, women and girls began to disappear altogether from fiction for boys.[136] The complete exclusion of female characters from boys' story papers continued after the Second World War, for example D. C. Thomson's 'Big 5' story papers did not include any female characters.[137] However, there was one notable exception in Hulton Press' *Eagle*.

While the Dan Dare series did reproduce the traditional war genre formula, it deviated from the traditional characterisation of a group of men and introduced an element, which was not synonymous with the traditional war genre. Frank Hampson and Marcus Morris included a female character in the series. Prof. Jocelyn Peabody introduced herself as a 'first class geologist, botanist, agriculturalist and the cabinet agree I'm the best person to reconnoiter Venus as a source of food – I'm a qualified space pilot as well.'[138] Her role in the first edition and mission was as an expert dietician and thus her knowledge was to prove invaluable when investigating the logistics of growing crops on Venus. She crewed a spacecraft with Sir Hubert and through this relationship tension arose as the older generation male doubted the

[133] 'Canadian Jack; or, the Mystery of the Old Log Hut. A Colonial Story', Boys of the Empire, nos. 18-44 (1888/89), cited Ibid., p. 156.
[134] Frank Richards, 'The Invasion of Greyfriars', 'The Bully of Greyfriars', 'The Cliff House Party', *Magnet*, nos. 68-70 (1909), cited Ibid., pp. 160-161.
[135] Frank Richards, 'Harry Wharton's Campaign', *Magnet*, no. 58 (1909), cited ibid., p. 162.
[136] Ibid., p. 153.
[137] Female characters did appear in D.C. Thomson humour comics such as 'Beryl the Peril' in *Topper* (1953-1990), 'Minnie the Minx' in *Beano* and 'Keyhole Kate' in *Dandy* and Sparky (1965-1974).
[138] *Eagle*, 12 May 1950.

ability of the younger inexperienced female although, Prof. Peabody always succeeded in her missions and her judgement was perfect.

The inclusion of a female character introduced a suggestion of modernity. The heroine was not sexually objectified nor was she denigrated through the series. She was not a moral foil against whom Dan Dare, a possible powerful model of hegemonic masculinity, was posited. Yet, simultaneously she carried the double burden of modernity and tradition. Hampson explained that he 'didn't want to produce a strip without a female. In a way I struck a blow for Women's Lib. She was shown as a very clever, attractive young lady [...] she was just a very normal, efficient, competent girl.' However, this was undermined when Hampson continued to explain in the same interview that '[Peabody] was there to be rescued.'[139]

The inclusion of a sole female character in a publication for boys also complemented the wider readership that the *Eagle* gained. The editors of the *Eagle* acknowledged openly that it also had a female readership by publishing female readers' letters.[140] Letters from male readers identified sisters and cousins as among the comic's loyal readership. Although the editor acknowledged a female audience and continued to identify the female readership throughout the 1950s in the letters page, instead of embracing and incorporating the new readership, Hulton Press and Marcus Morris published the very gender specific *Girl* in 1951.[141] However, the intended and actual readership of both the *Eagle* and *Girl* was presented as ambiguous in the letter pages of the *Eagle*. One reader who wrote in, David McLaughlin from Lanark, explained that 'Every Friday my sister and I squabbled over who should read EAGLE first. Now that GIRL has been published it is settled, because she can read one while I read the other.'[142] While the *Eagle* attempted to exclude women and all associations of femininity in order to affirm a collective male culture, construction of a masculine ideal must also be understood in relation to the other groups identified in the publication, notably women and 'spivs'.

Since the late nineteenth century separate books and magazines had 'theoretically' catered for girls and boys reflecting and reinforcing the emphasis on

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[139] Vince, *The Frank Hampson Interview*, p. 27.
[140] *Eagle*, 11 August 1950, 7 March 1952.
[141] Advertisements for *Girl* appeared in the *Eagle*, 21 March 1952.
[142] *Eagle*, 11 January 1952

gender difference. Narrative structures and conventions were an important element of story papers. Editorials, feature titles, illustrations and other techniques reinforced gender appropriate behaviour. Boys' story papers adjusted their style and presentation to maintain their reader's attention, while simultaneously incorporating strategies to frame the 'preferred meaning.' The sharp division between boys' and girls' literature was tangible, providing the opportunity to relate the patriotic imperial ideology to a sexual stereotype. As well as the financial gain of a second publication for girls, by differentiating the readers of the *Eagle* by gender Morris and Hulton Press extended the gender stereotyping of the Victorian publications into the mid-twentieth century.

The success of the *Eagle* and the new comic format forced D.C. Thomson and Amalgamated Press/IPC to change their format again. Both publishing companies had recovered from the stringent wartime paper rationing and their comics that survived after 1939 were only just beginning to resemble their pre-war format. The Amalgamated Press was first to introduce the new comic strip design with *Lion* (1952), which featured 'Captain Condor', based heavily on the Dan Dare series and the sibling title *Tiger* (1954). When the Amalgamated Press became the IPC (the International Publishing Corporation) these titles were followed by *Valiant* (1962), *Hurricane* (1964), *Jag* (1968) and *Jet* (1971) all of which featured a mix of war, sport, western, science fiction, pirate and 'jungle' stories. D.C. Thomson had to keep up with the trend and did so in two ways: by turning their old story papers into comics (*Hotspur* and *Wizard* became picture strips in 1959 and 1970 respectively while *Rover* and *Adventure* were merged into one comic in 1961) and by launching new titles, the *Victor* (1961) and *Hornet* (1963).

In 1967 the *Boy's Own Paper* ceased publication. The paper's circulation had steadily increased from 200,000 copies in 1879 to a peak of 650,000 copies in the 1890s. However, the popularity quickly declined after the First World War to 400,000, descending to a mere 20,000 copies in 1967.[143] An editorial explained the decline, in his opinion, of the B.O.P:

[143] Carpenter, *Penny Dreadfuls*, p. 46.

> Newspapers and magazines face serious difficulties in times of inflation, which stem from high costs of production and the very expensive cost of sales promotion and publicity in this high powered modern age. B.O.P also had its own special problem: the number of readers has been exceptionally high in relation to purchasers, sample checks, revealing that single copies of the magazine were read by as many as 25 to 30 boys. We could only survive the difficult economic conditions of our time if more and more readers bought their own personal copies and placed regular orders.[144]

The BOP tried to keep up with the changing times of the sixties and acknowledged the forces of change in order not to alienate their readership. In 1966 the BOP introduced a male fashion section to the traditionally empire and sport based story paper. Justification of the new segment was that 'clothes mirror the new found freedom of the modern boy.'[145] By emphasising the modern boy, the BOP hinted that men were changing and subsequently the masculine ideal was changing:

> Education from a variety of mediums is helping to develop mental abilities much earlier in life. Magazines, film, radio and television are bringing about a constant flow of new ideas and information about the modern world right into the home. Boys are being encouraged to grow up quicker than ever before and the kind of clothes you wear reflect this new found freedom.[146]

However, the oldest boys' publication was unable to keep up with the changing interests of boys despite modernising its public image and the old story paper was replaced by the modern comic.[147]

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[144] *Boy's Own Paper*, February 1967.
[145] Ibid., December 1966.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Comics in the 1970s again readdressed the war and sport story. D. C. Thomson's *Warlord* (1974) contained comic strips based in the Second World War with tough heroes. In response IPC published *Battle Picture Weekly* (1975-1988) and the controversial *Action* (1976-1977) which included graphic violence and stories of football 'hooliganism'. 'Look Out For Lefty' was a football strip about Kenny Lampton a working-class teenager whose powerful left foot gave him the nickname 'Lefty'. The strip

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the oscillation between a variety of masculine identities prior to, during and after the Second World War. The chapter has added to Kelly Boyd's discussion about the democratisation of the hero by extending our focus past 1940. By including and labelling heroes such as Wilson and Alf Tupper as 'supermen' and 'hooligans' D.C. Thomson engaged with issues pertinent to male youth during and after the Second World War. Downsizing the 'superman' figure at a time of ultimate masculine activity in war, D.C. Thomson relocated masculinity to the local environment yet still emphasised the fantasy element of masculine ability. The representation of masculinity shifted again after the war to include the economically independent working-class youth, who were a growing and, for some, worrying phenomenon.

Although D.C. Thomson's examples of masculinity worked against the middle-class system, thwarted superior authority and were not team players, they were not 'hooligans' in the usual sense of the word. The characters showcased good working-class manly traits. They were not involved in sport for their own satisfaction. They did not accept financial winnings, unless to pay for their next competition or to help a friend in need. Nor did they resort to physical violence to win their competitions. They worked hard to compete and fulfil their aspirations. They combined ingenuity and skill to succeed. This was still in line with D.C. Thomson's moral code of behaviour for their characters but more importantly within the moral framework of the time. D.C. Thomson created a new space for the working-class male and championed his role both in popular literature and in society after the Second World War.

The *Eagle* was a success. Far from being restricted to a middle-class audience as its publishers had expected, the comic picked up a sizeable working-class following. As well as entertainment, the *Eagle* was intended as educational whilst simultaneously promoting decency, courage, fair-play and selflessness. Drotner suggests that 'the new weekly [the *Eagle*] became a successful rejuvenation of the

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included football violence which reflected the real life problem of the time. 'Black Jack' the tale of a boxer who fought to help poor kids knowing he risked going blind, was one of the first black heroes in British comics. IPC's *2000AD*, published in 1977, was influenced by the punk movement and intended for both a male and female market.

manly ideals that the *Boy's Own Paper* had found it increasingly hard to uphold.'[148] The masculine ideal exemplified in the *Eagle* as a whole, by Dan Dare, the articles on sport, the religious back page, the club and the MUG system were an extension of the Victorian ideal of manliness and reflected concern about boyhood in the early 1950s.

[148] Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines*, p. 243.

CHAPTER 3

Reading Femininities: Representations of Girlhood and Womanhood

> *The girls know that the world which* Red Star Weekly *presents is quite unlike the real world: but they hope that perhaps some of all this glamour may come their way... They are desperately anxious for adventure and they hope for an easier life than that which their mothers have led. Their very proper desire to know more about the new world of love and sex is played upon by these magazines which feed them with such second-rate food. Moreover, they are fed forcibly because poor homes have fewer books, and a cramped living-room does not make for anything but slipshod, easy reading.*
>
> A. P. Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up* (London, 1940), p. 110

Angela McRobbie commented that comics and women's magazines 'define and shape the woman's world, spanning every stage from early childhood to old age.'[1] This chapter charts the changing representations of femininity from schoolgirl story papers to women's magazines. The chapter begins by illustrating, with reference to readership surveys, and contemporary observers' views, the variety of popular literature that girls read in the period. It then considers the tensions between representations of femininity in three distinct genres: firstly, schoolgirl story papers and comics; secondly, 'erotic bloods' and finally, women's service magazines. The comics and magazines discussed in this chapter are those that were the most popular during the period of interest and identified by the narrators in the oral history project and the correspondents to the Mass-Observation Archive.

What Did Girls Read?

Girls Reading Schoolgirl and Schoolboy Story Papers and Comics

In its inaugural year twenty-six percent of readers of the *Eagle* were girls.[2] The founder and editor of the boys' weekly paper, Reverend Marcus Morris, responded to the high number of girls reading *Eagle* by proposing and producing a separate publication especially for them. Printed in brightly coloured glossy photogravure, the new Hulton Press weekly, *Girl*, first published in November 1951, cost 5d and was aimed specifically at secondary schoolgirls.[3] The new publishing concepts and high production standards of the *Eagle* were transferred to *Girl* but with a feminine emphasis.

This was not the first time that a publication for boys had attracted such a sizeable female readership. Notably the *Boy's Own Paper* was one of the first publications for boys which inspired a female version, *The Girl's Own Paper*, (Lutterworth Press, 1880). In 1919 the readers' correspondence of the *Magnet*

[1] McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p. 83.

[2] *The Hulton Child Readership Survey* (London, 1950), Table 3.

[3] The *Eagle* and *Girl* were followed by 'companion papers' aimed at younger readers, *Robin* (1953-1969) and *Swift* (1954-1962). *Girl* was the only one of the Hulton papers not to be named after a bird which emphasised the gendered nature of the publication.

indicated that it was as popular with girls as with boys.[4] The *Guide*, first published as *The Girl Guides' Gazette* in January 1914, was also introduced to divert the female readership of *The Scout* and *Scouting for Boys* (1908). Publications for young children that were non-gender specific had been very popular in the early twentieth century such as *Rainbow* (1914-1956) and *Comic Cuts* (1890-1953). D.C. Thomson also published the highly successful *Dandy* (1937-to date) and the *Beano* (1938-to date), which were aimed at both girls and boys. *The Children's Newspaper* (1919-1965) was another non-gender specific publication which according to readership surveys continued to be popular post 1945. It was an informative weekly current affairs publication (costing 1½ d) for both middle-class girls and boys and according to Hulton Press, was read by nineteen percent of girls in Britain in 1950.[5] Edited by Arthur Mee (1875-1943), *The Children's Newspaper* aimed to tell 'The Story of the World Today for the Men and Women of Tomorrow.'[6] Mee's work focused on his values of Christian ethic, patriotism, faith in the British Empire and the importance of popular education. His vision of Empire included both men and women: 'There are qualities and influences in that Empire that are too precious to be ignored, and that ought to be understood by all her sons and daughters.'[7] *The Children's Newspaper* emphasised the role young women and girls could perform on the home front as opposed to throughout the Empire and continued to do so post 1945.

Table 3.1: *Boys' 'Bloods' Read by Girls, expressed as a percentage of the total number of 'bloods' read by the age groups.*

Age	Secondary School	Senior School
12+	23.0	17.0
13+	25.4	24.4
14+	23.3	26.6
15+	31.5	-

Source: A. J. Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read?* (Methuen and Co. Ltd, London, 1940), Table G XIc, p. 217.

[4] M. Cadogan & P. Craig, *You're a Brick Angela! A New Look at Girl's Fiction from 1839 to 1975* (London, 1976), p. 227.
[5] *Hulton Child Readership Survey* (1950), Table 3.
[6] *The Children's Newspaper*, 27 June 1925.
[7] Ibid.

The above table, taken from Jenkinson's analysis of what girls and boys read in 1940, summarised the percentage of boys' periodicals read by girls in all age groups at secondary and senior schools. The study revealed that the D.C. Thomson publications, *Wizard* and *Rover* (traditionally periodicals written for schoolboys) were read by more than one girl in five aged fourteen and over.[8] Jenkinson noted that 'these magazines make no attempt to appeal to girls, and make no concession to the girls' demands for "romance".'[9] Yet periodicals intended for schoolgirls did not make 'concessions to girls' demand for 'romance' either.

The *School Friend*, *Girls' Crystal*, *Girl's Own Paper* (GOP) and *Girl*, the four periodicals intended for girls that were the most popular after the Second World War, differed from each other in content, form, tone and intended readership. All four papers were targeted in varying degrees at schoolgirls. However, it is possible to differentiate between the papers according to the age and social class of the intended reader. The target reader is a useful critical tool yet only offers an approximation of the real reader and is often not identical to the actual readership. Tinkler has highlighted the difficulties in defining the social class of an intended readership as magazines were not labelled in class terms and information on editorial policy regarding class and intended readership is scarce. Advertisements, articles, editorials addressed specific needs and concerns of girlhood and are therefore useful in identifying an intended readership. Fiction on the other hand was intended to transcend girlhood experiences and therefore is more difficult to use to determine intended readership.[10]

Girls' Crystal was the only elementary schoolgirl paper to survive the paper shortages of the Second World War.[11] The original Amalgamated Press (AP) story paper, *School Friend* (1919-1929), was reinvented in 1950 as a weekly comic, and lasted until 1965 when it was combined with *June* to become *June and School Friend*. The *Girls' Crystal* was refashioned as a combination of story paper and

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[8] Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read?*, p. 216.
[9] Ibid., p. 217.
[10] Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, p. 47.
[11] In direct competition to the *Girl's Own Paper*, Amalgamated Press published a plethora of papers aimed specifically at elementary and secondary schoolgirls in the interwar period: *School Friend* (1919-1929), *Schoolgirls' Own* (1921-1936), *Schoolgirls' Weekly* (1922-1939), *Schoolgirl* (1929-1940), *Schoolgirls' Pictorial* (1924-1925), *School-Days* (1928-1929), and *Girl's Crystal* (1935). *Girls' Crystal* incorporated *Schoolgirls' Weekly* in 1939. *School Friend* originally published at 1½d but cost two pence for most of its time was the sister paper of the *Magnet*.

comic in 1953, costing two pence, and survived until 1966. Both papers targeted a specific audience. The editor of the new *School Friend* in 1919, Reginald T. Eves (1892-1971), claimed 'Essentially the *School Friend* will appeal chiefly to the girl at school – the girl whose tastes have not previously been catered for.'[12] The sub-title of the new *School Friend* in 1950 detailed that it included 'Enthralling Picture Stories For All Schoolgirls.'[13] *Girls' Crystal* also aimed to offer 'thrilling stories for schoolgirls'.[14] The intended reader of the *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* was the young girl in full-time education.

Commercial and social pressures influenced by the Second World War did not make it economically viable to produce distinct working and middle-class publications for elementary schoolgirls. The *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* catered for both working and middle-class readers. However, they were more popular with girls from poorer backgrounds because they were cheaper, attractively illustrated and full of stories. The schoolgirl identity of the papers was reinforced by the absence of advertisements for consumer durables, the exception being advertisements for other novelettes and schoolgirl publications. The intended age range of the elementary schoolgirl papers such as *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* was up to fourteen-years old. Girls who solely had an elementary schooling left school at fourteen and were predominantly working-class.

Secondary schoolgirl papers such as the *Girl's Own Paper* and *Girl* were aimed at girls who had the opportunity to continue their education past fourteen years of age and it was assumed, until recently, were predominantly from middle-class backgrounds.[15] The *Girl's Own Paper* was middle-class in content and form. Both it and its predecessor, the *Boy's Own Paper*, were published for the Religious Tract Society and were initially intended for a working-class audience as penny weeklies and bound monthly editions that cost sixpence each. But both acquired a mainly middle-class audience.[16] Cadogan and Craig claim that working-class girls rejected

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[12] 'Your Editors Corner', *School Friend*, 17 May 1919.
[13] Ibid., 3 June 1950.
[14] *Girls' Crystal*, 29 April 1950.
[15] P. Summerfield, 'An Oral History of Schooling in Lancashire 1900 – 1950' and F. Hunt 'Social Class and the Grading of Schools' in J. Purvis (ed.), *The Education of Girls and Women* (London, 1985) highlight how the social-class composition of schools varied.
[16] J. Mackay & P. Thane, 'The Englishwoman', in R. Colls & P. Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880 – 1920* (London, 1986), p. 194.

the paper because it was 'prissy' due to its focus on education. Likewise the paper was popular with middle-class parents who considered it to be 'good' literature for their daughters.[17]

Liz Heron argues that for the generation of children growing up after the Second World War, the implementation of the Welfare State and the Butler Education Act 1944 (Scotland 1945) opened up endless roads of possibilities.[18] The Education Act raised the school-leaving age to fifteen years and was intended to provided universal free education in three different types of schools: grammar, secondary modern and secondary technical (entrance to which was based on the 11+ examination). Opportunities for boys and girls to achieve an education were extended across the class spectrum and age range. The impact on reading was twofold. Firstly, there were more children able to read and secondly, the publishers had to acknowledge this wider readership by including a broader range of fiction in their publications in order to appeal to the expanding readership.

The succession of changing titles of the *Girl's Own Paper* highlights the ambiguities that surrounded the definition of adolescent girlhood and womanhood in the early twentieth century. In 1908 the weekly periodical became a monthly and changed its name to *Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine.* The combined publication addressed both women and girls, who were defined as single young women in their late teens and early twenties. The *Girl's Own Paper* stressed information and carried articles which dealt with practical and personal problems confronting readers in their daily lives. Articles in the *Girl's Own Paper* in the 1920s proffered advice on management of domestic servants which suggests that the intended reader at that point was a middle-class woman. In 1928 the paper changed its title once more to *Woman's Magazine and Girl's Own Paper* until 1931 when the *Girl's Own Paper* became an independent title again. From 1931 the *Girl's Own Paper* was more identifiable as a paper aimed at the schoolgirl aged between twelve and eighteen. As Mary Cadogan explained

> [From] 1931 to 1945... someone at the Religious Tract Society had the sense to make the distinction by bringing out two separate journals: their *Woman's Magazine* then catered for

[17] Cadogan & Craig, *You're a Brick, Angela!*, p. 263.
[18] Liz Heron, *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties* (London, 1985), p. 5.

adult readers whose main interests were considered to be home, family and fashion; and the "G.O.P", at a time when schoolgirl fiction was in its heyday, for a short time lived up to its name.[19]

In the 1940s the *Girl's Own Paper* portrayed readers preparing for, or just having completed their School Certificate.[20] In 1947 the title changed to the *Girl's Own Paper and Heiress* which in 1951 simply became *Heiress (incorporating Girl's Own Paper)*. The paper's focus shifted again to young women aged over sixteen but ceased publication in 1956.

The extent to which schoolgirls over the age of sixteen continued to read schoolgirl papers is difficult to gauge, although Geoffrey Trease suggests that older schoolgirls quickly tired of them.[21] Fenwick's 1953 study of 500 girls aged between fourteen and fifteen at a Select Technical School noted the popularity of schoolgirl papers: ninety-four percent of eleven to thirteen year-olds read *Girl*, *Girls' Crystal* or the new *School Friend* – the last being the most popular (almost sixty percent of fourteen to fifteen year olds and fifty-two percent of girls over fifteen read it).[22] Although 310,000 copies of *Girl* were published weekly in 1962, the output of *School Friend* was 414,000.[23] The *Girl's Own Paper* and *Guide* were placed well in secondary girls' reading choices yet fared badly in senior girls' reading choices according to Jenkinson.[24] In stark contrast, while *Girls' Crystal* continued to be widely read amongst senior schoolgirls in all age categories, thirty-three percent of twelve year old girls at senior schools read *Red Letter* and twenty-six percent read *Red Star Weekly* in 1940.[25] The last two were romance magazines.

Girls Reading Romance Papers

A number of papers intended for working girls appeared at the end of the nineteenth century in response to increasing literacy after the Education Act 1870.[26] According to Tinkler, papers for working girls prior to 1945 can be divided into three

[19] Ibid., p. 76.
[20] 'The Minister of Education Speaks to You', in *Girl's Own Paper*, October 1944.
[21] G. Trease, *Tales Out Of School* (Surrey, 1948), p. 128.
[22] L. Fenwick, 'Periodicals and Adolescent Girls', in *Studies in Education*, 2 (1953), p. 29.
[23] M. Campbell, 'Comic Love', *New Society*, 14 (1962), p. 25.
[24] Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read?*, Table G XIa, p. 214.
[25] Ibid., Table G XIb, p. 215.
[26] Cadogan & Craig, *You're A Brick Angela!*, p. 126.

types: weeklies for 'business girls' (seen by their producers as working and lower-middle-class), weekly papers for 'millgirls' (predominantly working-class readers) and monthlies intended for upper-working class and middle-class readers. Some papers intended for working girls' disappeared in the 1930s due to the rationalisation of production in response to the Depression.[27] Papers aimed at 'business girls' and 'millgirl papers' were amalgamated with magazines aimed at a broader audience of female readers, which Tinkler grouped together under the title of mother-daughter magazines.[28] For example the girls' business paper *Girls' (Best) Friend* (AP 1899-1931) was incorporated with a paper produced for millgirls, *Poppy's Paper* (AP 1924-1934) and continued as *Fortune* (AP 1934-1936) before being incorporated with *Oracle* (AP 1933).

Oracle was among a new range of romance magazines that appeared in the 1930s aimed at younger married women. This range included weekly publications such as D.C. Thomson's *Red Letter* (1899-1987), *Red Star Weekly* (1929-1950), *Secrets* (1932-1990) and *Lucky Star* (1935-1957). The editor of *Lucky Star*, Nell Kennedy, was also the editor of the millgirl publication *Peg's Paper* (Newnes & Pearson 1919-1940). Despite an overlap between intended and actual readership *Peg's Paper* and *Lucky Star* had clearly different aims. Kennedy addressed an obvious readership in the first editorial of *Peg's Paper*: 'Not so long ago I was a millgirl too, and my clogs clattered with yours down the cobbled street.'[29] This focus on young single girls was in stark contrast to the intended readership of *Lucky Star* which proclaimed to be 'The New Home Story Paper' for married women.[30]

These new publications discussed issues for young women and potential mothers such as romance, marriage and motherhood. Neither the fiction nor the informative articles referred to adolescent girls. However, since these magazines had incorporated the earlier working-girls papers which had been aimed at girls as young as fourteen it could be assumed that adolescent girls were included in the intended audience. Indeed, the letter pages of the *Red Letter* and *Lucky Star* confirm that these publications were read by younger readers as replies to letters often revealed the

[27] Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, p. 55.
[28] Ibid., p. 57.
[29] *Peg's Paper*, 5 May 1919.
[30] *Lucky Star*, 4 September 1950.

readers' ages and their worries specific to their age. Polly Wendover, the agony aunt in the *Red Letter*, explained in one reply that 'Sixteen is too young to tie yourself down to one special boy.'[31] And in another reply directed to a 'Schoolgirl' she explained she was unable to find the reader a pen pal.[32] Similarly, two girls aged fifteen wrote to Mary Holmes, *Lucky Star*'s agony aunt, because they were concerned about making friends in their new jobs.[33] Readership surveys emphasised the wide readership these publications achieved.

Table 3.2: *Readership of Mother-Daughter magazines by class for girls aged 14-24 years in 1939 (as percentage of girls who read each magazine by class).*

	Social Class			
	IV	III	II	I
Red Letter	10.97	7.48	2.1	-
Red Star	8.07	5.07	1.4	2.0
My Weekly	4.41	4.12	1.8	2.0
Miracle	8.45	4.21	0.9	2.0
Oracle	5.74	3.26	0.5	2.0

Source: Survey of Press Readership, Institute of Incorporated Practitioners in Advertising (1939) Vol. 1, Table 5, p. 45.

Table 3.2, taken from the *Survey of Press Readership* in 1939, highlights the popularity of mother-daughter magazines amongst working-class women or semi-skilled workers (social class group IV) but does not allow for analysis by specific age groups. A contemporary survey also suggested that periodicals such as *Red Letter, Glamour,* and *Red Star* were 'more popular with girls from poorer cultural backgrounds' meaning girls from working-class backgrounds.[34] Hulton's readership survey in 1947 concluded that fifteen percent of sixteen to twenty-four year old girls from social classes IV and V [semi-skilled manual and unskilled manual] read *Red Letter*, nine percent *Miracle* and six percent *My Weekly*.[35] The proliferation of

[31] *Red Letter*, 14 January 1950.
[32] Ibid., 6 May 1950.
[33] *Lucky Star*, 20 February 1950.
[34] Fenwick, 'Periodicals and Adolescent Girls', p. 35; Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, pp. 62-63.
[35] *Hulton Press Readership Survey* (1947), p. 5.

reading surveys in this period reveals the anxieties of educationalists and social observers regarding the influence of romantic fiction on the morality and behaviour of working-class girls. They believed the fiction offered the readers spurious fantasises of romance and adventure outside the parameters of their gender and class.[36]

Girls Reading Women's Service Magazines

Alongside papers for working-class women were glossy monthly journals such as *Vogue* (1916), *Ideal Home* (1920), *Good Housekeeping* (1922), *Woman and Home* (1926) and *Woman's Journal* (1927) aimed specifically at middle-class readers. The launch of cheap weeklies such as *Woman's Own* (1932-to date) and *Woman* (1937-to date) highlighted a shift in editorial policy in order to maximise the audience. The challenge was to attract a readership that spanned both the working and middle class, indeed *Woman* proclaimed itself to be 'all things to all women'. Between 1946 and 1950, the circulation of *Woman* doubled and *Woman's Own* trebled.[37] In 1958 *Woman* reached the record sale figure of British women's magazines with 3.49 million copies sold per week and a weekly readership of 11.5 million.[38] *The People's Friend*, which was first published in 1869 and is still published today by D.C. Thomson, focused on women's fiction and utilised a traditional formula of domestic and romantic tales by writers such as Barbara Henson, Una Murray and the well-known novelist and romantic writer Annie S. Swan.[39] In her previous writing for women, Swan had rejected the idea of the 'new woman' and continued to write romance fiction based on the traditional discourse of femininity centred on the family. The intended reader of *The People's Friend* was the home-centred woman with children and was both popular among young mothers and older women.[40]

Fenwick's 1953 study of readership highlighted the fact that women's service magazines were popular with schoolgirls. According to Fenwick one quarter of fourteen and fifteen year olds and one third of girls over fifteen read these

[36] Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 110.
[37] C. White, *The Women's Periodical Press In Britain 1946 – 1976* (London, 1977), p. 8.
[38] Cited in Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, p. 30.
[39] Annie S. Swan (1859-1943) wrote romantic fiction and also the advice column called 'Over the Teacups' in *Woman at Home* (1892-1920) as well as numerous novels.
[40] *National Readership Survey*, IPA, 1965.

magazines.[41] In 1965 563,000 more adolescent girls aged between sixteen and twenty-four read *Woman* compared to women aged over sixty-five.[42] Between 1949 and 1974 a fifth of *Woman* and *Woman's Own* covers utilised a 'Teen' cover: 'A 'Teen' cover typically showed the model's hair tied up in one or two bunches, or snuggling up to a kitten or puppy with an expressive range confined to two dimensions, youth and fun.'[43] Ferguson noted that the 'Teen' covers of *Woman* and *Woman's Own* were largely prominent in the 1950s and 'reflected editorial and advertising awareness of increased teenage spending power.'[44] Mary Grieve, the editor of *Woman* from 1937 until 1962, explained that to interest 'young floating' readers a teenage page was introduced. Grieve acknowledged that this extended their readership amongst sixteen to twenty-four year olds.[45]

This is a crude analysis of intended readership which is never the same as the actual readership, yet it provides the opportunity to differentiate between the schoolgirl papers, romance papers and women's service magazines. Analysis of these figures, editorial policies and contemporary observations suggest that young girls read a wide variety of material intended for boys, young women and mothers. These distinct genres of reading material each defined femininity and masculinity in a variety of ways according to the age and class of the intended readers. As will be discussed in Chapter 5 the women interviewed for this project used cultural myths and archetypes based on these story papers, comics and magazines to construct the stories that made sense of their girlhood. The changing representations of femininity presented in these three distinct female genres will now be discussed.

Schoolgirl Heroines: Domesticated, Passive and Asexual?

Schoolgirl fiction

The intended reader of the *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* was the elementary schoolgirl from either a working-class or middle-class background. The majority of fictional stories in the *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* prior to the

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[41] Fenwick, 'Periodicals and Adolescent Girls', Table 2, p. 29.
[42] *National Readership Survey*, IPA, Table 17A "Age and Social Grade", 1965.
[43] M. Ferguson, 'The Woman's Magazine Cover Photograph' in H. Christian (ed.), *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press* (Keele, 1980), p. 230.
[44] Ibid., p. 237.
[45] M. Grieve, *Millions Made My Story* (London, 1963), p. 135.

Second World War were connected to boarding school environments. This location distinguished the stories from the majority of readers' own experiences. Angela Brazil's (1868-1947) forty-eight full length novels and seventy short stories of boarding school life played a significant part in the creation of a new and highly influential literary genre in the 1920s and continued to influence girls' boarding school stories into the late 1950s. Brazil's work reflected the contemporary shift in ideologies of girlhood from the Victorian to the modern period.

New schoolgirl stories challenged the tradition of writing for girls, which had for a century established 'the norm of the domestic tale, in which the trials of the heroine were involved with the learning of discipline, the internalisation of the feminine values of self-abnegation, obedience and subordination.'[46] Schoolgirl characters rejected discipline, welcomed insubordination and found in the hierarchy of school life an alternative to the domestic setting because it offered scope for female accomplishment. The ethos of the school story itself was in direct opposition to the conventional (Victorian) positioning of women as sentimental objects. Depicting girls within a totally female environment liberated the characters from the prescriptive conditions that determined gendered division in the heterosexual community. Gill Frith noted that 'In a world of girls [...] to be assertive, physically active, daring, ambitious, is not a source of tension. In the absence of boys, girls break bounds, have adventures, transgress rules, catch spies. There is no taboo on public speech.'[47] The school story provided a space in which girls could play with roles and activities previously reserved for boys.

The core narrative of schoolgirl fiction in the *School Friend* in the 1920s had centred on the inclusion of a poor 'scholarship girl' or rich spoilt girl into the settled group of schoolgirls and focused on the resolution of social contradictions and psychological insecurities. The 'personal, social and financial obstacles' that were a core narrative process in earlier schoolgirl fiction were subsumed into the narrative structure of schoolgirl fiction from the interwar period onwards.[48] The inclusion of a scholarship girl from the poor family was no longer a central motif of schoolgirl

[46] J. S. Bratton cited in S. Foster & J. Simons, *What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of 'Classic' Stories for Girls* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 201.
[47] G. Frith, 'The Time of Your Life: The Meaning of the School Story', in C. Steedman, V. Walkerdine & C. Urwin (eds.), *Gender, Language and Childhood* (London, 1985), p. 125.
[48] See Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines*, p. 210.

fiction.[49] Emphasis on class difference within fiction decreased. Young heroines in fiction from 1945 onwards ventured to different countries without concern for real life issues such as money or family. Complete stories and serials set in places such as China ('The Golden Pagoda') and Egypt ('Denise and the Scarab Ring') featured in the *School Friend*.[50] The fiction emphasised how the heroine retained her femininity whilst coping either with success in a competitive environment or a difficult situation.

The *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* did not offer advice in the format of career columns, yet the fiction did introduce potential careers for young female readers. The genre transformed in order to address a specifically female juvenile readership in a direct challenge to the sentimental tradition of much previous fiction for girls. 'Career girls' had featured in elementary schoolgirl paper fiction between 1920 and 1950 as detectives, circus performers and actresses. These heroines were removed from the reality of the traditional female labour market and portrayed a more glamorous lifestyle than readers were likely to attain. Fiction in the *Girls' Crystal* continued in this fashion into the 1950s with stories of female detectives who travelled across continents to solve difficult cases and girls who performed in the circus.[51] Conventional boarding school stories still featured in these new papers. One story based on female adventure was 'The Silent Three' which ran in the *School Friend* from 1950-1963, and focused on three boarding-school girls who solved mysteries.

The new *School Friend* in 1950 began to feature young heroines embarking on accessible careers, negotiating job interviews, proving their ability and negating gender prejudices. In 'Trudy's Travelling Library' Trudy set up her own business: 'A van which would visit all the neighbouring towns and villages, call on all the big country mansions, schools, institutions and clubs.'[52] When a prospective customer phoned the bookshop Trudy answered the phone: '"This is Major Smythe –

[49] Mel Gibson suggests that the theme of 'struggling girls alone' re-emerged in comics intended for a younger female audience such as D.C. Thomson's *Bunty* (1958-2001). 'Remembered Reading: Memory, Comics and Post-War Constructions of British Girlhood', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Sunderland, p. 64.
[50] *School Friend*, 3 June 1950.
[51] 'The Clue of the Black Cat' by Rhoda Fleming, *Girls' Crystal*, 25 February 1950; 'Joy – The Girl With a 100 Voices' by Ida Melbourne, *Girls' Crystal* 29 April 1950.
[52] *School Friend*, 9 September 1950.

Smethers; I – Dash it, is that a girl?" roared the voice. "That's right, Major, Trudy Taylor… Can I help?" "Help? By Jingo, does a girl ever help?" snorted the voice.'[53] In the end, much to his disbelief, Trudy solved the Major's problem. A story about owning a business was far removed from tales about thwarting thieves in a foreign country. However, the *School Friend* reflected the ambiguous emphasis on femininity in the period. The practicality of new narratives and character models, which would offer a more modern standard of activity for girls without the old discourse of femininity were difficult to establish.

Alongside the leisure and career fiction featured in *School Friend* were scenarios based in the home such as 'Leave it to Jenny' by Evelyn Day. The premise of the story was that Jenny Watson's mother was away from home looking after a sick aunt, therefore 'Jenny was acting mother. Even though she was only fifteen years of age, Jenny took it in her stride.'[54] Every week a complete story told how Jenny managed the household chores, looked after her younger brother and father and coped with some unexpected event. Jenny assumed the substitute mother role in the serial and even wanted to listen to Housewives' Choice on the radio while cleaning. Her father willingly positioned Jenny within the substitute mother role. In one episode a rich uncle came to visit from America. Jenny's father and brother had the day off from work and school: '"The only one who isn't having the day off is Jenny," smiled dad. "Unless Uncle takes us out," said Jenny. "And then it certainly will be a holiday for little me. No cooking, no cleaning away – no washing up!" Jenny sighed at the prospect.'[55] There were limitations on the schoolgirl heroine. Reference to the heroine as self-sacrificing, loyal and modest also conveyed continuity with the Victorian angel in the home. By assuming the substitute mother role the caring and domestic nature of femininity was depicted.

The school stories set in an all female environment offered a community free from male competition or pressure, yet even stories in domestic settings hardly featured men. Heroines in the fiction conformed to the asexual ideal of the female adolescent. Male characters in schoolgirl fiction often played complementary yet subsidiary roles to the female heroines and normally featured as fathers, brothers and

[53] Ibid., 16 September 1950.
[54] Ibid., 20 May 1950.
[55] Ibid., 2 September 1950.

friends. The stories that included male characters from 1950 defined the heroines as the key characters who often rescued their male friends.[56] Deborah Phillips noted that 'the achieving heroine of the mid-1950s is not positioned as sexual, masculinity is a concept relegated to the margins of experience; men are occasionally glimpsed, but as irritants rather than as significant part of life, and usually in the form of fathers and brothers.'[57] Boys' position within the narrative was secondary to that of the schoolgirl heroine. Re-establishing the boundaries of girls' school fiction created a wider space and variety of scenarios for heróines to negotiate. As has been noted plots involved young heroines coping with their fathers, brothers, male rivalries, male enemies, male bosses, older male chauvinists and male friends. Although male characters were introduced they remained impotent. The narratives focused on the young heroine outwitting her rival, justifying her ability to the older cynic, or leading her male friends in competition.

Girls' Crystal appeared to critique traditional gender roles by exposing them precisely as roles rather than a natural product of sexual difference. The central character in 'The Worst Boy at the Co-ed School' abbreviated her first name to a gender neutral/boyish Christian name with an adventurous, risqué surname, Paddy Dare.[58] She was also the captain of the college, which was a prestigious role. These tales revised conventional female models of educational opportunities and offered accessible positions of authority relatively inaccessible to young girls and women in the outside world. Previously held male positions were available, safe and respectable within the school story and realigned possible opportunities for girls (see illustration 3.1)

The literary image of the girls' school was assumed to be a positive source of female power. School stories for girls provided a vision of a community of equals, a network of friends, where work and play were indivisible. This vision of a female community, self-sufficient and mutually supportive, was a central element in the school story. Frith contends that 'if we see ideologies of femininity in terms of a unitary, if over determined, progression towards passivity, domesticity and a

[56] 'The Merrymakers Island College' in *Girls' Crystal*, 15 February 1950.
[57] D. Phillips, 'Girls' Own Stories: Good Citizenship and Girls in British Postwar Popular Culture' in Jones & Watkins (eds.), *A Necessary Fantasy?*, p. 81.
[58] *Girl's Crystal*, April 29 1950. *Girl* also introduced a series called 'Robbie of Red Hall', (1952-1956) by George Beardmore & Roy Newby, about an orphaned girl from the Highlands.

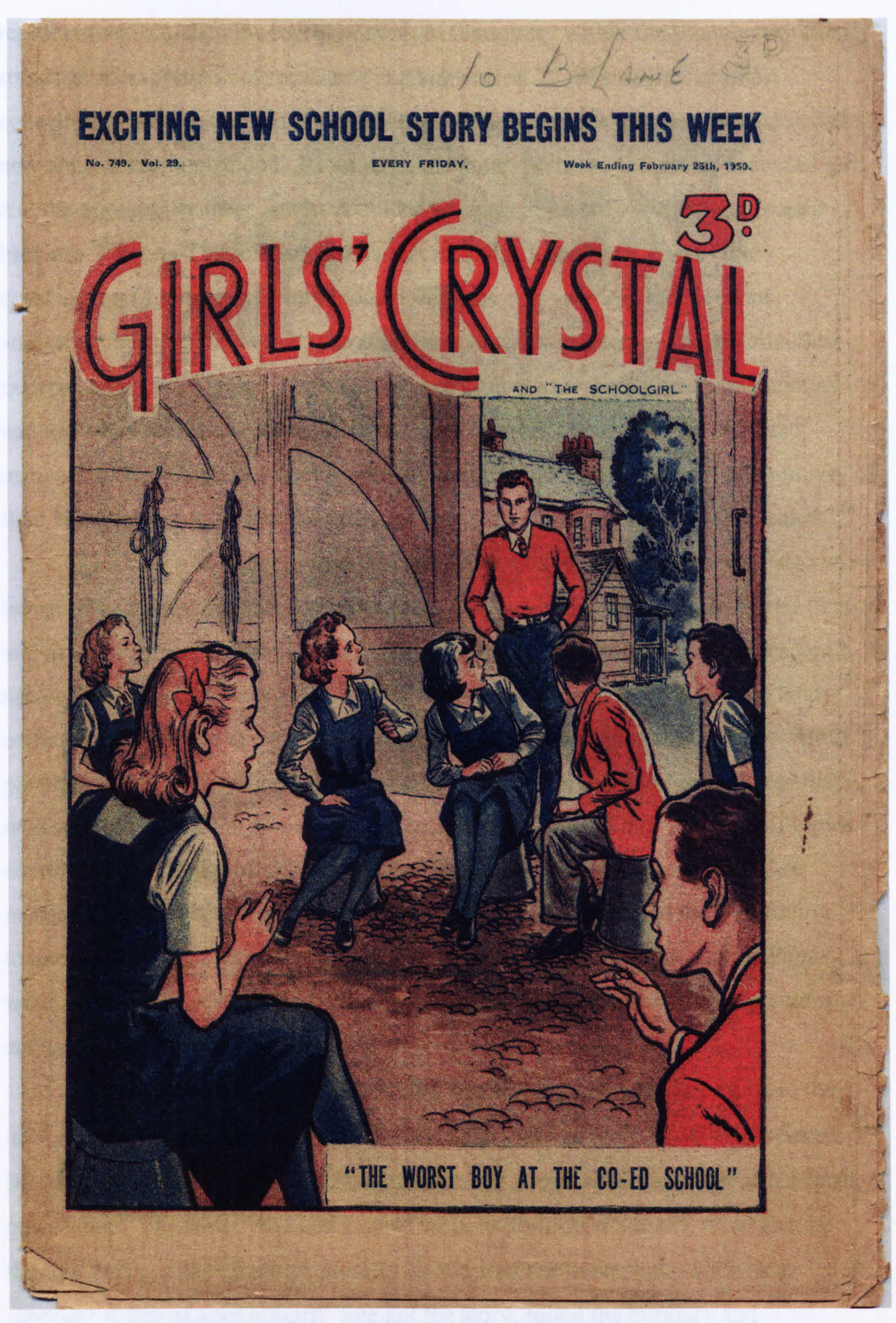

Illustration 3.1: Boarding school stories were still popular in girls' story papers and comics after 1945. They emphasised the schoolgirl heroine as adventurous and in control. *Source*: *Girls' Crystal*, 25 February 1950.

reproductive role, then the representation of femininity within the school story clearly stands as an expression of resistance and subversion.'[59] Schoolgirl heroines, conceptually innovative, did not reproduce existing patterns of behaviour but initiated new approaches to girlhood. Rosemary Auchmuty points to the power accorded girls and the opportunity these stories provided for girls to identify with strong female heroines.[60] Penny Tinkler also asserts that schoolgirl stories facilitated the construction of relatively autonomous, lively and empowering, independent adolescent heroines. However, she suggests that this was a temporary middle-class experience as 'working girls' papers focused almost exclusively on characteristics and activities consistent with patriarchal ideals' in the 1920s and 1930s; 'these magazines actively encouraged readers to identify with and emulate, the femininity of their heroines and to follow the prescriptions of femininity which they presented.'[61]

The *Girl's Own Paper* and *Girl*, aimed at a middle-class readership who were expected to continue in full time education, differed in content from the *Girls' Crystal* and *School Friend.* Informative articles on living abroad, religion, languages, craft, nature, books, careers and girls clubs were included alongside the fiction of many contemporary writers such as Elsie Jeanette Oxenham and Elinor Brent Dyer. Both papers focused on domestic crafts including cookery, needlework and other skills which would have been useful in the domestic environment. The diversity of topics covered and the depth of information and instruction given suggested that their readers' lives and opportunities were broad. The articles reflected the 'improving' tone of the papers. The majority of stories in both *Girl* and the *Girl's Own Paper* were structured around achievement of a young heroine in the context of a contest, and some form of contribution to the community.

The new comic strip format in *Girl* was employed to introduce girls to the new possibilities that the post-war reconstruction offered women. In 'Sue's Secret Mission' in *Girl,* Sue wanted to be a reporter and approached the editor of her local newspaper: 'The editor who had a lot of work to do fobbed Sue off, with what he thought was a dead end story. Secretly he admired her nerve, but – a job as a reporter! A slip of a schoolgirl!' Sue got the story, foiled the burglary and

[59] Frith, 'The Time of Your Life', p. 125.
[60] R. Auchmuty, *A World of Girls: The Appeal of the Girls' School Story* (London, 1992).
[61] Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, p. 74.

subsequently secured a reporting job for herself on the newspaper.[62]Ambition and achievement were a regular feature of stories for schoolgirls in the post war reconstruction.

In keeping with the lead strip of the *Eagle,* 'Dan Dare Pilot of the Future', *Girl*'s front page originally featured the brightly coloured strip cartoon 'Kitty Hawke and her all girl aircrew'.[63] In the first episode Kitty was introduced to the readers: 'Well, here we are again gang, with one more job chalked up to the all-girl crew – to prove to dad that we can operate his planes as efficiently as the glorious males.'[64] The Kitty series emphasised women pilots' experience of frustration during the Second World War when given menial tasks. The new comic strip attempted to promote a different experience of female ability. However, the Kitty Hawke series only lasted until March 1952, less than a year. The female aviation piece was replaced by a boarding school story, 'Wendy and Jinx in the Secret Manor School.' Marcus Morris detailed in an editorial that the change of serial was in response to readers' requests for a school story.[65] In her biography of her father, Marcus Morris' daughter explained that they '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.'[66] 'The Wendy and Jinx' series was replaced in the 1960s by the long running 'Susan of St. Brides' series which focused on a young woman's experiences as a nurse. (See illustrations 3.2 and 3.3)

Fiction in both elementary and secondary schoolgirl papers in the 1950s highlighted the ambivalent position of young women in society and the thin division between traditional and aspiring modern femininity. Heroines of the comic strip for young girls in the early 1950s offered a construction of 'femininity' which articulated the contradictions and expectations of a contemporary ideal of womanhood. The middle-class nature of *Girl* was expressed through the emphasis on

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[62] *Girl*, 26 March 1952.
[63] Fiction featuring female aviators was popular during the interwar period. *The Girls' Crystal* (1939) and *The Schoolgirl* (1933) included fiction about female pilots written by a male author E. L. Rosman under the penname 'Elizabeth Chester.' Editorial policy assumed that men would produce more exciting plots for girls than women writers. See M. Cadogan, *Women With Wings Female Flyers in Fact and Fiction* (London, 1992).
[64] *Girl*, 2 November 1951.
[65] Ibid., 26 March 1952.
[66] Morris & Hullwood, *Living With Eagles*, p. 164.

Illustration 3.2: The original comic strip in *Girl*, 'Worral of the Wilds', was replaced by the girls' boarding school story 'Wendy and Jinx' in March 1952.
Source: Girl Annual, 1958.

Illustration 3.3: 'Wendy and Jinx' was then replaced by another traditionally female nursing tale 'Susan of St. Brides'.
Source: Girl, January 1961.

'suitable' careers for young women in the fiction. Two other picture strips that focused on girls' careers and introduced the working life of the characters were 'Tessa of Television' a secretary and 'Angela, Air Hostess'.[67]

Continuing the informative nature of these middle-class publications, *Girl* included various non-fiction picture strips including 'The True Story of Emmeline Pankhurst' in the seventh *Girl Annual* (see illustration 3.4).[68] Full length articles were also presented that focused on 'Women of Action' such as 'Michalea Denis, the London-born huntress who 'shoots' with a camera' and Jacqueline Cochran a ferry pilot with the British Air Transport Auxiliary (see illustration 3.5). The writer, Beatrice Cox, started her discussion of 'Women of Action' by commenting that 'Raised eyebrows would once have greeted any woman brave enough to venture into a man's world. Today women have reputations second to none in all spheres.'[69]

From the 1940s the *Girl's Own Paper* included fewer schoolgirl stories and focused on more informative articles. The *Girl's Own Paper* had introduced discussion of possible careers for women as early as 1908. Flora Klickman, originally a musician and then journalist, took over as editor in 1908 until 1931, and included more information on serious careers for girls, including foreign missionary work. Yet the paper had continued to view women's jobs prior to the First World War not as vocations but as 'moral interludes'.[70]

During the Second World War the paper carried numerous recruitment articles for the war industries, the women's Services and the pre-Service training corps which was open to girls and boys aged between twelve and twenty-one years.[71] From June 1945 the paper was concerned with the future prospects of its young readers following the end of the war. The cover image of the June 1945 edition showed a young woman standing at a crossroads being advised directions by a young

[67] 'Confidential Secretary, a job for a girl on her toes' written by Catherine Townsend and illustrated by Chris Garvey detailed that 'This scientific age, with all the wonderful jobs that follow it, is full of opportunities for the career-girl if she is ambitious enough to tackle things like nuclear fission. BUT...the career of a Confidential Secretary can be just as exciting as tearing atoms apart', *Girl Annual*, 1958.
[68] Other 'Heroes and Heroines' included Grace Darling (2 November 1952), Henri Dunant (7 March 1952) and Marie Curie (14 March 1952).
[69] 'Women of Action' written by Beatrice Cox and illustrated by Modern, *Girl Annual,* 1958.
[70] C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London, 2001), p. 86.
[71] These articles were supplemented by cover images of women in British services as well as images of women in the American Women's Army Corps (October 1944), a nursing sister in Australian Army (February 1945) and a nursing member of the South African Forces (April 1945).

Illustration 3.4: *Girl* included a variety of informative comic-strips which depicted women and men who had been actively involved in politics and work in the past. This strip details the life of Emmeline Pankhurst. *Source*: *Girl Annual* 1958.

Illustration 3.5: This image of Jacqueline Cochran featured alongside a full length article on 'Women in Action'. *Source*: *Girl Annual* 1958.

man. This image complemented an editorial titled 'Which Way?' in which the editor addressed girls' opportunities and the demands of 'courage, intelligence and physique' facing their future decisions.[72] Readers were encouraged to think about the future; to take their wartime experiences and build on them in the post war reconstruction:

> During the war it has been easy, even for schoolgirls, to do things that seemed worth while - growing food, collecting salvage, learning first aid and making and mending. We discovered that there *is* a joy in service. Can we think *now* how we can plan our peace-time jobs so that they are as important as our war-time ones?[73]

The lead fictional story in the *Girl's Own Paper*, 'Worrals in the Wild', written by Captain W. E. Johns who wrote the Biggles series, also depicted this question and uncertainty facing young girls and women after the Second World War. In the November 1945 edition, Worrals and her friend Betty Lovell, had been de-mobbed from the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and were trying to decide what to do with the rest of their lives.[74] Through the editorial, advertisements and fiction, the *Girl's Own Paper* identified a shift in the discourse of femininity at the end of the Second World War and attempted to address it.

Marriage V Career in Schoolgirl Story Papers and Comics

The question of marriage versus a career was an issue that featured prominently in the *Girl's Own Paper* in 1945: '"Marriage or a Career, or Both?" Marjorie Hessel Tiltman discusses a question of vital importance to everyone of you.'[75] Tiltman explained why she 'would like to see every girl married...[and] equipped for a career. Both offer different ways of enriching and fulfilling her individuality':

> I would like you to take this question of marriage into sober consideration, when thinking of your career. One of

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[72] *Girl's Own Paper*, June 1945.
[73] Ibid., January 1945.
[74] Ibid., November 1945. W.E. Johns resisted the re-domestification of women and continued the Worrals series by making Worrals a private flying investigator.
[75] Ibid.

> the reasons why parents have, in the past, hesitated to spend money on the daughter's training is obvious – it was taken for granted that she would relinquish her work when she married. But the past few years have effected a tremendous revolution. Financial necessity may make it imperative that you continue in your work, and many sensible girls would prefer fifty pounds invested in their own head and hands than on an expensive wedding. [76]

Tiltman acknowledged the changing position of women in society after the Second World War and presented young girls with a socially active and independent model for them to emulate. The *Girl's Own Paper* focused on girls' opportunities in future careers as well as mothers.

'Carol's Career Corner' was a long-standing section in the *Girl's Own Paper.*[77] A number of careers and professions were presented as suitable for young girls to consider. Nursery nursing was suggested as an appropriate career for girls 'in the post-war world where new and ever-widening plans are being made for child welfare. The Diploma is a stepping stone to social service and other careers.'[78] The socially active girl, in line with the new Welfare State, was presented in the pages of the *Girl's Own Paper.* Yet the careers advisor also emphasised that nursery nursing 'equips a girl with invaluable knowledge when the time comes for her to make a home of her own.'[79] In November 1946 'Carol's Career Corner' advocated becoming a solicitor: 'Although there are fewer women in the legal profession than in some others, many women solicitors have proved highly successful. A woman's tact and much maligned intuition are indeed extremely useful additions to the usual qualifications.'[80] There was an emphasis on inherent feminine qualities which were perceived to be important and beneficial to specific jobs. Some careers suggested by the magazines remained embedded within the perceived ideal feminine sphere of

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[76] Ibid. Also quoted in Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, p. 114 and Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, p. 205.

[77] The 'Careers Bureau' was a consistent feature in the GOP even when it changed its name to *Heiress* in 1950 and focused more on ' older girls' and then 'teenagers' issues such as beauty and pop music.

[78] Ibid., April 1945.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., November 1946.

work such as nursing, secretarial work, domestic science, fashion and teaching.[81] Even though these occupations appeared to offer limited scope to women, they were presented as opportunities for development.[82] The *Girl's Own Paper* suggested that after training in design and needlework 'you may teach your special subject in a secondary, technical or art school' or possibly consider a business career in the antique trade.[83] Or 'for the girl who is fond of housecraft and other domestic subjects, who has done well at school and wants to do even better in business, there are good opportunities in the laundry industry.'[84] The opportunities of promotion within the retail trade were also highlighted in one investigative article: The retail assistant 'has her eye on an appointment as a Director of Buying, which will mean a four-figure salary and a great helping of responsibility.'[85]

Girl, also introduced a regular forum of careers advice which was collated into the collection *I Want to Be... A Girl Book of Careers*.[86] Some of the suggested careers for young girls to aspire to included interior design, architecture and pharmacy.[87] The narrative structure of both *Girl* and the *Girl's Own Paper* emphasised the girl on the edge of womanhood; a young woman was shown to devote herself to the acquisition of professional skills and a career and in turn negotiated an image of respectable womanhood and citizenship.

Careers and professions that were previously dominated by men were also presented to young female readers. *Girl* featured an article called 'I Want to be a Probation Officer'.[88] A. Bacon described a progressive career for girls keen on drawing and mathematics in the *Girl's Own Paper* in 1946:

> The profession of draughtswoman or tracer provide openings in engineering firms, in surveyors and architects offices, municipal engineers offices, map and plan reproduction offices or as mapping assistants in the Land Registry, drawing office

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[81] Ibid., March 1945, April 1945, May 1945. *Heiress*, January 1950, March 1950, June 1955, August 1956.
[82] Also Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, p. 93. Penny Summerfield emphasises how girls story papers and women's magazines contributed to the 'discourse of opportunity' for girls and women after the Second World War, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, pp. 202-205.
[83] *Girl's Own Paper*, March 1945.
[84] Ibid., May 1946.
[85] *Heiress*, March 1950.
[86] Phillips, 'Girls' Own Stories', p. 79.
[87] *Girl*, 24 February 1954, 31 March 1954.
[88] Ibid., 31 March 1954.

> assistants in the Civil Service, or the Architects departments of Rural and Urban Councils. Girls trained in these professions will mainly be absorbed in the future by engineering firms engaged in peace time production and in the building construction programme in which field of work the influence of women is likely to be strongly in evidence from now on.[89]

Continuing their education presented other options for girls in industry: 'There are undoubted opportunities for keen ambitious girls as qualified chemists and physicists [...] Some of the larger firms employ girls as laboratory assistants and encourage them to continue their studies if they show aptitude.'[90] The language used ('professions', 'trained', 'future', 'qualified') articulated an awareness of women's ability and potential, and encouraged girls to consider work outside the traditional boundaries of femininity. The question of women performing men's jobs was debated in the paper's Youth Forum:

> Bill Nather interrupts: 'All this was in war-time. Things are different now. Personally I like womanly women, and I like girls to do the sort of things I don't do. If you try to iron out all the difference that Nature intended, women won't be half so attractive.'
>
> 'Rubbish about Nature's differences', Leonie's eyes flashed. 'You're talking about bodies – I'm thinking about minds. Brains are the same in men and women'.[91]

Sexuality and Femininity in Schoolgirl Story Papers

Open discussion of sexuality and femininity was not a feature of the schoolgirl papers. R. T. Eves the first *School Friend* editor ruled out overt descriptions of sexuality along with references to religion and swearing.[92] During the 1930s fashion and beauty tips were included in schoolgirl weeklies, which for example informed readers how to customise garments into the new season's trends.

[89] *Girl's Own Paper*, January 1946.
[90] Ibid., June 1946.
[91] Ibid., April 1946.
[92] Cadogan & Craig, *You're a Brick, Angela!*, pp. 231, 242.

The *Girls' Crystal* and the *School Friend* did include information about friendships with boys but these were generally treated as trivial and were never discussed in relation to sex. Neither publication included a problem page or an agony aunt column to address readers' specific questions.

In contrast both *Girl* and the *Girl's Own Paper* had a correspondence section where readers' letters were printed. 'Answering Your Questions' in the *Girl's Own Paper* was the Reverend Henry T. Wigley who offered advice in line with the religious and moral nature of the publication. One anxious reader from South Africa asked 'Is it Christian to Dance?' in 1946 to which Rev. Wigley explained

> Occasional dancing among decent young people of similar up bringing at a domestic party, or a church social, is one thing; miscellaneous dancing in a dancehall among people of all types, is another thing. Something, too, depends on the kind of dancing – some forms being beautiful and others degrading. And certainly it makes a world of difference whether the dancing be accompanied by intoxicating liquor for this is definitely dangerous and has led many to ruin.[93]

Dancing, according to the *Girl's Own Paper* in 1946, was a difficult pursuit for young women to negotiate without crossing acceptable boundaries of femininity. Wigley's reply reflected contemporary concern about the changing youth culture. The editor of *Girl,* Reverend Marcus Morris, also encouraged readers to write about their problems. In an editorial he explained

> A trouble shared is a troubled halved, so if there's something on your mind – anything at all – why not tell us about it and our experts will see what they can do to help. No names will be printed – but let us have a stamped addressed envelope if you would like us to send you a reply by letter.[94]

[93] *Girl's Own Paper*, June 1946.
[94] *Girl*, 10 February 1954.

The first letters received by *Girl* concerned simple anxieties such as 'Alone and Frightened at Night' and 'apprehension about an examination'.[95] It was decided that the widespread nature of these concerns warranted a small amount of column space in *Girl* called 'What's Your Worry?'. In response *Girl* received more letters regarding wider issues and subsequently a small department was organised to deal with the correspondence.

James Hemming's analysis of letters to *Girl* between April 1953 and March 1955 highlighted the concern puberty generated alongside the more simple problems such as 'Bad at Maths' amongst its readers.[96] Hemming was an education consultant for both *Girl* and *Eagle*. He noted that both publications had considerable correspondence from their readers, although the letters received by *Girl* differed qualitatively and quantitatively from those written by boys. Hemming examined 3259 letters from girls concerning issues they had. According to his analysis 9.8 percent of the letters were concerned about 'personal deportment' and 6.3 percent were anxious about 'physical characteristics'.[97] A number of letters asked for information on the 'facts of life' and menstruation or complained that information was being withheld. One letter read 'I am twelve. Mother won't tell me about periods until I am thirteen. I am afraid it may start at school and I shan't know what to do.'[98] Hemming noted that 'it seems that adolescent girls may still be denied valid information about sex by both home and school so that they have to depend very largely upon what they can pick up from talking with their friends or reading.'[99] Although Hemming identified that a considerable number of letters from girls to the magazine were concerned with puberty the answers to these letters were not published in the column. Instead, 'depending on the request of the writer', Hemming explained 'a reply was generally returned by post.'[100]

Letters that were published in *Girl*'s 'What's Your Worry?' section concerned friendships amongst girls and the problems associated with maintaining friendships. For example answers to general questions such as 'How to Make

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 25 July 1956.
[97] J. Hemming, *Problems of Adolescent Girls* (London, 1960), p. 34.
[98] Ibid., p. 71.
[99] Ibid., p. 70.
[100] Ibid., p. 35.

Friends?' were frequently published.[101] Letters that addressed 'Schoolgirl Crushes' and the meaning of girls' relationships with other girls also began to be published: 'We are two senior girls and two juniors have crushes on us. How do you think we should treat them?'; 'My friend and I are 14. We like a prefect who is 17. Do you think we should invite her to tea?'; 'I am a second-former. How can I get to know a girl in the fourth-form whom I like?'[102] Hemming confirmed that of the 3,259 letters he analysed 242 were concerned with 'crush relationships' on both schoolmistresses and senior girls while 494 were concerned with heterosexual relationships.[103] From 1954 onwards questions such as 'How can I tell if a boy likes me?' became more frequent. Gradually the letters began to address more specific issues about relationships between girls and boys such as 'He Avoids Her' and 'A Selfish Boyfriend.'[104]

Despite creating space to address readers' questions and employing a male education advisor, *Girl* censored its discussion of the subject of girls' sexuality and did not provide a platform for these issues to be discussed openly for all its readers. Although *Girl* did not publish letters that were perceived to be about private issues and concerned with puberty, one issue that was deemed suitable to be discussed openly in the pages of the comic appeared to be girl-boy relationships. The comic had least control over the private letters sent by readers. By selecting letters and replies to publish, the periodical could exercise some degree of control over the meanings and identities of femininity offered to young readers. By replying to individual letters by post instead of publishing information, the publication continued to shroud girls' sexuality in mystery and simultaneously retained control of the publication and denied young girls the opportunity to gain knowledge of their own bodies. Editing the letter page confirmed the private-public separation of girls' identity in the 1950s and highlights the blur between modern and traditional femininity.

The editor of the *Girl's Own Paper* acknowledged in 1946 that 'teenage girls have been the most neglected section of the buying public.'[105] *Mayfair*, a small,

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[101] *Girl*, 3 November 1954, 28 December 1955, 16 May 1956, 13 June 1956, 18 July 1956.
[102] Ibid., 17 November 1954; 13 June 1956.
[103] Hemming, *Problems of Adolescent Girls*, pp. 76-9.
[104] *Girl*, 30 May 1956.
[105] *Girl's Own Paper*, August 1946.

'quality' monthly also appeared in 1946 presenting itself as the first periodical for 'teens'.[106] Consequently, in 1947 the *Girl's Own Paper* was incorporated with *Heiress* and was later heralded as a 'teen-age' magazine. The new coupling reflected a broadening of class appeal and a more specific focus on working and courting girls in place of schoolgirls. The publication adapted to its new image and addressed older working girls and young married women aged between sixteen and twenty-five. The standard articles on careers and fiction remained alongside features on beauty, such as 'Make-Up and You', and housework, 'Learning to Keep Home the Pleasant Way'.[107] The paper also began to address questions of girls' relationships with boys. An editorial acknowledged that

> Of all the new interests that crowd into the teen years, the question of boy friends is one of the most important. Some of the happiest experiences in life certainly come much later than 17, but it is true that the later teens can be particularly enjoyable, providing one knows how to cope with the many new situations and relationships that arise.[108]

The Youth Forum debated 'Ideal Boyfriends and Husbands'.[109] An article by Anne Castle called 'Teenagers and Petting' explained that 'petting should, in teenage romance, be a sort of "party cake". There's not the slightest harm in an occasional kiss or some hand-holding or hugging. But it should be a climax to an evening – not the aim and occupation of the evening.'[110] The advice offered by the *Girl's Own Paper* regarding sexuality was more prescriptive than instructive and the topics discussed remained within the traditional discourse of 'respectability'. Addressing the readers with language such as 'party cake' infantilised them instead of acknowledging their maturity.

Girl also blurred the definition of girlhood and womanhood in the late 1950s. Marcus Morris had initially used a blend of the new comic format with the old story paper tradition to create the new paper for girls in 1951. But aspects of women's magazines were also incorporated later to address the changing market for girls'

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[106] White, *The Women's Periodical Press,* p. 11.
[107] *Girl's Own Paper,* June 1946, August 1946.
[108] Ibid., July 1946.
[109] Ibid., September 1946.
[110] Ibid., July 1948.

periodicals. Jean Crouch an Assistant Editor on the paper recalled that *Girl* began to include male 'pin up' giveaways in the mid-1950s which raised 'parental disquiet', the first being Tommy Steele and the second Harry Belafonte.[111] In 1958 *Girl* also included the first dedicated fashion page to appear in a girls' story paper or comic of the period.[112]

Visualising Femininity

Visual images of girls and women in reading material also presented a discourse of femininity to readers. The introduction of *Girl* in 1951 challenged the written format of traditional girls' story papers by introducing the comic strip.[113] However, prior to the introduction of the comic strip images of women had adorned the pages of girls' and women's publications in various forms.[114] Visual images, along with other cultural texts and practices, help to organise the ways in which gender relations are understood. Representation, in its broadest sense is used to describe all those processes through which meaning is made and articulated in society. Visual representations help shape social ideals of femininity. These representations do not reflect existing realties but ultimately shape our perception about what reality is. Images are powerful. They can show you what to be, how to look, how to behave, what not to be, how not to look and how not to behave. Positive images in girls' magazines between 1930 and 1950 included motherhood and marriage rather than spinsterhood, career women or lesbianism. The changing depiction of young women on the front cover of the *Girl's Own P*aper highlights the changing construction of ideal femininity across the period of publication.

The original masthead of the *Girl's Own Paper* was a copy of a Greek statue and was resplendent with drapery. The editor explained the figure in a reply to a letter from two readers: 'The statue of which our heading is a copy has been greatly admired. It was called by the sculptor, 'The Spirit of Truth and Love', and we think

[111] Morris & Hullwood, *Living With Eagles*, p. 167.
[112] *Girl*, 18 October 1958.
[113] Mel Gibson suggests that comic strips are often associated with a male audience and the mix of comic strip and stories in girls publications post 1950 emphasised the ambiguous relationship between girls and the comic strip ' "What became of Bunty?" The Emergence, Evolution and Disappearance of the Girls' Comic in Post-War Britain' in M. Styles & E. Bearne (eds.), *Art, Narrative and Childhood* (Stoke-on-Trent, 2003), p. 88.
[114] G. Pollock, 'What's Wrong with Images of Women?', R. Betterton, (ed.), *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media* (London, 1987), pp. 40-48.

this a good motto for our paper.'[115] The image signified spiritual qualities of girlhood as opposed to action and what a girl should and could aspire to become in the late nineteenth century. There were religious connotations in the masthead as the figure was somewhat pious in appearance with a halo of light glowing behind her head. She appeared to be floating in the air which subsequently conveyed the idea she was an angel and harks to the Victorian ideal of the 'angel in the house', characterised by innocence, purity, gentleness and committed to the spiritual well being of the home. In 1894 the original masthead was replaced or modernised with two demure looking girls (see illustrations 3.6 and 3.7). There was a shift in the representation of femininity as one girl wrote or sketched and the other read. The portrayal of activities, which emphasised self-improvement, confirmed new ideas of education and signified the rapidly changing experience of being a young female in the period.

During the Second World War the *Girl's Own Paper* began to use coloured plates of young women working in war related industries and services on the front covers. For example, the cover pages of the *Girl's Own Paper* of October and November 1944 showed a member of the American Women's Army Corps. and the Canadian Women's Army Corps. respectively. Images of young women in uniform on the front covers of the *Girl's Own Paper* appealed to the patriotism of the reader. Promoting a new series on aviation, the editor of the *Girl's Own Paper* in October 1944 pointed out to readers that 'the writer is still in her twenties and, as you can see from her photograph, is a very attractive person as well as being a highly skilled airwoman.'[116] The portrayal of young women in uniform signified smartness and professionalism, and also showed how attractive a young girl could look in uniform.

The front cover of the *Girl's Own Paper* in October 1941 showed a young woman dressed in short sleeved overalls working a piece of heavy machinery (see illustration 3.8). The caption at the bottom of the cover advertised an article titled 'Engineering as a Career for Girls by Caroline Haslett'. The paper still referred to girls rather than women yet it is assumed that the female in the picture is a young woman. The image was striking. The young woman was actively working the

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[115] Cited in Mackay & Thane, 'The Englishwoman', p. 225.
[116] *Girl's Own Paper*, October 1944.

Illustration 3.6: This was the original masthead of the *Girl's Own Paper* which featured at the top section of the front cover with a full text story below. The image represents the Victorian discourse of femininity of the 'angel in the house'.
Source: The Girl's Own Paper, 10 May 1884.

Illustration 3.7: The masthead of the *Girl's Own Paper* changed in 1899 to show two girls writing and sketching, two respectable activities for young women.
Source: The Girl's Own Paper, 4 November 1899.

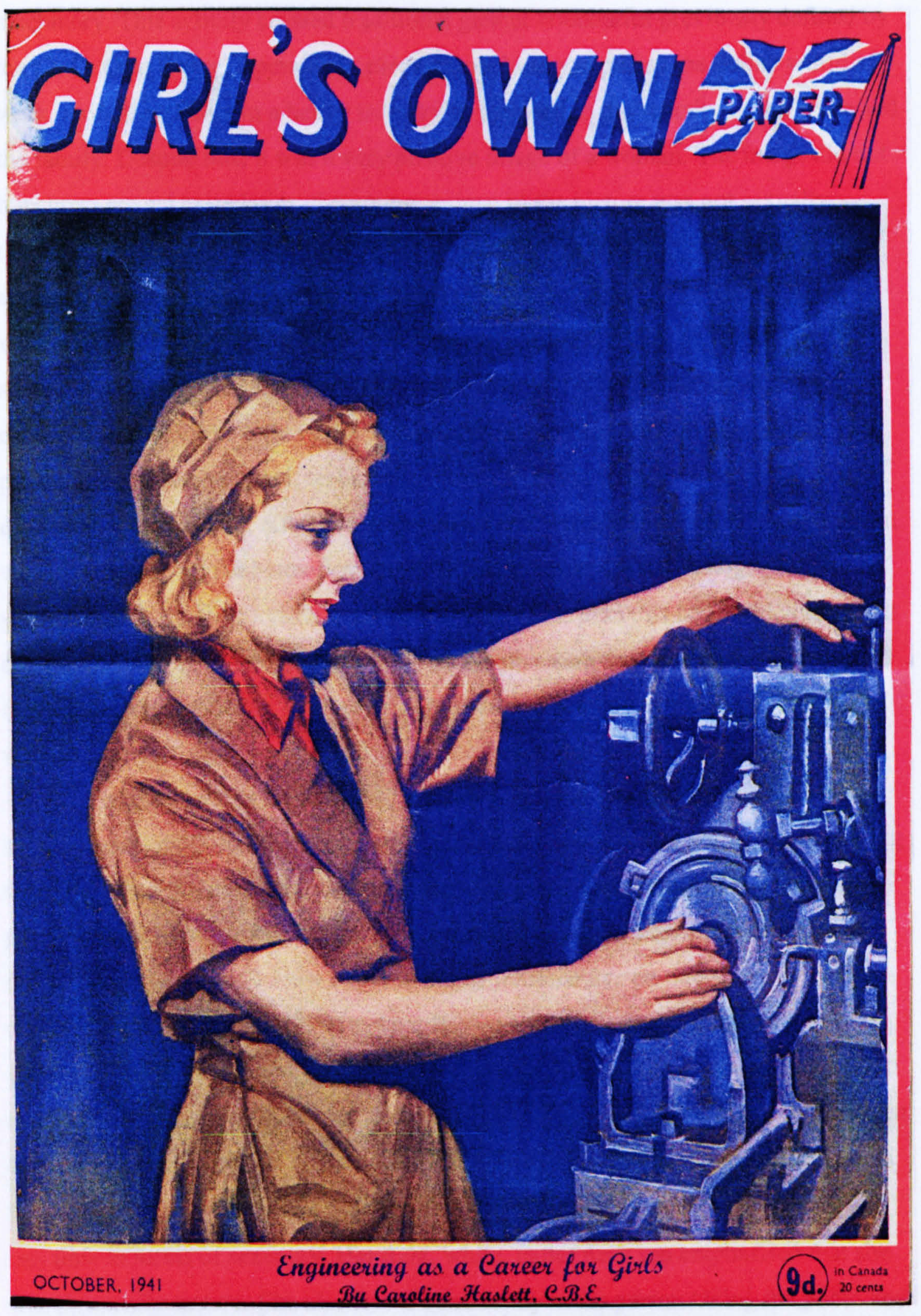

Illustration 3.8: The *Girl's Own Paper* front cover included images of women actively working and serving in traditionally male jobs during the Second World War. This image accompanies an article called 'Engineering as a Career for Girls'. *Source*: *Girl's Own Paper*, October 1941.

machinery. This activity crossed traditional gender boundaries previously defined by the *Girl's Own Paper*. Operating a piece of machinery signified the public world of work, more than likely in a heavy industry as opposed to the sanctity of the home and the family. Despite this, it was a very positive image of a woman. The image did not transgress sexual boundaries, the young woman in the picture was not sexually deviant; she was blonde, pretty and still maintained her femininity. The change in emphasis in the image was from the pure 'angel in the home' to the 'angel in the workplace'. Her overalls fitted her well and her blonde hair was on show. Her slender bare arms and hands were also visible, as they were in the late nineteenth century masthead. The light in the picture also illuminated her, still suggesting purity. The machinery, hard, technical, complicated was juxtaposed with the image of the girl's soft, gentle, effortless touch. Similarly, *Miss Modern* ran an article about women working on the home front in 1940. The caption of one photograph of a young woman working a lathe read 'Beauty and grace man this lathe which turns out components for aeroplane detectors.'[117] By emphasising the personal appearance of the women workers in the magazines a discourse of femininity was reactivated, as well as it being a morale boost and a recruitment device.

The cover of the *Girl's Own Paper* in July 1946 highlighted another shift in the discourse of femininity. No longer did the front cover depict young women doing men's jobs but instead a well-dressed older girl posed seductively at the swimming pool (see illustration 3.9). Callum Brown showed through reference to evangelical discourse how the *Girl's Own Paper* changed its discourse on pure femininity centred on domesticity in 1880 to, what Brown coins, 'muscular girlhood' in the 1930s. Brown used the image of a cheerleader to argue that the discourse changed to emphasise the 'physicality of the female body'.[118] The *Girl's Own Paper's* definition of girlhood changed again in the mid to late 1940s. The 1946 cover image showed a young woman in a sexy pose. The 'physicality of the female body' was emphasised this time in terms of sexuality. Her tight, white, halter neck top emphasised that she was physically mature. She also stared confidently at the person taking the photo and the reader. Yet she was physically positioned and placed in the image between iron railings suggesting possible limitations of her independence.

[117] *Miss Modern*, February 1940.
[118] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, p. 86.

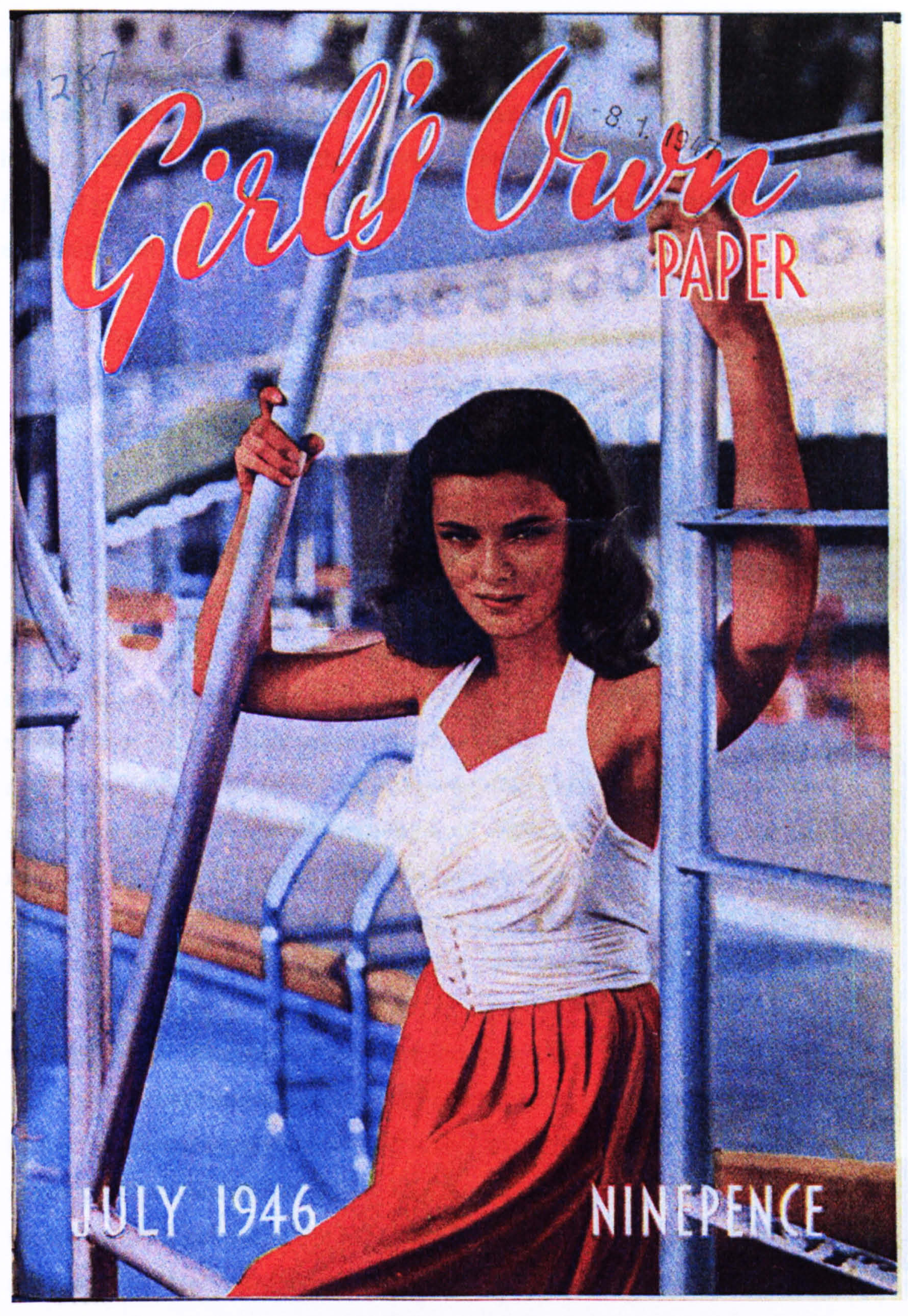

Illustration 3.9: After the Second World War some of the covers of the *Girl's Own Paper* showed photographic images of girls which emphasised their physical femininity. *Source*: *The Girl's Own Paper*, July 1946.

The *Girl's Own Paper* was anxious to portray images of girls as modern and attractive and to respond to readers' desires for fun and freedom. Yet the editors were also keen to adhere to traditional representations of femininity as passive and heterosexual with marriage as the ultimate career goal. In line with this change in focus of girlhood the editor at the time justified the shift of the paper's focus by explaining that the:

> *Girl's Own Paper* has always been an adventurous magazine, continually adapting its contents and service to meet the changing moods and needs of its readers. You may have noticed that during the past few years we have been growing older together. The reason for this is that very few girls who were readers in 1939 have dropped their subscriptions, so quite naturally GOP has changed with its readers. We have, in fact, grown up.[119]

As the above editorial suggests the paper had to change to acknowledge the changing experiences of its stable readership of girls who were growing up. The original readership of young girls of secondary school age who were still reading GOP were now leaving school and embarking on the next stage of their life. To mirror this experience the *Girl's Own Paper* joined with '*Heiress*' and marketed itself as 'The magazine for the older girl' in 1947. The changing visual depictions of women on the cover images of the *Girl's Own Paper* highlight the ambiguities surrounding femininity throughout its publication that the paper had to navigate.

'Erotic Bloods': Romantic V Working Femininities

As we have seen schoolgirl story papers and comics blurred the division between both adolescent girlhood and womanhood and, traditional and modern femininity. The middle-class papers, *Girl* and the *Girls' Own Paper*, assumed that the reader was a girl still in full-time education. In contrast romance magazines assumed their ideal reader was a single, working, young woman soon to be a young, married mother. As has been highlighted these magazines were assimilated with older publications for millgirls in the 1930s and therefore to a degree expected that

[119] *Girl's Own Paper*, October 1947.

their readership also included girls who had just entered fulltime employment after leaving school at the age of fourteen. Magazines such as *Red Letter*, *Red Star Weekly* and *Lucky Star* defined femininity and womanhood by the acquisition of a husband and family.

Fiction in 'Erotic Bloods'

Jenkinson called mother-daughter magazines such as *Red Letter*, *Red Star Weekly* and *Secrets* 'erotic bloods' in his readership study in 1940.[120] Citing *The Writers and Artists' Year Book*, Jenkinson described the content of these erotic magazines as 'stories with strong love interest containing sensational and quick action... Must be full of exciting interest and colour. Good intriguing plots and curtains absolutely necessary. Has strong, very emotional love stories making a special appeal to girls and women'.[121] David Doig, general manager of D.C. Thomson's adult magazines until 1978, said that 'erotic bloods' or 'blood and thunder papers' appealed to working-class women because 'They liked not the spicy thing in terms of sex but the spicy thing in terms of somebody murdering somebody else [...] It was more or less a romantic detective story.'[122] By the mid 1940s, 'blood and thunder' tales still existed, but the emphasis in the fiction shifted to more traditionally feminine tales.

Magazine fiction plots from 1945 onwards were often structured around the pursuit of romantic love and secure marriage. In 'Smart Girl Stella' from *Secrets*, the heroine, Stella aged twenty-four, worked in a roadside café as a waitress. She was introduced to the audience through her potential romantic interest's eyes: 'Mike glanced at her, his eyes moving over the gilded hair, the well-made-up face, the smart dress.'[123] The physical appearance and sexuality of the heroine was depicted as doll-like and passive as she was described through the male gaze. The crux of the plot was quickly revealed when Mike propositioned Stella: 'Sure, I'm only a truck driver right now, but I've got ambition. Marry me, kid, and we'll go places. I've got

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[120] 'There is no convenient feminine substitute for the term 'bloods', so this term is used, as before, to mean 'the weekly, fortnightly, or monthly magazines for boys and girls.' Jenkinson, *What do Boys and Girls Read?*, p. 211.
[121] Ibid., pp. 217-18.
[122] David Doig interviewed in 1986 by Joesph McAleer, cited in *Popular Reading and Publishing*, p. 166.
[123] 'Smart Girl Stella' in *Secrets* 7 January 1950.

the chance of a flat; we'd be real cosy.' Stella told Mike to 'Go find yourself another girl. I'm not on the market for marriage. Smart girls don't marry.' Stella continued to explain that she was the eldest of nine children and had to help her mother with the household chores 'even before I went to school!' She assuredly explained that she had 'had an eyeful of married life [...] and it's not for me!' Stella lived with her married sister who was twenty-three, had three children and was pregnant again. Stella explained 'That's not living, Mike – it's slavery.'

A period of time passed when the hero did not frequent the café. When he eventually returned he discovered that his heroine no longer worked there. The plot then followed Mike delivering a cot to a 'trim, tidy little house with the garden newly laid out. The sort of house Mike had had dreams about, dreams that involved Stella.' Stella opened the door to the house. This homely setting contrasted significantly with the heroine's place of work in a roadside café. Again the heroine's physical appearance was emphasised:

> Stella, dressed in a print frock, wearing a frilly apron!
> Hair straggled down her brow, and her face was flushed,
> as if she'd been standing over a cooker [...] Mike saw
> her bare arms were white with flour, too. Stella – baking!
> Looking so obviously a housewife, in print dress, apron,
> and a kerchief to keep her blonde hair under control![124]

The heroine had transformed into a woman. Her once 'well-made-up' face was now 'flushed'. The flesh of her arms was also on view signifying a sexual awakening. However, the heroine remained passive within the narrative as her sexuality, signified by her blonde hair, was kept 'under control'. The hero assumed that Stella had married and was expecting children. However, the twist in the plot was that Stella was keeping house for her sister. Stella explained her subsequent revelation:

> Mike, since I started looking after Liz's home – oh, it's
> taught me that I was all wrong in my ideas! Married life
> is fun – Liz and Bert are so happy, loving each other the

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[124] Ibid.

> way they do – and the kids, oh, it all adds up to
> something I didn't realise before.[125]

The plot in which the heroine experienced some revelation about her femininity was common within women's fiction in the 1930s[126] and continued to be so into the 1950s. The breaking of social rules marred a peaceful initial period; in the case of 'Smart Girl Stella' the heroine initially rejected marriage. Looking after her sister's children tested the heroine and finally the obstacles to a good resolution were overcome. The heroine experienced some transformation and revelation. The tale ended with a happy image: 'They clung together, just as if that kiss would last for always and always, the way they wanted it to last.'[127] Romantic love as opposed to independent sexual desire and intense emotion, as exemplified through the 'other' woman or the heroine who experienced a revelation, was presented as the ideal in this text and others from the genre.

Gender and Class in 'Erotic Bloods'

The relationship between class and readership was emphasised in the fiction of the 'erotic bloods', which focused on stories set in the local and domestic environment and, unlike the younger schoolgirl story papers, did not transcend reality. Fictional stories in publications such as *Lucky Star* and *Red Star Weekly* were often set in the industrial north in mills and factories: 'In the big industrial town of Ruddersford, life and work centres round Taylor's cotton mill.'[128] The front cover of *Lucky Star* in December 1936 showed an illustration from a story in which a mother warned her daughter about mixing with men from another class.[129] (See illustration 3.10).

In 'Out of My Depth', a full-length story in *Lucky Star* in 1950, the issues of gender and class and the heroine's future were explored through the heroine's

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[125] Ibid.
[126] B. Fowler, 'True to Me Always: An Analysis of Women's Magazine Fiction' in C. Pawling (ed.), *Popular Fiction and Social Change* (London 1984), p. 109.
[127] 'Smart Girl Stella' in *Secrets* 7 January 1950.
[128] *Lucky Star*, 4 September 1950. According to D.C. Thomson *Secrets* and *Red Star Weekly* were founded for mill workers in industrial towns in Scotland, Lancashire and Yorkshire, see McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing*, p. 166.
[129] *Lucky Star*, 26 December 1936.

Illustration 3.10: 'They said she'd go wrong. "Sally! I'm warning you! You'll come to no good! Men like Arnold Brindley don't marry the likes o' you! You're out of your class and you'll bring disgrace…" Great human story of a girl who wouldn't be warned.' *Source*: *Lucky Star*, December 26, 1936.

struggle with her family background.[130] The heroine of the story, Jen, became aware of the constraints placed upon her from her working-class background when she went to business college, studied shorthand and typing and met new friends: 'It was there I met Mona and Kathie, and it must have been being friendly with them and seeing their homes that made me so discontented with my own, for I hadn't thought anything of it before.' The reader was immediately made aware of the geography of the story. Lime Road, where the heroine's family lived was a working-class, dockside neighbourhood. The heroine's discontent was highlighted: 'I was ashamed of my family! Yes, of living in a shabby house that faced out on a dingy side street, ringed in by tall grey tenements [...] how had I lived so long in those sordid, overcrowded conditions? In practically a slum... for the property was scheduled for clearance.'[131] This new experience of work had an enormous effect on the heroine and her hopes and ambitions for the future. It made her more conscious of her home life and the traditional gender roles tied to her working class background. After a violent row with her father, Jen left home and moved to the suburbs, got a new job in an office and also a new boyfriend who matched her new way of life. The contrast between the working and middle class was emphasised through representations of gender throughout the story. The distinctiveness of the working class was emphasised through gendered images. Firstly the physical, masculine, hard working environment was depicted:

> There were my brothers, Alf and Edgar; they both worked in the shipyard, came home with black faces and hands, their clothes reeking of red lead [...] Alf and Eddie's pals... fellows like themselves worked in the shipyard, or dockers or truck drivers maybe. Boys who knew what it was to work hard... with their hands.[132]

The difference between 'manual' and 'mental' in class distinction constrained working-class development:

> The strengths of the working class were inseparable from what they were constitutionally unsuited for: their skills were

[130] Ibid., 21 August 1950.
[131] 'Out Of My Depth' in *Lucky Star*, 21 August 1950.
[132] Ibid.

> practical (not intellectual or rational), their nature decent and simple (not sophisticated or artificial), their proper sphere was local (not metropolitan or national).[133]

By utilising these opposites it becomes obvious how the story contrasted the strengths of the working class and the middle class: 'There were plenty of nice young men [at home], true-chaps like Don Ryan, my brother's pal - but they seemed raw, clumsy, when compared to Garry. Garry was assistant manger in a big manufacturing plant; he had background and breeding.'[134] The physical, hard working, manual culture of the working class was compared to the 'mental', rational working culture of the middle-class.

The complementary image of the feminine domestic working sphere in the home was also problematised within the story. It was this depiction that the heroine was fighting against and therefore she juxtaposed her position with what she imagined the middle class reality to be:

> Fridays Mum cleaned the house up, getting Nora and I to help. How I hated going down on my knees, scrubbing the floor, wringing out the soggy cloth. This particular Friday I had arranged to go with Kathie Peebles to the ice rink – Kathie's mother had a woman who came in to do the rough work; Kathie never had to soil her hands. That's why I flared up after tea, when Mum suggested that we begin the work [...] 'Why should I work all day at the office and come home here to scrub?' I demanded. 'This spit and polish nonsense at the weekend is crazy, anyway! Downright old fashioned, that's what it is! Other mothers don't...'[135]

After confronting her mother, Jen's father stepped in to control the situation: 'Finally he crossed to me, his face livid and lifted his arm threateningly. "Go on! Strike me!" I shrieked [...] then I felt his open hand hit my face. Again and again...' Inclusion of

[133] K. Dodd & P. Dodd, 'From the East End to *Eastenders*: Representations of the Working Class, 1890 – 1990' in D. Strinati, & S. Wagg, (eds.), *Come on Down? Popular Culture in Post-war Britain* (London 1992), p. 120.
[134] 'Out Of My Depth' in *Lucky Star*, 21 August 1950.
[135] Ibid.

physical violence was a device employed to signal the brutality of the working-class male.

The geography of Jen's new lodgings in the suburbs was significant to the story in comparing and differentiating between the classes and Jen's resolution: 'the breadth of the city was between us: Lime Road was down by the docks, and my new digs were on the outskirts.' Emphasis was placed on the shabby, grimy working class versus the modern, suburban middle class. This change in location also has an effect on the physical appearance of the heroine:

> I looked at myself in the mirror; I could hardly believe that I was the same girl! In the two or three months since I had left home I'd changed a lot. There was a new sparkle to my eyes, and my cheeks had a natural colour which had been lacking before.[136]

The stereotyped physical nature, which was significant in representing the working-class male, was utilised again to contrast the changing class position of the heroine. The literary tradition of the pastoral myth was emphasised in this story by highlighting the purity ('natural colour') of the suburbs with the constraint and contamination ('shabby, grimy') of the city.[137] The young heroine's desire for a career contrasted significantly with her mother's traditional role as a wife in the story. This juxtaposition of traditional discourse versus modern discourse was a source of much debate in the romance magazines of the time.

Marriage V Career in 'Erotic Bloods'

The choice women faced after the Second World War between marriage and a career was a central concern of the 'erotic bloods'. For example in the story 'No Wedding Ring For Me' in *Lucky Star* the heroine knew that 'her job and marriage didn't mix.' She was told 'Holt Air Lines rule – no married girl is employed as a hostess! Means any hostess who marries is dismissed automatically!' In the end the heroine resigned for 'Love – she knew that counted more than anything now.'[138] The *Red Star Weekly* ran a series of articles posing questions about gender roles. Each

[136] Ibid.
[137] See R. Williams, *The Country and The City* (London 1975).
[138] *Lucky Star*, 9 January 1950.

week the publication posed a topical question and two celebrities would debate the pros and cons, creating ambivalence in the magazine's portrayal of women's place in society.[139] In 1950 *Red Star Weekly* asked 'Should Wives have Careers?' Stephen Murray argued that

> When a girl becomes a bride she does take up a career, one that to me is the most valuable and important any girl can follow. She embarks upon a career of marriage and it needs all her effort and energy if she is going to make a consistent success of it right through the years. It is essentially the woman who really makes or mars the marriage in the essentials. For she alone can provide that atmosphere which turns a house into a home, a place of welcome, affection and comfort where a man can be truly happy and content. She must surely tend and train the children and give them the security of a loving background which they need if they are to grow up properly. [140]

In opposition to this idea of marriage as a career for women Richard Attenborough retorted that 'if a girl still feels the urge to express herself in a career [after marriage] I consider it would be selfish and unkind to try to stop her.[141] By juxtaposing the Victorian 'angel in the house' with the keen career girl, *Red Star Weekly* displayed ambiguities in its views on women and careers.

Yet, perhaps the letter pages and the subsequent advice offered gave the magazine's editorial agenda. A 'Bride to be' explained to Miss Denison, the *Red Star Weekly* agony aunt, that she was '24 and am getting married soon. Here is my problem. I want to go back to work afterwards [...]. But my young man isn't agreeable to this. He says a wife's place is at home, and he wouldn't marry me if he wasn't in a position to keep me.' In reply Miss Denison, advised that:

> There have been many cases where young wives going back to work after marriage have wrecked the happiness of the home and I strongly urge you not to yield to the temptation. Money

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[139] Topics included 'Should Men Do Housework?' and was contested between Cecil Price and Dennis Parker, *Red Star Weekly*, 18 November 1950.
[140] Ibid., 14 October 1950.
[141] Ibid.

isn't everything. If your husband can keep you and is proud and happy to do so give in to his wishes and stay at home. I know at first the days will seem long and empty after your housework is done, but before long they will get filled up with all sorts of duties and interests.[142]

Romance papers, which had a wide working-class readership, emphasised marriage as the ultimate career goal. Articles encouraging women to make a full contribution socially and economically were retracted throughout the 1950s. The editorial of *Lucky Star* in 1950 suggested

> people may laugh at housewifely pride, but there is something very satisfactory about seeing the larder shelves filled up, and knowing that the jams and pickles and the bottled fruit are all your own doing. It not only saves money to make as much as possible, but it seems to answer a deep feminine instinct – that of genuine home-making.[143]

Women during this period were faced with a double identity: on the one hand they were still anxious about their involvement in the changing social landscape, which the Second World War helped to create and on the other they wanted to retain a sense of traditional femininity.[144]

Sexuality and Femininity in Romance Papers

In contrast to schoolgirl fiction, female sexuality was a central theme of both the fiction and informative articles in 'erotic bloods'. Articles that discussed important topics such as health were common in mother-daughter and romance magazines. Dorothy Dix, *Red Letter's* agony aunt, was presented as an 'expert' on feminine problems who 'gives her advice, sincere, sympathetic, straight from the shoulder.'[145] *Lucky Star* presented 'Advice on Family Limitation' in 1950.[146] Advertisements for make-up and beauty aids were also plentiful in romance magazines. The emphasis was on how make-up and a woman's appearance secured

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[142] Ibid., 23 September 1950.
[143] *Lucky Star*, 9 January 1950.
[144] See P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, for a wider discussion of these issues, pp. 252-57.
[145] *Red Letter*, 2 January 1960.
[146] *Lucky Star*, 23 January 1950.

love and marriage: 'Few men can resist the fascination of an exciting complexion and vivid, thrilling lips. Do you know the secret of the glamour which so often wins love and fortune?'[147]

Fiction again reinforced and emphasised the importance of women's beauty and physical appearance. In one story, 'Nothing in Common', the heroine Annan, who kept house for her two brothers, found it difficult to fill her time when her brothers were enlisted into the army. Annan offered to entertain a friend of her brothers who was on leave for an afternoon, although her brother feared they 'won't have much in common as you're all for domesticity and he's a real rolling stone.'[148] Emphasis was placed in the story on the heroine's preparation for meeting her brother's friend. The reader was told of the heroine's choice of dress, her trip to the hairdresser and her decision to wear lipstick. The heroine's physical change from a domestic homely girl to a more 'worldly' woman emphasised how this would help her find her husband and ultimately end in marriage: Philip wondered if Annan 'might be ready to settle down to a quiet humdrum domestic life – with me?'[149]

Definitions of femininity and female sexuality were reproduced in women's magazines which defined what were seen to be desirable roles and relationships for women in society. Fiction often portrayed heroines' sexuality as undeveloped and the drama unfolded around the arousal and awakening of the heroines' sexuality. Female sexuality was described as passive in contrast to male heroes who were represented as sexually active and who subsequently aroused the heroine's sexuality. Active, independent female sexuality was defined as unfeminine. The discourse of the romantic heroine was ambivalent as it exemplified the female image yet simultaneously questioned the agency of feminine identity and desire.

In another complete story, 'Marriage is for Two' the heroine Eva had only been married a few months 'and already it seemed that the romance had vanished from her life. She had settled down to a humdrum existence of standing in queues and trying to cope with housework.'[150] The physical appearance of the heroine again was important: she was described as untidy, her tights laddered and her dress

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[147] *Secrets*, 25 March 1950.
[148] *The People's Friend*, 17 August 1940.
[149] Ibid.
[150] *Secrets*, 25 March 1950.

covered by her unshapely housecoat. The heroine overheard other women discussing her appearance ('She's like a lot of others – once they get married, they just stop caring about their looks') and decided to take control of the situation. The heroine's change was encapsulated in the observation that 'she had been a success as an office girl – now she was going to be a success as a housewife. Wasn't that far more important?' The heroine tidied the house, cooked a proper meal for her husband coming home from work and put a dress on. She experienced a transformation and explained, 'It's just because I let myself believe housework is boring [...] It isn't boring at all!'[151] The change in the heroine was significant as her husband (unwillingly) brought his boss home unannounced for tea. The boss was impressed by Eva's home making skills and subsequently her husband secured a promotion. Emphasis was placed on a wife maintaining her feminine appearance and housecraft abilities after marriage in the interest of her husband being happy and prosperous.[152]

The morals of the heroines in these 'erotic bloods' were always proper and correct according to D.C. Thomson editorial policy, 'Drinking and smoking were not allowed, nor was the mention of the [...] adulterous woman.'[153] Columns such as that in *Secrets* which published pictures of 'Happy Couples' insisted marriage was the ultimate ideal and goal for young women. This was emphasised by magazines encouraging recently married couples to send in their wedding photos in return for half a guinea.[154] However, concern for women's welfare and respectability did mean that taboo issues were discussed in the magazines. For example, *Secret's* agony aunt offered one reader advice on how to get a divorce in 1950.[155] Illegitimacy and the 'problem' of unmarried mothers also featured in the stories (see illustration 3.11) and the advice columns.[156] One twenty-four year old single woman 'was let down by a man' and left with a little boy. She explained in a letter to *Red Star Weekly's* agony aunt that 'There's no hope of me getting a job in this place because the people are

[151] Ibid.
[152] This narrative structure within women's magazine fiction, problem pages and advertisements was identified by Ferguson in her structural analysis as 'Self-help: Overcoming Misfortune and Achieving Perfection' and together accounted for twenty-eight per cent of her sample, Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, pp. 44-5.
[153] McAleer, p. 185.
[154] *Secrets*, 7 January 1950.
[155] Ibid., 25 March 1950.
[156] *Lucky Star*, 9 January 1950.

Illustration 3.11: 'Why was Bob Pearson's Wife Leaving Her Husband's Home?' This story dealt with the taboo issue of illegitimacy.
Source: *Lucky Star*, 9 January 1950.

very narrow minded. Even my mother won't be seen with me in the street.'[157] She had met a young man and asked Miss Denison if she should trust him and move away together. In reply, Miss Denison advised the young woman to ask if the man intended to marry her as if he did not she 'would have no proper position at all and might find yourself after a while much worse off, with no hold or claim on the man at all.' Ideally, Miss Denison suggested, try find 'a place in service away from your home town, where you could have your little boy with you.'[158] In contrast to the safe representation of married women in the home Elizabeth Wilson explained that women's sexuality in the late 1950s was still a taboo and highly stigmatised subject: 'for the young sexuality was associated with revolt and rebellion; typical in accepting the contemporary definition of the rebellious girl as a sexual rebel. For this was also the definition found within the sociology of delinquency where girls appear as criminals only in so far as they were sexual. For girls their sexuality was a crime.'[159] The emphasis in the fiction and advice of 'erotic bloods' was that that the young woman who fell pregnant illegitimately had failed as a woman and needed to be careful not to become stigmatised.

'Service' Femininities: Citizen, Wife or Mother?

Having secured love and romance the focus of the magazine market then turned from young single women to the concerns of the married mother. Publishers of *Woman*, *Woman's Own*, *Woman's Magazine* intended their publications to be read by older married mothers or at least young, working women who were soon to marry and bear children. The content of such magazines was thus aimed at the concerns of these women's prospective life cycle as mothers.

Marjorie Ferguson conducted a content analysis of *Woman*, *Woman's Own* and *Woman's Weekly* between 1949 and 1974. She focused on four main subject categories within the periodicals (namely features, the problem page, beauty and fiction) and identified interchangeable themes and sub-themes within these categories. The theme of 'getting and keeping your man' represented fifty-nine

[157] *Red Star Weekly*, 24 June 1950.
[158] Ibid.
[159] E. Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain: 1945 – 1968* (London, 1980), p.141

percent of all features, problem and fiction themes between 1949 and 1974.[160] Analysis of the roles that female characters played within the subject categories highlighted the emphasis placed on domestic roles within women's periodicals during the 1950s and 1960s. Consistent with the dominant theme of 'getting and keeping your man' was the role of 'Wife' which was represented in eighteen percent of the material, and the goal of marriage which was represented in seventeen percent of the material; eleven percent of the material featured the key role of the 'Mother'. Together these traditional female roles represented forty-six per cent of all female characterisation in these periodicals between 1949 and 1974. The subversive 'Careerist' role was reflected by only seven percent of the material.[161] Ferguson's structuralist analysis of women's magazines identifies typical codes, conventions and narrative patterns common to the genre but fails to highlight the tension within the publications between the discourse of traditional and modern femininity at the time.

Careers and Citizenship in Women's Service Magazines

According to Mary Grieve, the editor of *Woman*, throughout the period from the 1920s to the 1950s women cared little for careers or for feminism, and wanted magazines that reflected their domestic concerns:

> In holding the interest week after week of almost every second woman in the country, it was inevitable that *Woman* should concentrate on those interests which are generally held, rather than on minority interests. And sad though it is, there are fewer women strongly drawn to subjects like equal pay and racial problems than to practical skills, personal relationships and increased self-confidence.[162]

But this did not take into account contradictions in how the period was experienced. At the end of the Second World War some women actively resisted employers' pressures to relinquish their jobs to returning male veterans. More women entered the workforce in the 1950s in response to the developing clerical and service sector

[160] Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, p. 44.
[161] Ibid. p. 63.
[162] Grieves, *Millions Made My Story*, p. 196

work, distribution and light industry. There was also a high demand for teachers, nurses and midwives due to labour shortfall:

> In Britain, rates of female employment were higher in the post-war period than they had been for a century. Virtually all single women worked in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the percentage of employed married women declined immediately after the war, the figure rose again during the 1950s.[163]

Indeed the Attlee government in 1947 did initiate a campaign for the recruitment of women to the labour force and appealed 'to women who are in the position to do so to enter industry.'[164] The percentage of married women in the labour market rose from ten percent in 1931 to twenty-six in 1951.[165] However, simultaneously the government defined the need for women workers as a temporary, crisis measure. Thus, once the crisis had ended women would simply slip back into their role as mother and housewife.[166]

As a result of the growing numbers of women taking up employment *Modern Woman* appointed a new careers advisor in 1945, G. A. Rees, who acknowledged the raison d'être behind the position: 'The present acute shortage of women workers will end fairly soon. As a result, when applying for a job you will need to take greater care than before, because you will have competitors.'[167] Even after the shortage of workers had ended the advice suggested that a women's job market would be created due to the number of women competing for employment.

Simultaneously, concern about what would become of demobilised female personnel was the main focus of the *Woman's Magazine* in December 1944. It ran an article titled 'Marriage as a useful Career', in which once again anxiety was shown about women who had worked in the services during the war and their subsequent return to pre-war gender roles. The article explained that 'a bride in the service has

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[163] L. Tilly & J. W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York, 1989), p. 214.
[164] cited in J. Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945 Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years* (Oxford, 1992), p. 71.
[165] Ibid., p. 70.
[166] Penny Summerfield details four types of relationship between women and work from the First World War to the 1990s: firstly, 'the marginality of women to paid work'; secondly, 'opportunities for women in work'; thirdly, the 'dual role' which emphasised women's paid work plus their work in the home and finally, popular feminist analyses in the 1970s which challenged all three types, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, pp. 199-208.
[167] *Modern Woman*, November 1945.

quite a fair amount of free time and opportunities, if she will but take them, for studying subjects invaluable to a wife and sometime mother.'[168] In January 1945 'Careers in the Home' were being discussed by Agnes M. Miall:

> During the 5 years of war, British women have made a number of discoveries. But I doubt if any is more interesting and significant for the peace time years to come than the discovery of many Servicewomen that domestic work is very enjoyable, and that they want to keep on with it when they return to Civvy Street.[169]

According to this article the British Legion organised 'a most practical scheme for meeting the girls' [demobilised women] wishes and at the same time providing the ordinary, middle-class household with skilled domestic help'.[170] In the Legion's own words it aimed at

> providing regular work under good conditions and making a contribution towards raising the status of the domestic worker, and being a preparation for home-making and marriage.[171]

The Legion presented domestic service as an opportunity for demobbed women after the Second World War. The *Woman's Magazine* was aimed at both an upper-working-class and lower middle-class readership. Therefore an article such as this detailing 'Careers in the Home' was directed at both groups, the career minded, middle-class mother and her working-class maid: 'A wife and mother whose main talents lie in the outside world will be able to keep home smoothly running by the aid of the Home Service Corps. members'.[172] The article emphasised that both groups of women had opportunities to work. Presenting domestic service as a skilled job with a uniform, 'fair wages and good conditions of work' raised the profile of domestic service to a 'professional life'.[173]

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[168] *Woman's Magazine*, December 1944.
[169] Ibid., January 1945.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.

Another article, entitled 'Getting Ready for Civvy Street', explained the idea of 'Progressive Training' for women who were due to leave the services:

> This is citizenship, taught so as to make the family settle down as a unit – the responsibility of a householder, including finance, family and personal aspects and of a ratepayer, local and central voter... Vocational training has as its aim to improve trade knowledge or convert Service knowledge to the type in corresponding civilian jobs.[174]

The language of community and citizenship masked the contradictions of realigning women back into the private sphere of the home post 1945. Preoccupation with both working-class and middle-class girls as future wives, mothers and home makers continued after the Second World War and was intensified in the immediate post war years amidst pressure to restore pre-war gender relations. Young women had to traverse the thin line between traditional and modern womanhood. Representing women as citizens, active within the workforce and the nation was a suitable construction of appropriate femininity employed in the immediate post war reconstruction in order to satisfy both traditional and modern femininity.

The cover of *Woman's Magazine* in January 1945 highlighted the ambiguity that surrounded women, the home and work after the Second World War. A smartly dressed woman appeared to be opening the doors. She was poised on the threshold of her front room with her arms open wide. It is not clear if she is moving forward and stepping out of the world of domesticity; or whether she is welcoming women back into the home with open arms (see illustration 3.12).[175] However, by June 1945 the cover of the *Woman's Magazine* shows a cherub like baby face. The implication definitely directed towards motherhood.[176] (See illustration 3.13)

Motherhood and Marriage in Women's Service Magazines

Callum Brown identified that married women in evangelical narratives up to the 1920s were also the 'moral foil, for the endangered state of others.' The woman

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[174] Ibid., February 1945.
[175] Ibid., January 1945.
[176] Ibid., June 1945.

Illustration 3.12: The front covers of *Woman's Magazine* began to readdress women's options for after the war. However, it is unclear in this image whether she was stepping out of the home or welcoming women back to the home. *Source*: *Woman's Magazine*, January 1945.

Illustration 3.13: This cover of *Woman's Magazine* was less ambiguous and reactivated the discourse of motherhood at the end of the Second World War.
Source: *Woman's Magazine*, June 1945.

was not the central character of the narratives, her husband and children were.[177] In July 1945 the editor of *Everywoman* emphasised that 'one of the most important things a woman needs to remember is that, first of all, she must be a wife – after that, and only after that, a mother, and last of all a housewife.'[178] The emphasis on citizenship and careers for women began to slowly disappear from women's service magazines throughout the late 1940s. Stress was placed on women performing the roles of wife and mother so as not to undermine their husbands' position as head of the family and his sense of self.

The fiction in women's service magazines in the late 1940s included negative tales of women who had continued to work after marriage. In 'Cross Gaits' by Isabel Cameron in *Woman's Magazine*, Marjory married the Rev. Hugh Macgregor and gave up her job as a teacher. However, due to financial worry, Marjory began writing short stories and sold them to magazines to make some extra money. From her earnings she paid for the children's school clothes, the household bills and also all of her own necessities. However, the story detailed how Marjory's financial independence impacted on her relationship with her husband: '"It's a poor thing when a man can't meet his own commitments! I – hate – taking – your – money," he said, and something in his face and voice told Marjory they had better let the matter drop.'[179] Similarly, in a letter to a friend published in *Woman's Magazine* an 'exceptionally gifted woman' told how she 'abandoned an unusually successful professional career to devote herself to her husband and three young sons.'[180] The writer explained:

> It is very hard for this generation of young married women, who have known freedom and independence in their jobs, to settle back to the older, quieter career of wife and mother. But it is up to you and your friends to strike a blow for marriage while there is still time – by staying home, enduring the difficulties, making your husbands feel their old true responsibilities as head of the house.[181]

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[177] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, p. 83.
[178] *Everywoman*, July 1945.
[179] *Woman's Magazine*, March 1945.
[180] Ibid., April 1951.
[181] Ibid.

Articles that offered advice on the home and childcare reinforced the domestic and familial tone of women's service magazines.[182] By 1949 the *Woman's Magazine* included a section called the Marriage Guidance Bureau. The marriage councillor for the section was Dr. David R. Mace who pontificated about the merit of marriage in articles such as 'The Engagement is Announced', 'In Praise of Marriage' and 'Her Great Day'.[183] In contrast to the 'erotic bloods' whose agony aunts were presented in familial ways, such as Mrs Mann from the *Silver Star,* Dr. David Mace represented the professionalisation and medicalisation of women's issues. Another medical professional offered advice on childbirth in *Woman* in 1957.[184] Dr. Charles Hill, a paediatrician, was appointed to write articles on 'parentcraft' in the *Woman's Magazine* by 1950. Despite alluding to the joint responsibility of parenthood, the section emphasised that it was the mother who 'trains' children and 'who sets the attitude to effort and achievement.'[185]

Women's changing life-cycles were the crux of women's service magazine fiction. Tales of women who were already married and the variety of issues they had to deal with were popular. *The People's Friend* ran a serial about newlyweds called 'To Love and To Cherish'. One reader's letter in the correspondence page acknowledged that

> 'To Love and to Cherish' is very good. Most stories just tell you about the courtship of a young couple, but when they marry they live happy ever after. Now, every couple have their ups and downs in married life. As I read this story I find myself remembering little incidents which sprang from nothing the same as with these newly weds, and like this couple, have thought the making up worth the row. I eagerly anticipate each instalment and I love to discuss the story with my husband.[186]

The narrative ideal of marriage and happiness was set against the anti-ideal and taboo narrative of divorce or separation. Ferguson succinctly explained that

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182 Serial articles like 'Feeding the Family' and 'Time-table for a Day's Housework' appeared in *Woman's Magazine* June 1951, May 1949.
183 Ibid., July 1950, August 1950, October 1950.
184 'The Truth About Natural Childbirth: When Nature Takes Over' in *Woman,* 15 June 1957.
185 *Woman's Magazine,* November 1950.
186 *The People's Friend,* 6 January 1940.

'Love as a norm was a state of existence to be sought out and welcomed, just as its absence was to be avoided and feared.'[187] The fiction in women's service magazines rarely addressed divorce or infidelity except to chastise it. Although, this is not to say that readers were not experiencing such issues. The Marriage Counsellor in *Woman's Magazine* also tackled marital issues such as 'Can A Broken Marriage Be Re-made?' and 'Unwanted Wives'. He argued that despite the increase in marital infidelity and the 'modern attitude to separation and divorce' marriages could be mended and 'the stigma of failure' attached to 'rejected, discarded and unwanted wives' could be avoided if the parties involved followed his advice.[188]

The New 'Teenage' Weeklies, 1955 – 1963

Paper restrictions were lifted in 1952 and subsequently the women's periodical press became highly competitive. A wealth of new magazines geared to the new consumer-female-teen market appeared on sale in the late 1950s. Cynthia White points to a shift in the experience of femininity post 1945, highlighted by the 'emergence of teenage weeklies geared to the new demands of the teenager'.[189] Between 1955 and 1963 a distinct genre of magazines for teenage girls appeared on the market: *Marilyn* (AP, 1955-65), *Mirabelle* (IPC, 1956-77), *Valentine* (AP, 1957-74), *Romeo* (DC Thomson, 1957-74) and *Roxy* (AP, 1958-63) among others.[190] *Heiress* (incorporating *The Girls' Own Paper*) proclaimed it was 'the magazine for teen-age girls' in May 1955.

Their emphasis had shifted from career, ambition-fuelled articles to boys. This was highlighted by *Marilyn* that claimed it was 'the great all-picture love story weekly' and offered numerous picture serials that were concerned with finding love such as 'The Heart of a Teenage Girl' and 'Mmmm... A Real Man!'[191] Romance was linked and aimed directly to the teenage female consumer:

> The keynotes of VALENTINE are Romance... Youth...
> Excitement! Romance which lies at the heart of every

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[187] Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, p. 47.
[188] *Woman's Magazine*, January 1951, December 1950.
[189] White, *Women's Magazines, 1693 – 1968*, p. 126.
[190] These titles were influenced by the popularity of imported and reprinted American romance comics in the late 1940s such as *Young Romance* (1947), R. Sabin, *Adult Comics: An Introduction* (London, 1993), pp. 151-52.
[191] *Marilyn*, 11 March 1961.

> girl. Youth which makes her fresh and lovely – glad to
> be alive and glad to be loved. Excitement which comes
> from the thrill of music, dancing and song.[192]

The emergence of the notion of teenager again changed the definition of girlhood which, as Tinkler noted, varied in age across and within generations.[193] Mark Abrams also illustrated this with his research on consumption and the young in 1959. He defined the teenager as an unmarried 15 - 24 year old.[194]

The wealth of advertisements for beauty products and clothes suggests that these magazines were aimed at young wage earners with disposable incomes. The growth in the music industry was also highly represented in these magazines with articles on the latest groups and pop stars plus full colour pull out centrespreads of male idols. By 1962 these papers had a weekly output of about three million copies and they were deemed 'one of the most remarkable journalistic phenomena of the last ten years.'[195] The young female reader in the late 1950s was courted as a consumer. Articles in the *Heiress* continued to include the standard GOP material but also included more beauty and fashion articles and a problem page. Advertising was included from 1947 which emphasised the consumer potential of the readers rather than the traditional approach of instruction in earlier girls' literature.

The new range of teenage magazines available addressed young women's newly acquired spending power in line with how older women's magazines presented the new consumer durables to the housewife. The majority of the heroines in the new picture-strip romantic fiction were more interested in marriage and securing the right husband than in careers. The offers and advertisements supported this by suggesting ways of making yourself look better for your (prospective) boyfriend. The conclusion of many stories was often a proposal of marriage and an image of the couple embracing: 'I'm still one name short. I want yours on a wedding licence and I want it soon.'[196] The 'respectable' world of marriage was reactivated. *Mirabelle* was originally intended as a 'romance comic' for girls over eighteen years old. However,

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[192] *Valentine*, 19 January 1957.
[193] Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, p. 4.
[194] M. Abrams, *Teenage Consumers Spending in 1959* (London, 1961).
[195] Campbell, 'Comic Love', p. 24.
[196] *Roxy*, 5 December 1959.

its publishers were later surprised to discover that it was most popular with girls aged between thirteen and sixteen years old.[197]

Deborah Philips suggests that titles such as *Romeo*, *Roxy* and *Valentine* 'addressed their readers not as "girls" but as sexually aware young women.'[198] However, this is a highly optimistic reading. The first women's magazine that centred on women's sexuality was *Cosmopolitan* first published in 1972 (National Magazine Company, NMC). Feminist periodicals which subverted and transgressed the boundaries of traditional femininity and the women's periodical press had begun to slowly appear. In 1955 NMC launched *SHE* which cost one shilling. The founding editor explained that 'the women's magazines of the time just didn't reflect women as I knew them. Of course women have softness, but they are also funny, vulgar and tough. They are in touch with the harsh realities of life.'[199]

Young women were supposed to choose either a career and independence, or a family and domesticity. Women's and girls magazines flirted with ideals of female independence, social and financial liberation, while simultaneously stressing the fundamentals of motherhood and marriage. School story weeklies gradually went into decline as the new consumer weeklies were geared towards the teenager in a more prosperous, leisured and liberal society.[200]

Conclusion

A number of important conclusions can be drawn from this chapter. Firstly, defining what periodicals adolescent girls read between the late 1930s and early 1960s is difficult. Publications for elementary and secondary schoolgirls addressed girls of a specific class and age group but were read widely by girls of all ages both at school and working and by girls from a variety of backgrounds. The intended audience rarely matched the actual audience. From contemporary readership surveys

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[197] White, *Women's Magazines*, p. 174.
[198] Philips, 'Girls' Own Stories', p. 82.
[199] Personal interview with National Magazine Co. representative conducted by Cynthia White cited in *The Women's Periodical Press*, p. 12.
[200] *Jackie* published by D.C. Thomson (1964-1993) was the first girls' weekly for girls based on women's magazines. Comics and story papers for younger or older girls no longer exist. Instead women's magazines have started to produce versions intended for a younger female audience such as *CosmoGIRL!* and are based on a magazine format. In contrast zines (non-professional publications produced by fans such as Heather Middleton's *Honeypears*), graphic novels (long comic works such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, 1986), underground comix (self-published or small press comics such as the anthology *Wimmen's Comix*, 1970-1992) and other forms of comic (such as Japanese Manga) have a wide female readership today.

it is possible to identify a strong female readership of periodicals that were not intended to capture a young, adolescent female audience. Periodicals for boys, such as the *Magnet* and the *Scout* in the early twentieth century and later the *Eagle*, identified a strong female readership and subsequently publishers presented sister papers which addressed girls 'differing' needs. Romantic magazines intended for a young female working-class readership were read by both working and middle-class girls. Periodicals for older, married women and mothers such as the *People's Friend*, *Woman* and *Woman's Own* also gained a substantial readership amongst adolescent and younger girls.

Secondly, this chapter has also shown that definitions of girlhood and womanhood in publications for young girls' post 1945 were ambiguous. The *Girl's Own Paper* and *Girl* initially blurred the definition of girlhood adolescence by limiting its advice pages to issues which did not transgress the boundaries of acceptable femininity and by avoiding all discussion of sexuality. The careers advice offered by these publications similarly created a safe definition of middle-class, community active femininity while simultaneously, they emphasised the feminine qualities that were transferable to motherhood and marriage.

Linda K. Christian-Smith concludes that adolescent romance novels of the 1940s and 1950s were 'imbued with a confidence and certainty over the stability of gender relations that belies the actual historical context of the times.'[201] This chapter argues that periodicals for girls and women in Britain post 1945 did not reflect the same 'confidence and certainty' with regard to gender relations and gender ideals. Adolescent sexuality and femininity posed problems for secondary schoolgirl papers, which preferred not to address such issues, while questions of young women's careers and future relationships also created tension within the dominant discourse of femininity. Historian Liz Heron recalled

> that as little girls we had a stronger sense of our possibilities than the myth of the fifties allow. There was a general confidence in the air, and the wartime image of women's independence and competence at work lingered on well into the

[201] L. K. Christian-Smith, 'Romancing the Girl: Adolescent Romance Novels and the Construction of Femininity' in L. G. Roman & L. K. Christian-Smith (eds.), *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture* (London, 1988), p. 93.

> decade in the popular literature and the girl's comics of the day, even while these registered an ambivalence about what women should be doing.[202]

Representations of gender are not constructed in a vacuum. Any analysis of a literary text must take into account the fact that literature is produced and read within historical circumstances. Gendered subjectivity is discursively and historically produced, rather than being already given. Language and representation are central in constructing subject positions within femininity and masculinity. Femininities and masculinities are constructed in relation to the historical time and discourse of the period. These story papers, comics and magazines rearrange and recode certain larger social themes regarding women's romance, domesticity, sexuality and power.

[202] Heron, *Truth, Dare or Promise*, p. 6.

CHAPTER 4

Reading, Composing and Performing Masculinities

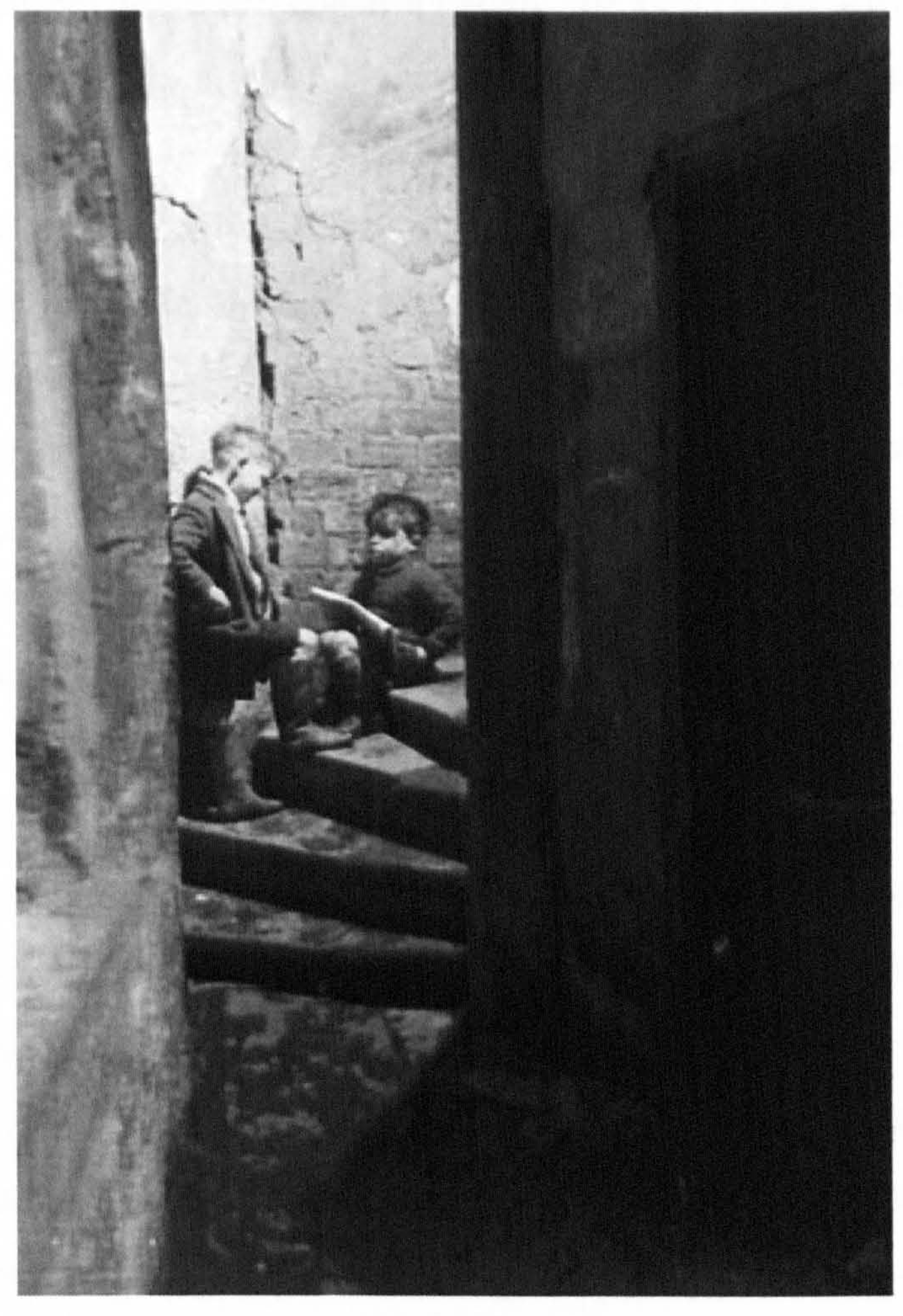

Illustration 4.1: Boys' reading a comic in a tenement close in the Gorbals, Glasgow, 1948. *Source*: www.scran.ac.uk

This chapter will focus on the memories of male narrators' reading experiences as young boys. It builds on Chapter Two which detailed changing representations of masculinity featured in boys' reading material between the mid 1940s and late 1950s. Masculine identities in boys' story papers in both the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were heavily constructed in relation to class. In boys' story papers of the mid twentieth century constructions of masculinity based on class remained but were ambiguous. Middle-class, traditional masculinities were in direct opposition to working-class, anti-heroic masculinities. This was represented between the 'hooligan' or 'spiv' versus the 'swank' or 'MUG' dichotomy terms which were used ironically to define ideal or anti-ideal versions of masculinity for young boys.

Individuals negotiate and construct signs, the same signs, differently, in relation to their own experiences and historical and cultural myth systems.[1] Therefore, there can be a level of contestation within the sign system. This chapter will use 'class', ('an obviously difficult word, both in its range of meanings and in its complexity in that particular meaning where it describes a social division'[2]), and explore the battle surrounding the meaning of class and masculinity for young readers of boys' story papers post 1945. The narrators related their status to the place that they grew up, their mother and father's occupation and the family's economic position. Some of the narrators used the languages of class within their narratives to discuss the relationship between themselves, the act of reading and the reading material.

The narratives collected have a dual role: they act as information, adding to a knowledge base of childhood reading material, while simultaneously they operate as discourse to be interpreted. Emphasis in analysis is placed as much on how people talk about childhood reading, styles of narrative, as with what they say about it, memory content. The distinctive and imaginative ways that boys acquired comics, how the material helped the male respondents negotiate their own masculine boyhood identities, and the ways in which reading comics impacted on their boyhood culture at home and in the street adds to the discussion of class and readership. The chapter also considers the gendered myth system surrounding reading in relation to

[1] V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (London, 1986), p. 23.
[2] R. Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow, 1983), p. 60.

the male narrators' experiences and explores how men composed and recomposed masculine identities for themselves as readers. Acceptance, rejection and negotiation of the masculine identities within the narrators' boyhood reading material will be the central motif of the chapter.

Place of Boys' Reading Memories and Acquiring Comics

Edward S. Casey pointed out that 'to be placeless in one's remembering is not only to be disoriented; it is to be decidedly disadvantaged with regard to what a more complete mnemonic experience might deliver. Places serve to situate one's memorial life.'[3] My first question to the narrators tended to be 'Could you just say a bit about your childhood, when and where you were born?' This was intended to allow the narrators to speak about what was important to them and could explain the prominence of place in their testimony. The narrators continued to elaborate their memories of 'place' with memories of reading.

The male narrators used the trope of 'place' to situate their reading memories and emphasised a variety of relationships with the places concerned. Firstly, a few men began their narratives by specifying the places where they grew up, often vividly describing the area and the role 'place' played in how they acquired their reading material. Secondly, some of the male narrators positioned the place they grew up as the 'other' in stark contrast to the escapism and fantasy they experienced in their reading. And finally, some of the narrators used 'place' as a site where they acted out their make-believe which was informed by reading their comics. These three 'places' provided the narrators with spatial settings in which to recall their childhood memories of reading.

Entrepreneurial tactics were developed by a number of the men interviewed to acquire story papers and comics. In the late 1940s and early 1950s publication of boys' comics was beginning to stabilise after the restrictions of the Second World War. However, despite the 'flood of cheap literature' from both British and American publishers onto the market eager to recoup sales, access to the material was restricted for some children for a variety of reasons. Social historians have debated and detailed the imaginative ways children would circumvent admission fees

[3] E. S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, 1987), pp. 183-4 cited in Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 16.

to the cinema, in the early twentieth century, by means such as substituting jam jars for money and asking to accompany an adult. Collecting jam jars and bottles and exchanging them for cash for a cinema ticket is a rich seam of childhood memory in oral history.[4] Child readers also employed such entrepreneurial tactics, to acquire comics in times of financial hardship and also to thwart parental authority.

Peter Halfpenny, born in 1919, and Ronnie Paterson, born in 1939, grew up in Govan and the East End of Glasgow respectively. Both narrators contextualised their memories of childhood reading with 'memory maps' of the houses and areas where they grew up.[5] Peter Halfpenny explained that he 'was one of seven members of a family, mother, father, two brothers, two sisters. I lived in a single end, okay? Lived in a single end.' He continued to detail that the house was often 'bug infested and flea infested and mouse infested' and the 'circumstances is that living in the conditions that we lived were never the best for people's health. Suffered flu's and coughs and aches and pains.'[6] In these opening remarks Peter placed his childhood memory initially within the domestic sphere of the family house. He was reflexive regarding his memories of place by explaining 'this type of thing was common place where I came from' which allowed him to widen the boundaries of his 'memory map' and to place his house within a context of a street and area ('this was in Albert Street in Govan, so it was') and within a historical time ('This is amongst the... well memories the facts. I was born in 1919, so that makes me eight-five in a couple of weeks').[7] The narrator familiarised the listener with the context of his narrative by defining the place and historical period and continued to weave his memories of childhood reading into his narrative.

Ronnie Paterson moved to Glasgow from Edinburgh immediately after the Second World War at the age of four, with his mother who had recently split from his father. He recalled that although his mother had suffered from bad health 'if she could work she did work. There wis nae any benefits.' Ronnie continued to describe the difficult living conditions he and his mother experienced as a single-parent family with no other form of support at the time. Ronnie also constructed a 'memory

[4] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, pp. 48-53; J. Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London, 1993), pp. 1-3.
[5] 'Memory maps' is a term used by Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 18.
[6] Peter Halfpenny, 11 May 2004, p. 1.
[7] Ibid.

map' of the area in which he lived in the East End of Glasgow. It was the subsequent impact of these living conditions which were accorded prominence in his narrative of childhood reading experiences. Ronnie's narrative was full of vividly detailed anecdotes in which he positioned himself as the central protagonist.

Setting the scene for their narratives was significant for both Peter and Ronnie. Having constructed the setting of their narrative, they detailed how they negotiated this local environment in order to acquire their reading material:

> *PH*: Right, the comics then was tuppence y'know. Well if you went a message which you done for, ah used to go for one Mrs in particular [up the close]. I usually got tuppence for that, that was part of the thingwy. So there we were delivering a half bottle of wine and the holy oil. These things were taking place, y'know just as simply as that.[8]
>
> *RP*: Things like comics, ah mean they're a great past time. And people would find them in a lucky midgy...
> *HY*: What's a midgy?
> *RP*: You dinnae know what a midgy is? A lucky midden? See, so most of the working class kids had the idea of raking midges. And you often found comics. You know thrown out with newspapers. So you would get quite a few comics like that or you would, you might, might find empty booze bottles. There was always a few people who had parties. And the different bottles you could get money for them [pauses] two pence a bottle. And you could get tae the cinema. You could maybe go errands for people and maybe get a thrupny bit. Well that was how much it would cost for a *Dandy* or a *Beano*.[9]

The freedom of choice sometimes equated with choosing a comic was taken away from the reader or 'midge raker' in this context. But the action of acquiring money

[8] Ibid., p. 4.
[9] Ronnie Paterson, 17 May 2002, p. 3.

through innovative strategies overcame the financial restrictions and widened the reader's choice. Kuhn points out that

> jam jar stories which are about resourcefulness and constraint, reveal a great deal about childhood culture, especially about how children find ways of coping with what they may experience as the overwhelming restrictions and limitations imposed by the adult world on their quest to pursue individual and collective goals.[10]

The objects of desire were the comics which were a site of escapism and simultaneously embodied a site of non adult control.

Similarly, Roland Marshall, who was born in 1935 and also grew up in Govan, recalled waiting at the foot of a close for women returning from the steamie*: 'three or four of us each took a turn when a pram came along, the pram was loaded tae the gunnels wi' washing had tae go up about five or six steps so we each took a turn of helping the woman up the stair wi' her and you got a penny for [that].'[11] Evident within these narratives is an emphasis on community: we were poor but we worked together. The men recall the networks of support that they subsequently became a part of as children within their neighbourhoods ('ah used to go for one Mrs in particular'; 'you could maybe go errands for people and maybe get a thrupny bit') which in turn would then finance their comics. The narrators had previously detailed the financial hardship and strain their families were under which allowed them to elaborate their narratives with such anecdotes.

The men's memories of reading are habitual. By the term habitual I mean they place reading within their everyday routines as a normal activity. Their narration implicated them in the action, either raking midges or going on an errand. The 'midge' and errand narratives embodied a narrative of action, in which the male narrators were the protagonists within their narratives, actively subverting the financial and social restrictions imposed on them. Both the action and the men's participation were represented as routine and collective ('most of the working class

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[10] A. Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality* (London, 1988), p. 61.
* A 'steamie' was a public washhouse. Washing stalls contained a sink where women could do their washing using hand boards.
[11] Roland Marshall, 4 May 2004, p. 9.

kids had the idea of raking midges and you often found comics'; 'three or four of us each took a turn') which discursively included the narrators within the action. Their role as consumers was also highlighted at they exercised choice and even, if limited, purchasing power.

Roland Marshall detailed another strategy in order to read more than the one comic he could afford:

> *RM*: Ah know. Because what we used tae dae was John Curry lived two doors along from me and he would get the *Beano* or the *Dandy* and ah would get the *Knockout* and we would, swapped it o'er.
>
> *HY*: Did you see the *Rover* or the *Hotspur* or anything?
>
> *RM*: Oh ah seen them but that was, well, ah was lucky tae get money for... the *Knockout*. So ah couldnae buy anything else but John Curry and that we couldnae have bought, we were lucky tae get thruppnece to get the *Knockout* sort of thing you know. So that was the whole thing about it.[12]

Boys developed borrowing networks amongst their friends, which developed their choices independently of parental supervision. Barbara Johnstone suggests that 'people in men's stories are more often nameless, and their environment is more silent' in comparison to women's narratives.[13] Roland named his friend in the above narrative. He placed John Curry, who was central to his reading habit, within the narrative both geographically, in relation to ease of accessing the material ('lived two doors down'), and financially, in similar terms as himself ('we couldnae have bought, we were lucky tae get thruppence'). Both the geographical distance and financial comparison were observations that emphasised a close relationship between the two friends; something, which has been suggested, is not usually expressed in male narratives. These narratives also located the memories in a particular historical moment. Roland's narrative set a moral tone of consumption. It stressed how the narrator learned to make do with the two comics he and his friend could afford. What

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[12] Ibid.

[13] B. Johnstone, 'Community and Contest: Midwestern Men and Women Creating their Worlds in Conversational Storytelling', in D. Tannen (ed.), *Gender and Conversational Interaction* (New York, 1993), p. 20.

was not said but was implied was a critique of children today 'who get everything for nothing.'

The freedom of choice, which was restricted in various ways for some working-class readers as detailed above, was in stark contrast to other narrators' experiences. Alex Thomson born in 1939 explained that his comics 'were bought as part of the family paper, the newsagent delivered them and they were paid for as part of the family weekly papers.'[14] Hamish Fraser, born in 1941 in Keith, Aberdeenshire explained that he had 'some pocket money or I would ask. I never had a regular pattern of pocket money. But I mean I would *ask* and I would either be told no or yes and buy a comic.'[15] Andrew Gummers, the son of a German immigrant who was a dentist, recalled that 'There was the *Wizard*, the *Beano*, the *Dandy*, the *Eagle*, I was well off I could get all these.'[16] Similarly, Richard Ingram recalled that his parents would buy comics for him:

> *RI*: I'd usually get the, I'd get the *Dandy* or the *Beano* alternately when I was younger and then ... The *Eagle* and the *Hotspur* for in my pocket, that was the two I liked and ... The *Champion* and the *Wizard*, the *Hotspur* and the *Rover* they were all popular comics so you could just swap them around. So you got access to them all really. In those days of course there was no television.[17]

For these narrators 'place' as a trope of their narratives of reading took a less salient position in their memories. These narrators did not require the environment they grew up in to facilitate how they acquired their comics. Instead these narratives emphasised the expectation and routine of story papers in the everyday lives of the readers ('the newsagent delivered them'; 'I would either be told no or yes'; 'I'd usually get the...'). In stark contrast to the readers who raked midges to find old copies of story papers, a number of narrators recalled the days of the week that each comic was published. Alex Thomson remembered:

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[14] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 2; Hugh Wynne, 2 December 2005, p. 6.
[15] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 3.
[16] Andrew Gummers, 20 April 2006, p. 22.
[17] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 6.

> *AT*: I think I got the *Rover* and the *Adventure*, because one came out on the Tuesday and one Thursday, so I read the *Adventure* on Tuesday, I got the *Wizard* on Wednesday from my friend, I got the *Rover* on Thursday and I got the *Hotspur* on the Friday. I think the *Eagle* came on Saturday to us. So I had five days of escapism.[18]

Alex's recollection of receiving a comic or story paper five days out of seven every week in the 1950s resembled the advertising campaign D.C. Thomson championed:

Monday's Mag –
'*Adventure*'
Tuesday's Treat –
'The *Wizard*'
Thursday's Thrill –
'The *Rover*'
Saturday's Select –
'The *Skipper*'[19]

Alex's 'Big 5' was not the same as D.C Thomson's 'Big 5' because he substituted Hulton Press's *Eagle* for D.C. Thomson's *Skipper*.[20] However, by recalling the names of, and possible days of the weeks he received the publications it could be suggested that this narrator identified and consumed the comics as one 'product'.[21] Kirsten Drotner suggests that 'readers of the Dundee ventures would identify with their purchases in total rather than with individual characters or series, let alone with the authors who always remained anonymous.'[22] Drotner argues that because the boys' story papers were published on different days throughout the week this instilled an element of fandom and subsequently the readers identified the comics as synonymous with each other. However, from the above testimonies it would appear that some readers were prescribed, actively chose or had to rely on the fortune of a lucky midge for their reading material subsequently restricting and limiting the potential to identify wholeheartedly with one 'product'.

[18] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 3.

[19] *Rover*, 12 March 1932.

[20] One possible explanation for this is that the *Skipper*, first published in 1930, ceased publication in 1940, a year after Alex Thomson was born.

[21] For a discussion on the production methods of the 'Big 5' which were rationalised by D.C Thomson (the layout, the identical format of one or two line drawings on each page, the likeness of characters) and subsequently meant the production of one product see Drotner, *English Children and their Magazines*, pp. 188-9.

[22] Ibid.

The background and details of how the men acquired their comics was informed by social and historical circumstances, and similarly the way the men interacted and viewed the material was informed from these same social and historical points of view. Martin Barker and Kate Brooks' study of Judge Dredd audiences found that their narrators did not talk about the film in narrative terms but instead used different 'languages', to express 'a relation to the film or to the act of going to the cinema'.[23] Analysis of the men's interviews for this project demonstrates how the men differentiated between the story papers and comics, the characters and the series of stories in terms of style, class and content. There were few detailed descriptions of the narratives and plots of stories in the men's memories of reading comics. What emerged more often were vivid visual descriptions of the material and of the characters that the narrators related to either positively or negatively. While most narrators did recall the basic premise of a particular genre and the main protagonist from a series, they focused more sharply on how they related to the comic, the character of a specific series and how they used these to negotiate experiences of growing up in the mid twentieth century.

The following discussion explores how the men composed their narratives and memories of boyhood reading. It focuses on the different representations of masculinity identified in Chapter Two. The men interviewed read a wide variety of comics throughout the period of interest. No two narrators had access to or read exactly the same sample of titles. Despite this the language used and emphasis placed on certain themes by the narrators when they talked about their childhood memories of reading was striking.

It is useful at this point to consider how audience reception research explores the relationship between the audiences and media. According to Schrøder *et al*,

> The individual who encounters the media message is seen as someone who has been socialized into possessing a number of codes, or interpretative repertoires, acquired and developed in the social and cultural contexts experienced during the lifetime of the individual. The contexts being unique, the repertoires at the disposal of an individual are ultimately unique and

[23] Barker & Brooks, *Knowing Audiences*, p. 145.

consequently the production of meaning triggered by the media text will ultimately be unique to each individual.[24]

Oral Historian Allesandro Portelli also argues that although memory is shaped by the social environment the act of remembering is individual and personal.[25] However, what was striking about the men's memories of their boyhood reading material was the shared language and symbolism they used. 'The degree of presence of "formalised materials" like proverbs, songs, formulaic language, stereotypes', suggests Portelli, 'can be a measure of the degree of presence of "collective viewpoint"'. Memory texts may create, rework, repeat or recontextualise the stories that people tell each other. The boundary between the personal 'truth' and the collective 'imagination' is blurred at this point.[26] Memory only becomes collective when it is extracted from the individual and becomes part of myth, folklore and institutions.[27]

Narratives of Traditional Heroic Representations of Masculinities

One theme that appeared throughout the men's testimonies was related to the format of the comics that they read. By 'format ' I mean comments on the production techniques, the design and the style of the comic. The *Eagle* played a central part in all of the men's memories of childhood reading.[28] The majority of the male narrators regarded the *Eagle*, as 'revolutionary' or 'new' in style and format when it was first published in 1950.[29] Although John Cooper only recalled 'seeing copies of it, [because] it wasnae a magazine that ah bought' he suggested awareness that there was something different about the *Eagle*, 'but ah remember seeing it and being very impressed with it.'[30] Richard Ingram remembered that '*The advertising* [for the *Eagle*] *was, boom*! They advertised for a few months in advance and everybody

[24] K. Schrøder, K. Drotner, S. Kline & C. Murray (eds.), *Researching Audiences* (London, 2003), p. 124.
[25] A. Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin, 1997), p. 57.
[26] A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), p. 99.
[27] Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, p. 157.
[28] Apart from two narrators. Peter Halfpenny who was too old in 1950 to have read the *Eagle*, he was born in 1919 and Roland Marshall did not mention the *Eagle* during his interview.
[29] Ken Doran, 4 March 2002, p. 6.
[30] John Cooper, 21 May 2002, p. 5.

wanted to get this comic. I still have my first edition.'[31] Hamish Fraser recalled a more surreptitious advertising campaign for the *Eagle*: 'It was a must have kind of thing. I've no recollection of an advertising campaign or anything, somehow it must have got round by word of mouth.'[32] Not all of the narrators read the *Eagle* regularly in their boyhood, yet the narrators' memory talk of the publication included a set of shared common beliefs.

Paper rationing, which was deregulated in 1951, and improved production techniques from the late 1940s onwards, allowed larger and clearer pictures to be produced. The *Eagle* as the first British-based comic strip created a new format and firmly heralded the replacement of the outmoded serialised story paper. The *Eagle* editors made use of innovative illustrating techniques and struck an initial impact by placing the comic strip of 'Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future' on the front page. The *Eagle* motif itself, a golden eagle on a brilliant red background, was also impressive and striking due to the rich and vibrant colours used. The size of the new publication, roughly the same shape as a tabloid newspaper, also differed from the previous publications which were smaller, around A5, and allowed for greater detailed imagery.

The narrators often used the *Eagle* as a gauge or a turning point to discuss, compare and contrast other, older styles of story papers. Hugh Wynne who grew up in London remembered receiving *The Children's Newspaper* for a period of time 'which was a much more boring thing, black and white as far as I remember and more or less all just text. [...] It was much more an educative and informative thing which didn't really appeal as much as the entertainment and the colour of the *Eagle*.'[33] Hamish Fraser recalled the anticipation of waiting for the new publication: 'One knew there was going to be this new comic. And... it was clearly quite different in lay out and style and glossy from what eh, you know, from the *Dandy* and the *Beano*.'[34] Alex Thomson and Ken Doran also offered an appreciation of the new design, format and content:

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[31] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 5.
[32] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 3.
[33] Hugh Wynne, 2 December 2005, p. 24.
[34] Ibid., p. 5

AT: The *Eagle* I think mainly because of its because when it came out first of all, I must have been thirteen or fourteen I think, was full of glossy pictures, that attracted me to buy it because it looked interesting brightly coloured whereas at the time, the other four that I read they were virtually picture less. They would have a picture on the front about some story inside and then it would be mainly text with maybe just one headed picture about maybe say...an eighth or a quarter of page, the rest of it was text. Whereas the *Eagle* came, came out, right on the front it was... eight pictures of Dan Dare and Digby, his sidekick and Anastasia the little space ship they had, the Mekon, the Treens and all the rest of it, it was all colourful.[35]

KD: But the *Eagle* was revolutionary of course. You know when it came out in 1950, caught me right at, you know, ten years of age. And it went on as I see for, ah mean, a number of years. I was just trying to remember how many years but. It went ah think, what was the date they said there in this particular article? [Interviewee has a commemorative article from the *Glasgow Herald* about the *Eagle*] it's significant because not only was it a total concept because from the broadsheet but I always thought, I described it as a broadsheet but they say tabloid size, but I suppose yeah it was a modern, it was a broadsheet compared to the other comics, they were much smaller. But probably it equals a tabloid in modern newspaper parlance but it was from 1950 to 1969, so it was 19 years at that. So I obviously, ah don't think I was buying it when I was 19 but for those formative years I mean the whole concept of colour, you know the whole Dan Dare business, Jeff Arnolds, Riders of the Range, you know the characters in it and then of course that, the centre spread was the breakdown of a inside of something,

[35] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, pp. 4-5.

> you know that sort of 3D view, that was fantastic, you'd never seen that in a comic before, so the quality was very high and the detail so as I say...[36]

Alex and Ken positioned themselves within the above narratives as experts on the *Eagle*. The narrators detached themselves from the narrative and commented critically on the design and production techniques of the comic. They offered detailed descriptions of the comic including size, colour, and new features ('it looked interesting brightly coloured whereas at the time, the other four that I read they were virtually picture less'; 'it was a broadsheet compared to the other comics, they were much smaller.') Ken even brought to the interview a commemorative article about the *Eagle* and questioned its accuracy within the interview from his own authoritative position as an 'old' *Eagle* reader ('I always thought, I described it as a broadsheet but they say tabloid size'). Both narrators used the pronoun and first person 'I' within their narratives which signified the subject of an action and simultaneously signified an authorial voice. Both men portrayed their choice of the *Eagle* as a self-conscious act, a rational choice and detailed the reasons which lead to this choice. The men composed identities for themselves within their narratives as consumers of and experts on the *Eagle*.

Both narrators mentioned the age they were when they first began to read the *Eagle* ('when it came out first of all, I must have been thirteen or fourteen'; 'You know when it came out in 1950, caught me right at, you know, ten years of age'). Recalling the age they read the *Eagle* from the point of view of the present signifies that during the interview the men considered what stage they were at on the passage from boyhood to manhood when they read the *Eagle*. By referencing their age the narrators imposed a chronology of their boyhood, a time frame that correlated with the transition from boyhood to manhood. As young consumers of a new product both narrators expressed the feeling of being involved in a defining moment.

The interest of the *Eagle* for the majority of the male narrators was a combination of the new comic-strip style and the 'exploded' technical drawings of machinery in the centre pages ('the centre spread was the breakdown of a inside of something, you know that sort of 3D view, that was fantastic, you'd never seen that

[36] Ken Doran, 29 January 2004, pp. 16-7.

in a comic before'). Alex Thomson also recalled being particularly impressed by the centrefold of the *Eagle*: 'Something mechanical that was the cut away drawings and futuristic... plans of the things and how they would be built and how, although they never got as far as Concorde but that sort of idea, kind of futuristic things like destroyers, things that would interest a boy, not a girl.'[37] The new printing techniques, revolutionary format and colourful artwork of the *Eagle* reflected a change from the older D.C. Thomson story papers which were still based heavily on long stories. Richard Ingram recalled that the *Eagle* 'Really opened your mind to the future! The other stories in the *Adventure* and so on never left the earth!'[38]

For all of the narrators who read the *Eagle*, the front-page serial of Dan Dare epitomised the futuristic and revolutionary element of the publication. As has been detailed in Chapter Two the basic plot of the Dan Dare series was concerned with the central protagonist and his gang combating alien foes in space and the central appeal for the narrators revolved around the hero Dan Dare. The narrators used similar language and imagery when they talked about the character of Dan Dare:

> *KD*: I think coming out of the Second World War when the Battle of Britain was so prominent and the, you know, 'so much was done for so few by so many' in Churchill's words, Dan Dare was very much the epitome of that. He was the clean cut, squared jawed uniformed hero very much when ah think about it, if they had set him in World War Two he certainly would have been a Battle of Britain fighter ace sort of character. And he was the equivalent, the Americans had a lot of these kinds of heroes Buster Crabbe and etc, so he was the sort of British equivalent of that. But very clean cut, very reliable honest, very high morality factor, integrity.[39]
>
> *HF*: Very much the kind of clean cut officer corps... and I suppose I mean fitted the image of what the true Brit was ... and I mean there was a powerful sense of kind of Britishness and

[37] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 2.
[38] Richard Ingram 15 April 2002, p. 4.
[39] Ken Doran, 4 March 2002, p. 6.

you know, the greatest country on earth at that time. It was still very much an imperial place, you know, your Empire Days rather than Commonwealth Days and things like that. So I mean, I suppose he fitted into that clean-cut image of what a true whether I thought of him as an Englishman, or a Briton I don't think mattered. I think I thought of him as British.[40]

These narrative extracts are strikingly similar. Both narrators described Dan Dare. Both used the same three motifs in their narrative: 'Clean-cut' was used twice by each narrator to describe the character of Dan Dare; the narrators talked about the hero generally in terms of a specific historical masculine discourse notably that of the Second World War fighter pilot ('Dan Dare was the epitome of that'; 'the image of what the true Brit was'); and both narrators identified Dan as 'British'. Portelli's suggestion that personal 'truth' may sometimes coincide with shared 'imagination' is relevant to boyhood memories of Dan Dare. Both narrators distanced themselves from the narrative and simply recalled the character traits of Dan, which they remembered as being characteristic of the time.

The Second World War was the central motif in the narrative imaginings of Dan Dare. While the men interviewed were only children during the Second World War, one particular national institution served as a fundamental or potential influence on the lives of all the men interviewed, National Service. Maintenance of military conscription marking men's entrance into adulthood, combined with fresh wartime memories made the negotiation of 'manhood' a difficult process in the fifties.[41] Young men were expected to undergo basic military training and military service for a period of two years under the terms of The National Service Act of 1948.[42] After training the men may have been requested to serve their military service abroad in Malaya of Kenya. Marwick suggests that National Service probably 'did help to preserve that slightly archaic quality which one finds in British life in the post-war era.'[43] Its abolition in 1960 very much fitted into the energy and libertarianism of the new age. When asked what stories in the *Champion* (AP 1922-1955) based on RAF

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[40] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 5.
[41] L. Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London, 1997), p. 18.
[42] A. Marwick, *British Society since 1945* (London, 2003), p. 72.
[43] Ibid.

themes meant to him, Richard Ingram simply replied 'We were going into the services anyway, I had no choice in the matter, you were going, the National Service.'[44] Another narrator explained that war comics were 'exciting. All young boys… it's a natural thing. When you'd come through a war, so it's fairly natural.'[45]

The *Eagle* and the *Boy's Own Paper* continued to be aimed at a middle-class audience in the 1950s. The intended readership was never the actual readership as a number of narrators from working-class backgrounds recalled reading this material and reading about different experiences compared to their own. Hamish Fraser, born in 1941 explained that 'although I came from a solidly working-class background I mean, I identified with the, the upper cuts public school person.' Hamish's father worked in the woollen mills in Keith, Aberdeenshire and his mother owned a tearoom. Hamish went to university in Aberdeen in 1959 and then continued reading for a DPhil in History at the University of Sussex from 1963 until 1966. He continued to explain that reading the *Eagle*

> *HF*: reflected pressure for upward mobility within the family presumably. It was a question of pulling your way up I mean that was very much the general message. Improve yourself. You weren't there to stick where you were – it was to advance and that's why you know that's what education was about and that's what university was about.[46]

Alex Thomson was born in 1939 and grew up in Forth, a mining village in Lanarkshire. He pursued a career as a research chemist between 1962 and 1971 before continuing his career as a secondary school teacher. His childhood memories also focused on the encouragement he received from his parents to achieve:

> *AT*: My father and his cohorts were all miners in Lanarkshire, the likes of myself, 'I'll go down the mines' 'Over my dead body' that was their attitude. So there, there was always, I would say a push, an encouragement to do better and anything that would help you to do that.[47]

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[44] Richard Ingram, 7 May 2002, p. 5.
[45] Ronnie Paterson, 17 May 2002, p. 7.
[46] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 10.
[47] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 3.

The narrators attached a sense of movement and action ('upward mobility'; 'to advance'; 'a push') to their memories of why they read the *Eagle* and the *Boy's Own Paper*. They positioned the reading material in contrast to their parents' experiences which they were encouraged to leave behind. The narrators actively used the publications as tools through which they experienced different lifestyles and ideas from those around them. One Mass-Observation correspondent, born in 1930, acknowledged that 'my childhood was a long time ago and many details of it are decidedly hazy. And for the key ages of 10 – 15 it was wartime, which had a big effect. A third factor is that we were a poor family and it is at least my recollection that we never had comics bought new.'[48] Despite this correspondent's initial hesitancy to remember he continued to describe what he felt he gained from his limited boyhood reading:

> I was a working-class boy (although moving onwards and outwards via grammar school) but I absorbed and was deeply influenced by the codes of both schoolboy and adult behaviour that I found in the comics and the books: honesty, decency, 'doing the right thing', etc. I cannot sadly claim to have lived up to them but they have always been meaningful to me. Play up, Play up and Play the game![49]

This correspondent also used a metaphor based on movement to describe his relationship to the material ('moving onwards and outwards'). For these working-class readers the initial impetus behind reading publications aimed at a middle-class audience was improvement.

Andrew Gummers explained that he used the *Eagle* and other comics such as the *Wizard*, *Dandy* and *Beano* to improve his English. He lived with his mother, a housewife, father, a dentist, his paternal grandparents and elder brother who had all left Germany in 1939 to avoid persecution as they were Jewish. Born in Glasgow, Andrew recalled the difficulty he experienced speaking German at home and English at school and the impact this had on his ability to speak and write English: 'So if I

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[48] Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex: Mass-Observation Number B2710 reply to Autumn directive 2003 part 2.
[49] Ibid.

hadn't had the comics, if I didn't have the books if I had just gone on, I wouldn't have got any Higher English at all.'[50]

Callum Brown suggests that the 1950s were about 'perfecting Victorian values and finally distributing their fruits.'[51] Some of the male narrators used the past discourse of masculinity to discuss and compose their identities as readers, in the present. The Mass-Observation correspondent's reply above acknowledged the Victorian discourse of masculinity directly by including a reference to 'Play up, Play up and Play the game!' The exhortation of 'play the game', first emphasised in Newbolt's 'Vita Lampada'[52], came to reflect the Victorian discourse of masculinity: decency, modesty and dignity, all manly ideals which were acquired on the playing field. Another Mass-Observation correspondent, born in 1933 also emphasised the Victorian discourse of masculinity in his reply to the directive on childhood reading:

> I would say that the *Champion*, published between 1922 and 1955 did not alter my upbringing but supported and was in line with, the attitudes of my parents and my schools in seeking to develop me as active, brave, enterprising, responsible and patriotic. All the characters in the *Champion* stories during my time demonstrated these qualities and it was very clear that they were not men who would tolerate 'cissies'.[53]

To another Mass-Observation correspondent 'comic heroes were models of honesty and integrity.'[54]

The *Eagle* and the *Boys' Own Paper* continued to instil in young male readers a sense of adventure based on stories that presented the British Empire as exciting in order to attract boys to imperial concerns and secondly, to avoid degeneracy of the manly character. Richard Ingram explained that tales of empire 'hit you in the face in the *Boy's Own Paper*'. He continued to explain that 'it did affect me in that sense reading these books [sic] because, adventure, because all I wanted to do was live on a

[50] Andrew Gummers, 20 April 2006, p. 22.
[51] Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 175.
[52] J.A. Mangan, 'Play Up and Play the Game: Victorian and Edwardian Public School Vocabularies of Motive', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 23, 3 (1975), p. 331.
[53] C110 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.
[54] H1543 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.

South Sea Island.'[55] Although the narrators did not talk about masculinity per se construction of a suitable masculine identity was a strong theme within the men's narratives. Discourses of Victorian manliness were widely used by the narrators to explore their memories of boys' story papers. Hamish Fraser explained how the missionary element of the articles featured in the *Eagle* and those that he later read in the *Boy's Own Paper* appealed to him:

> *HF*: A lot of this was a sense of exploration and a sense that there were all these exotic things happening in other parts of the world, ehm... now some of that was also tied in with a kind of with religious things. I mean the sense of mission, you know, Sunday schools and churches and ...that you know the kind of the British role in life was to go out and enlighten. Ah mean that was really quite powerful ...you know, my religious views were tied in with missionary views, you know, you had this... and there were a lot of missionary messages in the church and so on and as ah say I think that was the kind of ...a message that came across in various ways here, you know, that you had a mission to do good to the world... and as ah say it was also tied in with there was this exotic world eh, which was there to be discovered. I think the *Boy's Own Paper* brought that out a bit more.[56]

In contrast John Cooper described his memories of boys' story papers as 'very jingoistic and imperialistic and gung ho and they were all full of this nonsense':

> *JC*: And it was obviously, they were English publications that obviously this great thing about the Empire and stuff. An awful lot of the content of the stories reflected this *and* it was really, ah don't know if they were aimed at middle-class or upper-class kids but that was certainly the heroes in it.[57]

A sense of identification with the characters appeared within these men's memories: Hamish recalled 'I identified with the, the upper cuts public school

[55] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 9
[56] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 7.
[57] John Cooper, 15 May 2002, p. 5.

person'. The feeling of wanting 'to be' one's heroes also emerged in the men's recollections of their boyhood reading. John Cooper recalled that in stories based in public schools being a prefect was a desirable role and subsequently 'maybe there's a wee bit of you inside that kind of wanted that.' He explained that he 'probably envied, you know, the upper class characters' in some of the stories because 'they had quite an exciting life.'[58] However, he explained how he had to 'negotiate' this feeling with his own school experience:

> *JC*: A think there must have been, ah think it... it was all stuff, it was a different world to the world that ah really inhabited, you know, it was all school prefects and you know white, white hunters and stuff like that you know and ...ah think everybody thinks maybe they could have been the top prefect guy, although I never wanted to be that at ma school you know, that was a much more rough and tumble environment. Being a prefect wasnae a good idea not at all.[59]

Christine Gledhill advocates an understanding of the relationship between spectators and film text as one of 'negotiation': 'For the term 'negotiation' implies the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give-and-take.'[60] Although the reader viewed the masculine identity of the public school prefect as desirable, he was unable to match this with his own experiences of school. Therefore, meaning was produced at the point where the ideal masculine identity overlapped and was irreconcilable with the reader's own experience, ('Being a prefect wasnae a good idea not at all'). The attraction of reading story papers and comics for some male narrators was the 'self-fulfilling' element, the 'independence' the characters appeared to have from adult supervision which would have been attractive to boys who felt socially and culturally cut off. Hamish Fraser detailed the attraction of reading comics and story papers for him:

> *HF*: They did things as a group and... could make their own decisions and somehow had a ... a different kind of relationship

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[58] Ibid., p. 1.
[59] Ibid., p. 5.
[60] C. Gledhill, 'Pleasurable Negotiations' in E. D. Pribram, (ed.), *Female Spectators: Looking at Film & Television* (London, 1988), p. 64.

> with adults, than one you experienced at home, and in a way this was something that one hankered after or seemed vaguely attractive. In a sense one didn't aspire to this. You were just aware there was this quite attractive other world. I was always very happy at school.[61]

Kirsten Drotner suggests that 'the "ordinary" British schoolboy characters are immediate objects of identification and it is therefore significant that these types are the first to openly defy any ties to realism in the papers.'[62] The school story transgresses reality because the schoolboys disregard everyday sanctions and adult authority. While a school setting or a group of boys may present at first an instant site of identification for male readers of that age, the story may not have reflected the readers' own experiences of school. One narrator commented that 'Yes, yeah they [school stories] were.... interesting. I don't know how true they were or what not but they were funny in a lot of ways.'[63] Alex Thomson came from a mining family. When asked if he found public school stories accessible he explained:

> *AT*: I don't think public school at the time made an impact on people like myself because it was really out of our league, there was no way my parents could [have] afforded this even if they had wanted it.[64]

If a narrator enjoyed the D.C. Thomson publications they often did not enjoy the *Eagle* or the *Boy's Own Paper* as much, and vice versa. Hamish Fraser recalled *'occasionally'* looking at the *Rover* and the *Hotspur* 'but I never bought either of these' because they were 'off putting I suppose, the kind of style of them. Eh... they, I think there was a lot of written text in them as opposed to the comic side.'[65] Richard Ingram remembered occasionally reading the *Boy's Own Paper*:

> *RI*: 'but it was expensive for a start and eh... you would read it but it wasn't that exciting you know? Airy fairy... you felt the stories were that real you couldn't get into the stories that much

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[61] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 9.
[62] Drotner, *English Children*, p. 222.
[63] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 8.
[64] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 8.
[65] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 4.

where as you felt you could get into the D.C. Thomson stories and involve yourself in it, you know?'[66]

The narrator juxtaposed the 'real' 'airy fairy' element of the *Boys' Own Paper* with the 'exciting' D.C. Thomson stories. He used the metaphor of accessing or 'immersing' one's self in the stories to emphasis the attraction of the D.C. Thomson publications. Simultaneously, the narrator also contrasted the two competing types of masculinity he believed were exemplified by the publications: the 'airy-fairy', middle-class type, with the 'exciting', daring working-class type.

Narratives of Anti-Heroic, Subversive Masculinities

This section will explore how male respondents used, rejected and negotiated representations of working-class masculinities in story papers whilst growing up. In contrast to the public school team sports ethics that had been the essence of much nineteenth and early twentieth century boyhood reading material, the main heroes of the D.C. Thomson comics post 1945 tended to be individuals who were often working-class antiheroes. In a BBC 4 radio programme dedicated to Alf Tupper the 'Tough of the Track', Ron Hill the marathon runner born in 1939, recalled that:

> I was a *Rover* fan. I began running at school in 1951. I joined a club in 1953. Alf Tupper was my inspiration. Probably I identified with Alf because at that time we lived in a two up two down stone terraced house which was a few yards from the railway and the toilet was in the backyard so it was very sort of, frugal living conditions, and you know. So I identified with Alf because he also lived in worse conditions because he lived on disused canal barges and under railway arches.[67]

Richard Ingram recalled that the character of Alf Tupper from the *Rover* 'was a man who was realistic. He had no funny gadgets or friends to sort of help him, a down to earth guy, doing his bit.' And consequently Richard felt that 'You could believe in that, you know kind of, making out like a hero you know? Some one to look up to, you know, because he was doing something that everybody wanted to try and do,

[66] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 4.
[67] 'The Tough of the Track', BBC Radio 4, 30 July 2005 http://toughofthetrack.net/remembered.htm

you know?'[68] Another narrator centred all of his reading memories on the character of Alf Tupper:

> *RP*: The Tough of the Track! He was on a diet of fish and chips. Which at your very best would be your staple diet. Right? If you could afford it. It was a supper. A fish supper. And he lived in run doon place. But he kept himself tidy. And he was the underdog all the time. And despite all these difficulties and people looking down their nose at him, he still came out... all the other guys with the fancy gear and the running shoes... and he sometimes had to run in his bare feet. He over came the difficulties, you see?[69]

After explaining that 'these comics were always quite uplifting' the narrator was reflexive about his own childhood experiences within his narrative and asked himself 'Do comics influence you?' He replied:

> *RP*: So. Yes. It's impressive. Later on eh, you got a bit of comfort, Ah got a bit of comfort from a lot of D.C. Thomson comics and it was because of the type of people that eh, the type of people who you could identify with. Alf Tupper. You see Alf?[70]

Investigating female audiences of Hollywood productions from the 1940s and 1950s, Jackie Stacey acknowledged that identification with the stars was a central discourse generated by the respondents.[71] Stacey noted that the spectator knows she is not the star, yet for the duration of the film there is a 'temporary fluidity' between the viewer's identity and the identity of the Hollywood star which is often triggered by a sense of similarity such as hair colour. Following on from Stacey's definition, identification for the male reader is the relationship between the character and the reader and the processes of the formation of masculine identities through the fiction.

In the above extract the narrator placed himself within the narrative. By explaining 'You got a bit of comfort, Ah got a bit of comfort' the narrator

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[68] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 4.
[69] Ronnie Paterson, 17 May 2002, p. 3.
[70] Ibid., p. 2.
[71] Stacey, *Star Gazing*, pp. 28-30.

emphasised the affective reaction he experienced from reading the 'Tough of the Track' series. The narrator succinctly provided a rounded explanation of why he felt comforted by the Alf Tupper stories. He felt 'you could identify' with the character of Alf as he was an example of working-class masculinity for young working-class boys to look up to. He concluded by contextualising the 'Tough of the Track' narrative in relation to his own experience of growing up and again emphasised the affective element of reading them: 'That was very comforting for a kid who came from an extremely poor diet, sometimes eating bread that had turned blue mouldy. In ma childhood ah spent seven months in hospital through malnutrition. It was a really, really rough sort of existence.'[72] Identification with the character of Alf Tupper was possible for this narrator due to the living conditions and experiences he felt he shared with him. The narrator pointed out that 'in that environment, a comic takes on an escape just like a film takes on an escape.'[73] The independence and nonconformity of the anti-hero characters such as Alf Tupper in the stories were constantly at odds with the official discourse of middle-class respectability and ideal middle-class masculinity which were exemplified in other publications such as the *Eagle* and *Boy's Own Paper*.

In contrast to the down to earth, manly qualities that were featured in the majority of D.C. Thomson papers, the supermen qualities of other characters were also an obvious attraction. Peter Halfpenny explained that

> *PH*: The likes of the characters in these they helped in their own way of lifting the gloom and the likes of, we had in the *Rover* we had Morgyn the Mighty. He undone all the bad terrible things that was done through his strength, he was in the, he was in the circus. He worked in weights and he made certain nae laddies got out of order. There was the Black Sapper, he had a machine that was an earthly submarine, he bored his way through there, came up through floors to catch the baddies.[74]

The Black Sapper had been a staple character in the *Rover* during the interwar period. As has already been discussed at that time his character essentially worked

[72] Ronnie Paterson, 17 May 2002, p. 3.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Peter Halfpenny, 11 May 2004, p. 6

outside the law and for the good of himself. John Robertson who wrote for D.C. Thomson between 1954 and 1985 recalled being asked by the editor of the boys' story papers at the time, Willie Blain, to alter the basic premise of the Black Sapper story line in the mid 1950s:

> *JR*: The Black Sapper in the thirties, the Black Sapper was an evil villainous undersized crook with this mysterious machine but when eventually they allowed me to write they wanted the Black Sapper to be a good guy and I wrote it but I never approved of it but the Black Sapper had suddenly become somebody good.[75]

John explained that in response to the *Eagle's* religious back page Willie Blain 'wanted a story about a nice Christian gentleman.'[76] Despite numerous D.C. Thomson characters subverting the middle-class masculine ideal John also explained that the D.C. Thomson publishers had a 'very strict moral code'[77] with regard to the boys' story papers they published. The characters who were perhaps anti-heroes in the sense that they were not middle-class characters still offered an exemplary masculinity. It is possible to glean from the men's oral testimony how the changed character of the Black Sapper was more in keeping with other characters of the period.

The men talked from a collective point of view in relation to the discourse surrounding boys' reading material in the 1950s. Stock phrases such as 'good triumphing over evil' and 'over coming adversity' appeared throughout the men's narratives. The phrase 'good triumphs over evil' and variations such as 'the good always triumph' and 'the good ride away into the sunset' were mentioned directly fifteen times in the men's narratives as well being referenced through plots of stories.[78] The character of Wilson the super athlete, who first appeared in the *Wizard* in 1943, was recalled by name by four of the narrators. For Ken Doran, Wilson was 'the dedicated loner who could perform superhuman feats.' Richard Ingram recalled that Wilson had 'been to some Shangri-La place and got this faith or whatever. And

[75] John Robertson, 18 March 2005, p. 11.
[76] John Robertson, 29 July 2003, p. 6.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Alex Thomson, p. 5, pp. 7-8; Ronnie Paterson, p. 4, p. 11; Hamish Fraser, p. 6; Ken Doran, 4 March 2004, p. 12; Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 8 and 7 May 2002, p.12; Roland Marshall, p. 15.

he was super-super human' while Alex Thomson remembered that Wilson was 'kind of science fiction.'[79] Richard recalled that he was aware as a young boy that the super man qualities that the character Wilson had were difficult to believe in but at the same time he felt he identified with the character:

> *RI*: Now I was an only child so I tended to identify with him [Wilson] and I liked running and things he did and surprising people. If he did running up a hill, I did running up a hill. So yes I'd say that he was my hero in that sense. So I did identify with him whether that was a good thing I don't know.[80]

The narrators recalled the character of Wilson in similar terms. He was remembered for his superhuman strength, for being independent and having an air of mystery surrounding his background. The narrators' memory talk about Wilson was indicative of their memory talk about the comics in general. The men used stock phrases and information to discuss and recall their childhood reading. This is reminiscent of Allessandro Portelli's idea of a collective view point.

'Escapism' and 'fantasy' experienced through reading comics began to surface in the men's talk. The men's narratives of escapism focused on what they were leaving behind as opposed to detailed descriptions of the fantasyland they were escaping to. Ken Doran highlighted that 'you read them because it was enjoyment and a bit of escapism':

> *KD*: You read these things because it took you out your normal environment which was living three floors up in a tenement building y'know and maybe struggling to get food that week, during rationing and some people experienced bombs dropping on the city, so you were increasingly looking, you looked for things like that.[81]

A Mass-Observation correspondent born in 1926 and brought up in London also highlighted that 'It was all imaginary escapism/escapades that released me from the dockside sprawl that was the industrial toil and tired faces.'[82] The historical

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[79] Ken Doran, 4 March 2004, p. 8; Richard Ingram 15 April 2002, p. 9; Alex Thomson 9 August 2002, p. 7.
[80] Richard Ingram, 7 May 2002, p. 17.
[81] Ken Doran, 4 March 2004, p. 14.
[82] R450, born 1926, Autumn directive 2003, p. 2.

specificity and emphasis on place within these narratives of escapism was very clear. The experience of rationing denoted the restrictions and experience of the Second World War, the 'dockside sprawl' and 'industrial toil' emphasised a period when manual and heavy industries were a significant source of employment for the working class. Escapism for the readers above was in leaving behind 'your normal environment' to temporarily imagine life somewhere else, doing something different.

Comics also offered the opportunity to escape parental control and authority. John Robertson's father was a Brethren minister in the local parish and did not approve of him reading comics such as the *Hotspur* and the *Rover* ('For the old man these papers were rubbish, they weren't fit to read.') Due to his father's insistence, John was heavily involved in his father's church activities throughout the week. He explained, 'of course you have to bear in mind that I was being brought up in that particularly narrow religious background and the comics were a considerable relief from that':

> *JR*: Essentially I suppose I read the comics for, I think the technical word would be escapism but I read them all from cover to cover and fast as lightening and go to the wall that I told you about at school and swap them over for something else.[83]

Swapping comics included the individual reader in a community of readers which validated both the genre and the experiences, as opposed to the restrictions and condemnation encountered at home and at school. Escapism for this reader was through being involved in an activity that thwarted the restrictions of parental control and the feeling of belonging to a group.

The boundaries of a young boys' social world, which were severely limited financially and geographically, were widened by the stories in the comics that they read. As one correspondent, born in 1927, put it 'the *Adventure* wrote stories of explorers such as Livingstone and Scott, all very absorbing to the young mind who had travelled only as far as his bicycle could travel in a day, between breakfast and tea.'[84]

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[83] John Robertson, 18 March 2005, p. 5.
[84] L1504, born 1927, Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.

> *AT*: These kind of things gave us an outlook to say well, you could be a pilot, you could be a sea captain, you could be an officer in the army, you could be this that or the next thing. It gave us an insight if you like, it gave us a view out with our limited view… if you lived in Forth or even West Calder at that time, they were isolated communities, there wasn't a lot of toing and froing, if you follow me and this gave us a window on the world.[85]

These responses evoked an engagement with the texts, notably in the experiences that the readers could bring to their reading (living conditions, societal events, and school experiences) and leave behind. The men contrasted their own experiences with those depicted in their reading material: '(it was a different world to the world ah really inhabited'); they highlighted the sense of leaving behind their own experiences ('because it took you out your normal environment'); and emphasised the opportunities they could identify from their reading ('This gave us a window on the world').

Performing Masculine Identities

The 'reader' is often portrayed as an individual consumer, who is socially exclusive in contrast to a group participant.[86] Connotations associated with the activity of reading could have been masculine weakness as opposed to masculine strength associated with action. Two readership surveys conducted prior to the Second World War considered boys' leisure practices and concluded that reading often competed with sport, fretwork and carpentry as their leisure activity of choice.[87] However, other surveys conducted during the period suggested that boys were actively engaged in reading. Hulton's Child Readership Survey in 1950 noted that sixty percent of eight to fifteen year old boys read *Eagle* while twenty-nine

[85] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 9.

[86] This assessment of reading as an individual activity is currently under reconsideration by a number of historians, for example Rosalind Crone considers the activity of performing and reading the texts out loud to a group in 'Cries of murder and sounds of bloodshed: The practice of reading cheap fiction in working-class communities in early Victorian London', paper presented at Social History Society Conference, Reading 2006.

[87] D. Caradog Jones (ed.), *The Social Survey of Merseyside* (London, 1934), pp. 219-20; J. H. Engledow & W. C. Farr, *The Reading and Other Interests of School Children in St. Pancras* (London, 1933), pp. 12-13.

percent of boys read *Adventure*, and twenty-eight percent read *Rover* and *Wizard*.[88] Jenkinson's 1940 survey of schoolboy reading habits concluded that the leisure pursuit was popular among all age groups of boys.[89] It is possible to trace this tension between masculinity and leisure practices of reading in recent autobiographies of childhood in the 1930s. Vernon Scannell recalled his father exclaiming, 'Head always stuck in a book, just like a girl. No wonder you've got spots! Put that book down and get outside. Go and chop some trees down!'[90] One Glaswegian recalled in his autobiography that his

> Father was well read in politics and in the nineteenth-century novelists, Dickens and Trollope being his favourites. But his reading nourished the sour scepticism that deeply possessed him. One day, when I was about fifteen, he said to me sharply, a shade enviously I afterwards thought, 'Why d'you waste your time with all this reading? It won't get you anywhere! 'I don't know,' I answered. 'I can't help it.'[91]

In these excerpts the fathers chastise their sons for a leisure pursuit that they identify as feminine and/or frivolous. The rise and variety of women's magazines as a site of feminine consumption contributed to unease around men reading magazines.[92]

One way that the male narrators resolved this tension between feminine connotations of a leisure pursuit they enjoyed was to explain how reading fuelled the games they played with their friends. The male narrators placed emphasis on how they used the stories and characters imaginatively in their make believe and play.[93] The men recalled how they customised props for their play by 'making do'. Tales of past boyhood play and examples of this in the present mode of narration were used

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[88] *Hulton's Child Readership Survey* (London, 1950) Table 2.
[89] Jenkinson, *What do Boys and Girls Read?*, p. 64.
[90] V. Scannell, *The Tiger and The Rose* (London, 1971), p. 81.
[91] R. Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals* (London, 1986), p. 33.
[92] In contrast to this historical concern about male readership, contemporary comics and graphic novels are regarded as a male preserve both in terms of publication and readership, despite Trina Robbins' work which focuses on female writers and characters, and a wealth of fanzines published for and by women. Female readership of contemporary 'male' genres is under acknowledged. See Mel Gibson, '"You Can't Read Them, They're for Boys!" British Girls, American Superhero Comics and Identity', *International Journal of Comic Art*, 5, 1 (2003), pp. 305-324.
[93] Annette Kuhn found that boys growing up in the 1930s drew on characters and narratives from films for the basis of their boyhood play. As they grew older the boys would mimic Hollywood stars such as James Cagney and Fred Astaire, *An Everyday Magic*, pp. 104-109.

by two narrators to describe the kinetic energy of boyhood play and the spaces where the boys read and performed their own take of the stories were also significant. These three themes weave together narratives of active boyhood reading and play.

The three distinct ways of 'making do', and acting out the stories involved improvising with objects they found, specially made costumes and commercially produced props that came free with the comic.[94] John Cooper remembered improvising props for his boyhood play from items he found: 'All the heroes [had] these bits and pieces about, so ah got it all the 'gither, a box of matches which was also wrapped in something so it didnae get wet because it would be no use if they got wet, you know [laughs]' and he created a survival kit:

> *JC*: And ah carried it about as much as ah could, but it was impractical because it was too big for ma pockets you know, so you only took it occasionally and on these occasions nothing drastic happened you know but they had a load of rubbish in it you know like a fishing hook and a length of twine and a couple of needles you know and how to make a needle into a thingwy, a compass.[95]

Hamish Fraser also recalled using impromptu props from around the house when he and a friend based a play on a cartoon strip from the *Eagle*:

> *HF*: I also remember Harris Tweed. I can remember with a friend one summer putting on a play which was Harris Tweed the detective, the coat and cushions and things inside. How old I was then I don't know but we entertained our audience of four with this thing.[96]

In contrast to the use of readily available domestic items Ken Doran recalled his father carefully making his make believe costume and props:

> *KD*: Ma father was very good with his hands so when ah was interested, ah've always been interested in cowboy things. One of ma chums Jo Quinn, who happened to be ma best man, he

[94] The use of household props in boyhood play was also common for Annette Kuhn's male narrators when playing out cinematic roles, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 101.
[95] John Cooper, 21 May 2002, p. 2. The use of household props in boyhood play was also common for Annette Kuhn's male narrators when playing out cinematic roles, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 101.
[96] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 7.

has very vivid memories of ma father, quite unusually in the late forties it must have been, making cowboy outfits for me.[97]

Ken was and still is a keen cowboy fan and when he was growing up he enjoyed both going to the cinema to watch a western and reading comics such as the *Eagle*, which included the western cartoon strip, 'Jeff Arnold Rider of the Range'. The attraction of reading this was

> *KD*: the essential thing of the cowboy, the lone hero on horseback, free to travel, you know involved in adventures, the good guy, you know rides away into the sunset you know, even with the love of a good woman he can leave her behind if it meant, you know that justice demands that you stay the lone figure, the lone ranger, you know.[98]

Ken continued to explain in correspondence with the author that his father was a cabinetmaker to trade

> and had the skills to make the pistols from wood which were then painted black, leather holsters and belt were made from the leather of the aprons that electric welders used, as at that time my dad was working as a welder in Howdens. The wristbands and the chaperos (leather over trousers) came from the same source and they were decorated with metal discs down the legs made from tin, as was the sheriffs star to pin on the cutdown waistcote [sic] with fringes stitched on. The hat was a felt trilby like a Stetson with a hat band made of leather. Most of the material was scrap from the Howdens workshop.[99]

Ken noted that he 'felt special and proud because nobody else had anything as authentic as my cowboy outfit, other kids had to make do with cardboard/wooden imitations.'[100] By making a specific make believe outfit for his son, Ken's father encouraged his son to identify with a specific masculine ideal. Judith Butler suggests that gender is not something we have, nor is it something we are, rather, it is

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[97] Ken Doran, 29 January 2004, p. 6.
[98] Ken Doran, 4 March 2004, p. 12.
[99] Correspondence with author from Ken Doran, 8 June 2005.
[100] Ibid.

something we, to varying degrees, perform. Butler contends that gender is a fantasy enacted by 'corporeal styles that constitute bodily significations.'[101] Gender is a performance. A set of manipulated codes, costumes and acts signify gender. The representational form of play clothes and toys made these identifications of masculinity for the narrators more 'realistic'.

Some male narrators identified the props that were given away 'free' with the comics that they bought as important to their identity as a reader of that comic. As has been discussed in Chapter Two the *Eagle* was one of the first children's periodicals to introduce a club for its readers. The first edition of the *Eagle* detailed that 'those who join the club within the next four weeks get a free badge.'[102] Ultimately, all readers who joined the club were awarded a badge. Hamish Fraser and Ken Doran recalled their badges:

> *HF*: And I had the badge! I had the badge *and I had stars*! You got stars!
> *HY*: Why did you have stars?
> *HF*: I don't know why you had stars! But you could add stars to the badge!
> [HY & HF laughter] [...]
> *HY*: Were you proud of your badge?
> *HF*: Clearly sported it. Eh... I remember it being clearly there and obviously hooked the star on.[103]

> *KD*: But it [the *Eagle*] was unique in the sense it went far beyond the normal comic. If you stayed with them they, they celebrated your birthday every year with you. So they sent you a pen or something to recognise your birthday. But if you were, you got an *Eagle* badge, you joined the *Eagle* club of course can't remember how much that was. So you had an *Eagle* badge and then for each year you got a bar almost like a military decoration. So I was five star Eagler, you'd five bars and people

[101] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1999), pp. 171-90.
[102] *Eagle*, 14 April, 1950
[103] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 5.

> would say 'Oh you're five...' so you'd been in at the start and
> you'd maintained it and that was a real lift.[104]

These extracts exude the euphoric feeling of belonging to a specific community of *Eagle* readers. Wearing the badge and accumulative stars which showed the readers' commitment to the publication exemplified and justified this (*'and I had stars*! You got stars!'; 'people would say "Oh you're five..." so you'd been in at the start and you'd maintained it and that was a real lift'). The badge was a physical symbol of belonging to the *Eagle* community. The badge, and ultimately what it stood for, could be upgraded. If a reader had performed some extraordinary feat their 'teacher or Club leader' could nominate them for a MUG badge. Details of readers and their accomplishments for which they were awarded the higher MUG's badge were included on the *Eagle* club page. One young male reader was awarded a MUG's badge because

> He has a quite outstanding record at Northmead County Secondary School, Guildford. He does not go for the showy, easy things but looks around to see where there is useful work going on and then joins in to help do it. He plays an energetic part in the work, play and dramatics of his school. He is Senior Prefect. He is also a keen Sea Cadet, and a member of his Parish Church Choir.[105]

A letter 'From the Editor to You -' was included alongside letters from readers. Foucault suggests that whether the letters reprinted in the guise of readers' comments were genuine or fabricated is largely irrelevant.[106] This couplet of editorial-reader letters evoked a sense of editorial presence and simultaneously, reader involvement in the publication. The apparent dialogue with readers through the letters page and the *Eagle* club was an important element of the *Eagle's* attempts to consolidate an audience.[107] Similarly, the *Hotspur* had an editorial page title 'Sez Me!' with a

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[104] Ken Doran, 29 January 2004, p. 17.

[105] *Eagle*, 11 August, 1950.

[106] M. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York, 1977), pp. 113-38.

[107] See K. Jackson, *George Newnes and the New Journalism in Britain 1880 – 1910: Culture and Profit* (Aldershot, 2001), for a discussion of how *Tit-Bits*, a periodical launched in 1881 to bridge the divide between mid-Victorian family papers aimed at children and women and sporting papers, included references to readers as 'friends' as a familiar editorial tone.

picture of a young friendly man in shirtsleeves smiling in his office chair.[108] This image contrasted significantly with the sterner image of the *Boy's Own Paper* editor telling boys to 'always play the game' and to take a cold bath every morning. James Slavin felt that 'the *Boy's Own Paper,* it was people writing down to children, this is what you should know.'[109] It has been suggested that the Thomson editors had a friendlier and more open 'approach to boys and treated them as equals and personal friends.'[110] Reader engagement with the *Eagle* through such devices as letters and the club created a sense of agency and a loyal community of readers.

An inclusive atmosphere of a reader's community, by its very nature, required a degree of exclusion. As has been detailed in Chapter Two the *Eagle* club aimed to exclude 'Spivs' from its community. Hamish Fraser or Ken Doran did not mention becoming a MUG in their narratives. This could simply be because they have forgotten about the distinction the *Eagle* made of being a MUG. It suggests that they were never put forward to receive the accolade. Another possibility is that they have composed a narrative which acknowledged their identity as an *Eagle* reader but one which did not admit to being a MUG, commonly used to describe someone who is gullible. James Slavin recalled that none of his friends wanted to be a MUG ('in our eyes once a mug always a mug'). Yet, he also explained that 'you didn't want to be a Spiv because that was morally objectionable, being a Spiv. A MUG was the guy who dealt with the Spiv if you like.'[111]

Hugh Wynne recalled going on his first youth hostelling and cycling trip with the *Eagle* in North Wales in 1959.[112] Hugh was born in Cambridge in 1944. His father was a dentist and his mother a librarian. According to Morris and Hullwood, the *Eagle* holiday scheme 'aimed to provide cheap holidays for children who wouldn't normally get one.'[113] The *Eagle* paid half the cost for the first club holiday abroad to Sestrière in the Italian Alps.[114] Trips to Paris, Brussels, Yugoslavia,

[108] R. D. Low joined D.C. Thomson's in 1921. As the managing editor and head of boys' story papers he was responsible for launching the 'Big Five'. Willy Blain was the sub-editor of the *Hotspur.*
[109] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 4.
[110] Lofts & Adley, *The Men Behind Boys' Fiction*, p. 14
[111] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 7.
[112] Hugh Wynne, 2 December 2005, p. 26.
[113] Morris & Hullwood, *Living With Eagles*, p. 177.
[114] Ibid. For nineteen guineas per child, six parties of 30 readers spent nine days skiing, skating and tobogganing in Italy. The *Eagle* staff looked after the children. This organised activity holiday was

Germany and Holland were regular features as prizes and special offers for *Eagle* readers and club members. Hugh recalled that 'a badge' identified him and the other children on the trip as *Eagle* readers and club members.[115] The badge provided proof of the readers' licence for participation and included him (or her) as a legitimate member of the community with full access to all the privileges offered. A holiday as a group, performing tasks and working together was the ultimate accolade and test of belonging to a community of readers. It also legitimized the activity of reading by putting into practice the social skills they had learned through the moral instruction of the comic.

Performing 'cowboys and indians' in childhood play was also a prominent memory for other narrators: 'Well boys are always playing at war games type things, either cowboys and indians or wee war things you know running around shooting each other you know. But you're only dead for a couple of minutes that was the good thing.'[116] The narrators evoked the energy and kinetics of boyhood games based on reading within the interviews. Peter Halfpenny recalled imagining riding a horse while playing at 'cowboy and indians':

> *PH*: We tried to imitate them our self you know. Likes of, take ma next door neighbour a fella the same age as myself, a month between us you know and of course he would go to the course and Tonto was a great cowboy, he wasnae a cowboy that was the horse you know, Tonto. So Tom there, show you how they influenced them. He got to the course and he's right away he's the horse so, [*interviewee stands up and slaps his thigh while imitating riding a horse*] the simplicity of the thing.[117]

Ronnie Paterson while talking about the escapism he experienced reading comics recalled children pretending to be cowboys:

> *RP*: The kids would run down the street wi' one hand holding the reins and the other hand slapping their arse! [*Narrator slaps his thigh*]

reminiscent of organised sport for working-class boys through organisations such as the Boy Scout movement.

[115] Hugh Wynne, 2 December 2005, p. 27.
[116] John Cooper, 15 May 2002, p. 10.
[117] Peter Halfpenny, 11 May 2004, p. 6.

HY & RP: [laughter]

RP: You know, that's them slapping the horse! And there'd be 'gunfights' all over the place![118]

Annette Kuhn's narrators also recalled the 'gallop home' after watching a cowboy film.[119] In contrast to Ken Doran who had the cowboy outfit, for these narrators the pretend horse was and is central to their masculine imaginings. Horses play a silent yet important role in westerns by connecting men physically to nature and representing the control men had over nature. The above extracts emphasised the physicality of boyhood play. The first was placed within a subjective experience of acting out the cowboy role with a friend. Peter identified his next-door neighbour, Tom, within the narrative and positioned himself watching the role-playing. In contrast Ronnie used the second person narration and placed himself as an observer of these other children acting out the cowboy role. Yet both narrators took the opportunity to actively show the interviewer what they meant by enthusiastically slapping their thighs. The 'gallop' was central to the acting out of the cowboy role both within the narrative of the past memory and also within the action of the present narration.

For most children the family household and surrounding area would be the first space that would be utilized as a site of play.[120] Ken Doran, born in 1940 in the Townhead area of Glasgow, 'was born and brought up in a tenement building from 1940 to 1956 [...] and did most of my comic book reading and all that perhaps during that particular era' in that building. He detailed how he transformed the domestic space into somewhere to read: [121]

KD: It was always at home, ah think ah would have just ended up sitting on the floor of the living room as they called it then or a bedroom. Ah mean you stayed in tenement property so it was a sort of living room stroke kitchen and then there was a big

[118] Ronnie Paterson, 17 May 2002, p. 5.

[119] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 102. The degree to which the narrators were conflating memories of cinema and reading is difficult to gauge at this point. The narrators recalled reading specific cowboy comics and also attending children's cinema clubs and matinees that showed cowboys and westerns. Thank you to Dr. Kelly Boyd for raising this question at the Social History Society Conference 2006.

[120] Graham Dawson discusses by reference to autobiography the household as a site of play in *Soldier Heroes*, p. 251-8.

[121] Ken Doran, 29 January 2004, p. 1.

> room which was sort of the good room and then in our case well it was distemper at the time but it was emulsion pink, it was the pink room. So you had a long hallway, I used to make, with my younger brother and I, you used to get two chairs back to back and put poles across them and then drape a blanket and that became a den, so you would sit in there in the hallway and read the comics. So it was probably, yet it was all domestic, yeah, aye, ah didn't read them in libraries, you certainly weren't allowed to read them in school, ah mean you wouldn't read them in the organizations you went to, so yeah.[122]

Within the familial situation the boundaries were then widened. Hamish Fraser recalled 'playing at Dan Dare' every lunch time with a school friend initially in a derelict smithy in his back garden:

> There was a huge shed and lots of cogs, wheels and handles lying around. These could easily be attached to the walls and become the steering wheels of the spaceships, the handles to open the airlocks, the guns to fight off the Mekons. [123]

The narrator utilised the boyhood language of his play within his narrative ('spaceships'; 'airlocks'; 'Mekons'). Other narrators recalled how the monuments and landscape of the latest war were utilised as backdrops to their make-believe because 'air raid shelters in the garden would make ideal castles.'[124] Ken Doran emphasised that 'make believe took place the house, the street and in the air raid shelter [...] as long as it was devoid of adults.'[125]

These memories of where the boys read and enacted their games emphasised the importance for boys to separate and colonise distinct adult free spaces in order to play out their fantasy and escapism. The makeshift den erected in the redundant corridor in the house, the derelict smithy and old air raid shelter were sites that boys could control. These spaces contrasted significantly with the official sites of reading such as the school, library and parental home which were governed by adult control.

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[122] Ibid., p. 8.
[123] Correspondence with author from Hamish Fraser 14 June 2005
[124] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 6; correspondence with Ken Doran with author, 8 June 2005
[125] Correspondence with author from Ken Doran, 8 June 2005

Re/composure: Reading Women Out and In of the Narrative

There was a significant exclusion of the discursive anti-ideal, the feminine in the majority of these story papers. As David Jackson suggests 'the illusion of flawless manhood is kept going in these stories through the silencing of the potentially threatening voices of the 'feminine'.'[126] The construction of an ideal masculinity was maintained by the exclusion of all things feminine and relied upon competitive clashes, trials of strength and mental and physical conflicts. Alex Thomson recalled that 'of the comics I read, there were, ah suppose, hundreds of them but they all had the same general... idea that they were leaders, they were honest, they were hardworking, they over came evil and now that I think about it they were all men.'[127] Richard Ingram recalled that boys wanted '*nothing involving women!*' from the story papers of the time and continued to explain that 'boys at that age were very misogynistic, you know and... women didn't come into the stories at all.' However, he did acknowledge that 'they [female characters] were in the *Eagle*.'[128]

As discussed in Chapter Two, the *Eagle* did introduce a new element into the boys' story paper formula by including a female character in the Dan Dare series. The story line of Dan Dare was intrinsically concerned with the gendered relationships between the main characters of the series, chiefly, Dan, Prof Peabody and the older Major. The male narrators all recalled the character of Dan Dare; they remembered his side kick Digby; and they remembered the alien villian, the Mekon. The narrators had one of three possible memories regarding the female character Prof Peabody: they either, remembered the female character; denied there was a female character in the series or; initially did not remember a female character and then after discussion remembered her. Alex Thomson, for example, recalled that 'there were no women heroes [in the *Eagle*] or very few but then it was a boy's comic and they tended to focus on manhood.'[129] Ken Doran initially did not remember a female character in the Dan Dare series, however when reminded of her name this evoked a different type of memory:

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[126] Jackson, *Unmasking Masculinity*, p. 235.
[127] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 7.
[128] Richard Ingram, 15 April 2002, p. 5.
[129] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 7.

> *KD*: Oh, Professor Peabody, that's right she was a sort of scientist, intellectual type scientist but ah remember that now because she reminded me very much of a science teacher Miss Bell who was a very, well from my perspective, I always remember she wore pencil skirts and that's when you looked at a female and you didn't really know what made her tick but you knew that she was attractive, these pencil skirts and she wore, you know tight sweaters were the rage then and she'd glasses bat wing and she was very much and some of the boys in the class used to say 'Oh here comes Miss Peabody' you know she was a sort of semi sexy, although you didn't understand the implications of that but just visually she was a kind of handful sort of thing and she... But she didn't feature in that comic and ah might have been more aware of her but it does come back, Professor Peabody that's right. Sorry Miss.[130]

Similarly, Hamish Fraser recalled the visual impact of the character of Prof Peabody: 'I remember her as pretty, yes, with long hair and that was really it I suppose, but eh? Really quite attractive. Is Dr [sic] Peabody here [narrator checks copies of the *Eagle*] no alas not.'[131] The female character in the Dan Dare serial was prescribed a gendered role by the male narrators despite the character's role within the story line being critical to the survival of the group. As one narrator recalled the 'girls' were 'either heroines in distress or just made up the numbers'.[132] None of the male narrators recalled the character of Prof Peabody solely because of her role as a scientist. The position of the female character in the men's memory talk notably that of subsidiary, hidden or sexualised suggests they rendered invisible the role of the female character or trivialised her role within the plot. The male narrators read women out of the adventure narrative.

Some of the male narrators and correspondents highlighted that they were unaware of what girls were reading because their experiences of girls were severely

[130] Ken Doran, 29 January 2004, p. 7
[131] Hamish Fraser, 30 May 2002, p. 5.
[132] Ken Doran, 29 January 2004, p. 7.

limited.[133] As one correspondent recalled 'I am not sure what girls of my era read as my association with them was limited, as was the case with most boys of my time and area, the mixture was not encouraged.'[134] The male oral narrators had a variety of views regarding the gendered stereotyping of children's reading material. Alex Thomson used the gendered myth surrounding girls' magazines to explain what he thought girls' reactions to the *Eagle* would have been and his reaction in general to publications for girls:

> *AT*: Okay... for boys. I don't think it's a comic that many girls would read and get a lot out of in the same way as there were girl comics of the time, which I can't, I probably looked at two or three issues of that my sister had lying around "ah that's cissy stuff".[135]

His narrative began to resemble 'boy talk' as he introduced dialogue and language which reflected his boyhood reactions to all things feminine, 'ah that's cissy stuff':

> *AT*: Yes, very specific for boys. I doubt if more than a... handful of girls would have enjoyed it. They would have said the same about, a similar thing that I said about the *Girl* – 'that's about war, that's about... nothing to do with me.' I don't know whether it was about the age in which I lived, which tended to be, things were gender specific ah mean boys clothes, and girls clothes and they didn't meet in the middle. I don't know if that was a function of the comics as well, maintaining that difference because I found, I found the girls comics just *yuck*![136]

The narrator pointed to the gendered nature of the time he grew up in and suggested this as the reason for his own gendered opinions.

In contrast some male narrators and Mass-Observation correspondents did recall reading periodicals intended for the opposite sex. Hamish Fraser had the opportunity to read his female cousins' *School Friend* at 'extended family gatherings on a Sunday afternoon.' Hamish explained that he did not differentiate the girls'

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[133] In Jenkinson's survey *What Do Boys and Girls Read?* no publications intended for a female audience were cited by boys aged between 12 and 15, pp. 64-83.
[134] L1504 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[135] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 9.
[136] Ibid.

School Friend from boys' papers as the 'girls were tomboys I suppose but that seemed quite acceptable and very much in the same genre as Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*, which was a staple of book reading from I suppose nine or ten.'[137] Hamish also recalled that his mother frequently took *Woman* and *Woman's Own* which he would have 'flicked through' only 'gradually graduating to reading the problem page and reading of a world of which I knew nothing.'[138] One Mass-Observation correspondent recalled that he 'was fascinated by *Girl'*. He continued to explain that by reading *Girl* he found 'out for probably the first time in my, by today's standards, somewhat sheltered life what different things appealed to each sex.'[139] Richard Ingram received American publications from his next-door neighbours who had relations in America. He noted that 'for the first time I was conscious of sex, you know, seeing these women with their busts and pointed nipples.'[140]

Dis/composure?: From Boyhood to Manhood

A narrator may not always achieve composure within a narrative. Recent 'studies of masculinity suggest that the construction of male identity within discourses of masculinity is also fractured and insecure.'[141] Penny Summerfield notes that a particular memory, question or 'uncomprehending and unsympathetic response from an audience, may produce discomposure' which may be expressed through tears, anger, contradicting stories or a fragmented narrative.[142] Similarly, a narrator may compose one identity for a younger self then compose another for a later period in their life. Simply growing out of reading comics was the most common explanation given by the men for ceasing to read boys' story papers. However, the transition from boyhood to manhood was not as straightforward and an unambiguous relation to masculinity did not appear in these testimonies. No longer reading comics

[137] Hamish Fraser, Correspondence with author, 14 June 2005.
[138] Ibid.
[139] D1602 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[140] Richard Ingram, 21 May 2002, p. 12.
[141] Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p. 71. See R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge, 1985); M. Roper, 'Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: the Psychic and Social Construction of memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War' in *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (2000), pp. 181-204; Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 23.
[142] Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p. 69; P. Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History' in T. Cosslett, C. Lury & P. Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London, 2000), pp. 93-104.

represented the shift from boyhood to manhood for the narrators experienced by traditional trials of masculinity such as work or marriage. However, the point at which the men had to negotiate this 'rite of passage' differed significantly and the place of comics within this trajectory was a marker of transition. Some of the male narrators composed different identities for themselves as young men which did not fit comfortably with the leisure practice of reading.

Roland Marshall was born in the Govan area of Glasgow in 1935. His father worked for Indian Tyres in Inshinnon and his mother worked after she was married as an usher in the Vogue cinema, also in Govan. Roland's narrative focused on his experiences of boyhood and work. Roland introduced a discussion of the various jobs he had from his first one, aged ten as a stable hand for his neighbour, to carrying coal aged fourteen while still at school. 'Then' he explains 'ah started work seriously [aged fifteen] and ah went tae the old, ah went tae the old Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society at Scotland Street, where the garage was but we worked out of Shieldhall.' He continued to detail his working life punctuating it with anecdotes that exemplified his experiences of work. Roland completed his discussion of work and the acquisition of a fully masculine identity by referring back to his first job aged ten and the gap between boyhood and manhood emphasised by comics:

> *RM*: So ah would say when ah went tae look after the horses in the stable in Harmony Row, the comics finished then.
> *HY*: Could you say a little bit more about that?
> *RM*: Well, just as easy, ah was in among the men, the men group there. Ah was looking after the horses and the men didnae read comics [laughs] so it could have just been that.[143]

He stopped reading comics at the age of ten when he started to work. Ronald's perceptions of comics and the concept of reading were constructed around the past discourse of masculinity. When asked if there were any books in the house when he was growing up, Roland explained 'Naw. Other than the comics, naw there wasnae there was nae anything. Ah wasnae interested in books.'[144] Roland continued to explain that a comic was something he would turn to 'when as was sitting in the hoose, you know, well just one room. Nothing tae dae. So you may as well occupy,

[143] Roland Marshall, 4 May 2004, p. 16.
[144] Ibid., p. 13.

so you had a comic that you liked tae read sort of thing.'[145] The narrator viewed reading as an indoor, private pursuit, in stark contrast with the outside, active world of work. He highlighted the sharp contrast between boyhood and manhood, which was easily depicted by the masculine world of work.

The narrator continued to use the discourse of the time being remembered to explain the division between boyhood and manhood: 'In they days the men didnae take anything tae dae with the weans.* The weans was women's work. They wouldnae even talk tae them outside, you know.'[146] In Scotland, and specifically Glasgow, working-class fathers have been perceived as being on the fringe of the family. Manual labour, physical and emotional strength, the ability to provide financially for and protect one's dependants and involvement in a hard drinking culture have defined working-class manhood in Scotland.[147] A distinct gender imbalance in the allocation of responsibilities in the home is depicted throughout common discourses of the mid-twentieth century. The machismo discourse of the 'hard man' has been an archetypal construction of masculinity in Glasgow. John Tosh notes that boys' 'qualification for a man's life among men [...] depends on their masculinity being tested against the recognition of their peers during puberty, young adulthood and beyond.'[148] Therefore, in order to project the image of manhood instead of boyhood, the narrator had to negotiate the division and reject the paraphernalia of boyhood that might have undermined his aspiring masculinity. The narrator used the gendered discourse of the time in which he grew up to create an identity for himself within the interview. A Mass-Observation correspondent also experienced this division between the masculine world of work and that of the reader. His school introduced a system 'where tools would be take the place of books – as something more useful to recipients in later life [...] the assumption was we

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[145] Ibid., p. 16.
[146] Ibid., p. 4.
[147] A. McIvor & R. Johnston, 'Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries, c. 1930 – 1970s' in *Labour History Review*, 69, 2 (2004), pp. 135-151; A. Hughes, 'Representations and Counter-Representations of Domestic Violence on Clydeside Between the Two World Wars' in *Labour History Review*, 69, 2 (2004), pp. 169-184. For a reappraisal of this see L. Abrams, 'There was Nobody like my Daddy: Fathers, the Family and the Marginalisation of Men in Modern Scotland,' *Scottish Historical Review*, 78, 206 (1999), pp. 219-242.
* 'weans' is a Glaswegian word for children.
[148] Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity?, p. 184.

would give up reading when leaving school and as workers we would need to gain skills with tools.'[149]

Discomposure can also occur when the narrator is not comfortable with the story that has been told. One narrator who volunteered for the project questioned the construction of his own narrative of boyhood reading towards the end of the interview which had also focused more on his experiences of work. His memories of reading boys' comics appeared to be too buried in his memory. He concluded in order to regain some composure within the interview that 'I suppose [boyhood is] only a small slice of life.'[150]

Age and the narrators' place in the job market was a significant marker of time used by the male narrators to structure their narratives of boyhood and manhood. One Mass-Observation correspondent recalled 'reading the odd comic to when I went into the airforce at eighteen years of age.'[151] Oral narrator John Cooper started working at the age of sixteen and explained that 'Oh no when ah was working ah wasnae interested in anything like that [then].'[152] Instead, John detailed the books and novels he would buy. The consumer power acquired with the prestige and masculine identity as a young wage earner allowed John to traverse the transition from a boyhood reading identity to a suitable manly reading identity. Alex Thomson's experience also exemplified the tension between financial restrictions of boyhood and the passage into manhood: 'I stopped buying it because I couldn't afford it, because although it got paid with the family papers it came out of my pocket money and then I got interested in girls.'[153]

Despite the attention paid to the feminization of periodical press during the later nineteenth and early twentieth century by historians, publications aimed at a specific, older male audience that identified the masculine consumer did exist throughout the period.[154] *Men Only* (1935-1967), *Lilliput* (1937-1960) and *Men's Wear* (1902 to date) were successful periodicals whose preferred reading audience

[149] S2246, Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.
[150] Hugh Wynne, 2 December 2005, p. 7.
[151] W565, Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.
[152] John Cooper, 21 May 2002, p. 5.
[153] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 9.
[154] Greenfield, O'Connell & Reid, 'Fashioning Masculinity', pp. 457-76; Bengry, 'Not Just for He-*Men Only*'; Breazeale, 'In Spite of Women', pp. 1-22.

was the middle-class male.[155] However, not one male narrator interviewed for this project recalled reading or an awareness of a specific magazine aimed at men during the 1950s and 1960s. Ken Doran pondered the idea: '*I know what* I like to read. But men's magazines, I'm not as conscious of men's magazines at that era, the end of the late fifties, sixties. The weekly news magazines maybe but not *men's* magazines. I'm sure ah don't know if they existed.'[156] He questioned the difference between the 'weekly news magazine' and more specifically 'men's magazines' suggesting that the former was one and the same for a male audience. The discourse surrounding men and their leisure pursuits has changed since the 1980s with the staggering growth of the men's lifestyle magazine market, and this was not lost on this narrator:

> *KD*: I wasn't conscious. I tended, ah mean I'm aware seeing what ma sons buying whatever the *QM* and *Fortune* [sic], I see there's even more new, there's another one out this week. I'm amazed at the, the standards, you know the glossy publications that are available for men now. If there were equivalents of them, I was oblivious to them or I tend to very quickly you know look at something once and then just see if it's for me or not and I'm quite quick to judge these things and just bin them.[157]

Masculinity is not innate and has to be learned in any particular social and historical context and at any one time there are a range of masculinities on offer. Certain masculinities are privileged while others may be labelled as deviant or marginalised. Throughout the twentieth century the feminine connotations of consumption have been pronounced and subsequently ensured that consuming remained an uncertain field for men keen to establish their credentials of solid, heterosexual manhood. There is a polarised split between 'masculine' and 'feminine' forms of cultural practice that is constructed in terms of oppositions between work and leisure, rationality and emotion, practicality and the 'instinct' for beauty.

[155] While the title *Men Only* and the initial editorials attempted to define the male audience as central to its readership, Historian Justin Bengry has identified a vibrant relationship between *Men Only* and other intended audiences of women and gay men that contributed to the construction of the male British consumer between 1935 and 1939, 'Not Just for He-*Men Only*', Social History Society Conference, Reading, 2006.
[156] Ken Doran, 29 January 2004, p. 16.
[157] Ibid.

The narratives of the male interviewees and the replies from the Mass-Observation correspondents highlight a shift in discourse surrounding boyhood and manhood. A number of narrators commented on how, in their opinion, the values of both boys' and girls' reading material have changed, for the worse. The narrators used their already composed identities as readers of boys' comics to place time in their narratives and compare the past discourses of boyhood and manhood with the present and comment critically again. Alex Thomson explained that 'in a lot of what I understand to be younger generation's reading is that, there was no, there was violence but there was no sex.'[158] Ronnie Paterson and Richard Ingram also commented on past values of their reading material in contrast to their perceptions of experiences today:

> *RP*: It was always, these comics were always quite eh, up lifting...all the stuff in there was positive role models that you would expect at that time... you know folk still went to church and there was still morality you know.[159]
>
> *RI*: If you were honest, work hard at something, trained, ehm, you'd achieve success. If you were fair to your friends uhm, that was I suppose they were all good Christian values, lets face it.[160]

The reasons the men participated in the project differed from the reasons the women gave. 'Posterity', putting something down on record and 'setting the story' straight are often reasons given for participating in an oral history project. The men involved in this project gave a sense of reliving lost times. Childhood memories of reading comics for them woke memories long forgotten or memories which were suppressed due to growing up. For a couple of the male narrators the opportunity to recount, explore, and return to a time lost, of childhood innocence and boyhood was apparent. A couple of men compared boyhood today to their own experience of boyhood. The men highlighted how they thought boys today lack a sense of direction, willingness to work and have a certain effeminacy about them in contrast to growing up a boy

[158] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 5.
[159] Ronnie Paterson, 17 May 2002, p. 11.
[160] Richard Ingram, 7 May 2002, p. 12.

during the Second World War.[161] For some of the men the expectation to work at a young age impinged on their boyhood and they had to quickly leave their boyhood behind.

Similarly, Alex Thomson explained that the comics 'tended to present the winners of life as being upright, honest, hard working people. And I think I have a ... philosophy very much like that as part of my life. I think I'm honest. I think I'm truthful.'[162] Boys' story papers and comics played a significant part in securing a future identity for young boys at a particularly susceptible period in their life. They contributed to a discourse of masculinity, yet other influences were at work as well. These comics offered boys a chance to shape their own situations. The stories created a site for young boys to negotiate their own identities.

Conclusion

Experiences of childhood reading were not homogenous. Individual experiences varied widely due to age, geographical area, family income, parental supervision and individual choices. Whether the men read the *Eagle*, the *Rover* or *Wizard*, they use the dichotomy between the 'hooligan' and 'swank', or traditional masculinities versus anti-heroic subversive masculinities, the discourse of masculinity at the time, to compose their narratives. The men use these motifs to discuss how they negotiated, accepted or rejected these masculine ideals in the construction of their own masculine identities.

For a number of men who came from predominantly working-class backgrounds reading publications such as the *Eagle* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, that were aimed at a middle-class readership, signified a transition and movement from one experience to another. Ultimately, their reading material represented the potential for them to achieve more than their fathers had. Subversive, anti-heroic masculinities such as those presented in the *Rover* and *Wizard* allowed boys to identify with working-class heroes who exemplified masculine ideals. The men talked about how these characters offered examples of masculinity that they found exciting and interesting. Some narrators were able to identify with the characters such as Alf Tupper and were able to negotiate and create an identity for themselves.

[161] Ronnie Paterson, Alex Thomson, Richard Ingram
[162] Alex Thomson, 9 August 2002, p. 5.

Other narrators also identified with characters such as Dan Dare who exemplified a more normative or traditional masculinity. Other narrators could not identify with some of the characters and instead they recalled how they negotiated the ideals within the comics to make sense of their experiences.

The men did not discuss masculinity openly within their narratives. However, it is possible to identify narrative techniques and styles used by the men to construct suitable masculine identities for themselves within the interview situation. Action was central to the men's testimonies. The narrators performed within their narratives in a number of different ways: some re-enacted the actions specific to their boyhood play; they retold the action of improvising stories and games influenced by their reading and the activity of acquiring the reading material. They composed themselves either as the central protagonist or as an authorial voice of the majority of their narratives by using anecdotal or habitual memories, both of which implicated the teller at the heart of the action.

Time was an important narrative tool in the men's testimonies as they used it to define specific periods in their life in relation to reading. They used historical time to define a place, long since changed, and its impact on their childhood; they juxtaposed the past with the present in order to comment on today's comics and changing boyhood in contrast to their own experience; they showed an awareness of changing discourses of masculinity specific to historical time; they used age to define specific points in their development from boyhood to manhood and they were often able to say when they stopped reading comics which defined a transition from boyhood to manhood. As we will see from the next chapter the women composed different memories of reading compared to the men.

CHAPTER 5

"Girls' Own" Voices of Femininity

Illustration 5.1: Girls reading magazines in George Square, Glasgow, 1958.
Source: www.scran.ac.uk

This chapter aims to introduce female readers' voices, opinions and experiences of reading *School Friend, Girls' Crystal, Eagle* and *Red Star Weekly* among others. The reader is re-positioned as the central character in the story. The interviews conducted with the women for this project provided individually styled narratives, each voicing a distinct experience of 'girlhood' reading between 1935 and 1955. The narratives were constructed in numerous ways. Some narrators were concerned to place the reader, themselves, in a context of their childhood and where they grew up. Only one narrator positioned herself as the 'reader' at the centre of her narrative. Some narrators rejected the myth attached to girls reading material altogether. The testimonies did not touch on all of the same issues. For some women there were stronger issues revolving around the theme of reading that they wished to express.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part explores the narrators' memories about reading story papers intended for both schoolgirls and schoolboys. The second section considers the narrators' memories about reading women's magazines. As the 'intended readership' of girls' comics and women's magazines was never the 'actual readership' this division of the material is necessary in order to highlight the ambiguities and nuances involved within a project that deals with reading popular literature for a female audience. Both sections begin by considering how the readers' acquired their reading material and where they recalled their experiences of reading taking place. The discussion then develops to explore the ways in which the narrators recalled their childhood reading memories of schoolgirl, schoolboy and women's magazines. Again, as in Chapter Four, the women's oral testimonies work on two levels: firstly, the material is viewed as information adding to the knowledge of childhood reading material; and secondly, the narratives are read discursively in order to explore the changes in myths surrounding reading habits and how memories of reading operate.

Part 1: Girls Reading Schoolgirl and Schoolboy Story Papers and Comics

Place of Reading and Acquisition of Reading Material

Reading is viewed as a temporal activity. Jane Mace states that 'we read or write at particular moments; but in doing so, we transcend the moment.'[1] Reading is an activity which is done in the present but can transport the reader to another time and possibly another place. The trope of 'place' was prominent in the memories of the women narrators. 'Space' and 'time' are also relevant to the discussion of reading, especially a discussion focused on female reading habits: 'space' is relevant as a location to read, finding the space in the house away from other people and finding time, leisure time, between school and chores. The reply by one female Mass-Observation correspondent to the directive on childhood reading emphasised the importance of place and space within women's reading memories:

> Were it not for the existence of comics I might never have learnt to read. Allow me to explain. I was born in 1951, lived until 1969 in a two up two down terraced house in Yorkshire, which was also the local sub post office, so we lived in three rooms not four. Our kitchen also served as living room, dining room, and reading room. Having the only sink in the house and a coal fire it was also the bathroom. The toilet was outside at the end of the backyard. As we had little space, we certainly had no room for a bookcase, so reading material had to be disposable.[2]

The female narrators, like the male narrators, organised their accounts topographically, locating their narratives of reading in the remembered places of their childhood and youth. For most, these geographical, spatial and contextual memories were offered at the beginning of the interview, and acted as a staging device, and provided a backdrop and context to their reading memories.

Three distinct 'place' settings were used by the female narrators to stage their narratives: firstly, the neighbourhood in which they lived and grew up as a child; secondly, their home specifically and the building or tenement it was in and thirdly, the library or school. The narrators' memories of 'place' were never static. One

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[1] J. Mace, *Playing with Time: Mothers and the Meaning of Literacy* (London, 1998), p. 67.

[2] E743, Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.

narrator shifted the overall mood of her place-memory at the end of the interview from positive memories to more challenging memories. The narrator initially recalled the room and kitchen she grew up in as a happy period in her life despite the cramped living conditions. However, the narrator's memories of the flat shifted when she emphasised how difficult the small space was for a family of four to live in, in contrast to the experiences of the schoolgirl characters she read about in the *Girl's Crystal*. The interview touched on areas of her memories that she had not recalled for a long time and possibly was making her re-think or re-address her memories of where she grew up for the first time.[3]

Places in relation to time were also important for the narrators. A couple of narrators explained how time had impacted on the place they grew up later on in the interview: 'You have to remember dear, the times we were living in were more difficult'.[4] Detailed descriptions of the neighbourhood, parts of town, suburbs and their houses in which the narrators grew up were important in order to position their childhood in historical time and place. The women's 'memory maps' varied in style and detail but they functioned to set the scene for the recollections of reading that followed.

Annette Kuhn suggests there is a different relationship, evident in oral testimony, between place and memory for urban and rural dwellers.[5] The testimony gathered from Glasgow, a purely urban environment, would suggest there is also different relationship to place and reading memory between different classes. Class is not fixed and predetermined nor is it reflected in class-consciousness; rather it is 'constructed and inscribed within a complex rhetoric of metaphorical associations, causal inferences and imaginative constructions.'[6] What counts as class experience, cannot be established by collecting empirical information but by analysing the terms of definition offered in discourse. The language and discourse of class was apparent in the oral testimony gathered from the women narrators for this project. The constituencies of Glasgow where the women grew up are perceived to have been extremely conscious of their class position whatever that was alleged to be. Ten of

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[3] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004.
[4] Iris Adams, 23 September 2003.
[5] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 28.
[6] G. S. Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832 – 1982* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 102.

the women interviewed were born in the districts of Govan, Langside, Partick, Clydebank, Woodlands and Carntyne. The three remaining women interviewed were born and grew up in Dumbartonshire, Fife and Yorkshire.[7]

In her place narrative Margaret Kelly detailed the tenement buildings and her local neighbourhood. Margaret was born in Renton in 1931, moved to the Govan area of Glasgow when she was two or three and was still living in Govan at the time of the interview.

> *MK:* The house in Govan, well there was one kitchen room with a set-in-bed* in it and another room with a bed in it and that was it, we all had to share it. But we were one of the fortunate ones in Govan, we had an inside toilet and that meant you were a wee bit, up the stairs like. The street at that time was actually counted as one of the best streets in Govan. It was very well kept, very tidy, Elderpark Street, you couldn't say that now. But then it was and there was the congregational church in Elderpark Street which the community sort of worked with all the time. [8]

Born in Govan in 1927, Elizabeth Baine also lived on Elderpark Street:

> *EB:* It was a room and kitchen with a toilet, an inside toilet. Nice big roll away windows in the kitchen and there was a recess in the wall in the kitchen, ma mum and dad slept there and my sister and I slept in a bed settee in the room, so she would put it up if visitors were coming and a place to entertain people. So I felt quite posh [laughs]. Most of my friends had brothers and sisters galore and couldnay have bed settees, had to have beds everywhere.
>
> *HY*: So what was it like living in this room and kitchen?
>
> *EB*: Oh ah thought it was great. Didnay know anything else. Now ah would think it was horrendous *but then* ah

[7] Evelyn Wilson; Doreen Thomson; Emily Turner.
[8] Margaret Kelly, 4 May 2004, p. 2.
* A 'set-in-bed' was a box bed for two (or more) people in a recess in the kitchen.

just thought ma mum and dad were there and it was wonderful. And they gave you all they could afford and it was a great life. Ah loved every minute of it. We were all poor but happy and everybody helped each other they really did. If something special they gave you what they didn't need. Everybody was very kind. Ah cannae remember anything that made me unhappy in these days. It was great.

HY: Was it quite poor, you mentioned poor?

EB: Yes, it was poor but the thing is you're all in the same boat.[9]

Both of these narrators provided intricate detail of their childhood living conditions in a room and kitchen in a traditional tenement and their family life. A tenement building is characteristic of Scottish city architecture. In 1951 around fifty percent of Glasgow families lived in one-room 'single-ends' or two-room 'room and kitchens'.[10] There would be twelve 'houses' in a typical tenement, with one single-end and two room and kitchens on each level. The size of the families living in each house would range considerably. The 'close' or entrance passage to the upper houses is a unique feature of the Scottish tenement. It is an area of the tenement building that is shared by all the people who live there and has to be walked through by everyone including visitors to get to any specific house or to get to the shared backcourt. The close is neither public nor private.[11] Along with the rota to wash the shared close, would be a strict regime for cleaning shared toilets and using the wash-house in the back court, if there was one, to be followed by each household in the tenement block. Such cleaning regimes and living in such close, and often crowded, proximity to other families created a specific sense of community.

Both narrators described their houses and Elderpark Street which were 'well kept' and both noted that they had an inside toilet which was not a common feature of tenements at the time. They also introduced their families and their place within the tight community ('We were all poor but happy and everybody helped each other

[9] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004, pp. 2-3.

[10] J. Faley, *Up Oor Close: Memories of Domestic Life in Glasgow Tenements, 1910 – 1945* (Oxford, 1990), p. 18.

[11] See F. Worsdall, *The Glasgow Tenement: A Way of Life: A Social, Historical and Architectural Study* (Edinburgh, 1991) for a fuller discussion of tenement buildings.

they really did'). Both narrators shifted between the present ('Now ah would think it was horrendous') and the past ('*but then* ah just thought ma mum and dad were there and it was wonderful'), and emphasised a slight change in their perceptions of their childhood, ('you couldnay say that now'). By guiding us through these places and addresses the narrators made the listener (and reader) familiar with the setting of their childhood in a Glasgow tenement.

The means by which the women narrators acquired their reading material varied. Several of the narrators explained that they swapped their comics among their friends or around the closes in the tenements that they lived. One narrator summed up the options of acquiring reading material: 'So really for reading matter you were dependent on what you could afford to buy which wasn't very much, what your parents were prepared to buy you or what was around the home.'[12] Historians have recently re-evaluated the significance of 'survival networks' established between women, their kin and neighbours as well as groups of male co-workers in working-class neighbourhoods.[13] Women would exchange, loan and pawn items together in order to supplement their husbands' wage. Emotional support and encouragement were also provided through these networks. Ellen Ross notes that 'sharing was literally built into the housing.'[14] Sharing and 'survival networks' were common means of material support. Narrator, Margaret Kelly, explained how a network worked in her close: 'You would hear "Oh such and such" and there would be a, a cap would go round to put money into':

> *MK*: Because everybody was the same dear. There was never this, what the Jones have, or that, everybody was the same. And if somebody was poor and the woman was having difficulty, then the neighbours helped out.[15]

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[12] Emily Turner, 28 October 2003, p. 14.

[13] A. McGuckin, 'Moving Stories: Working-class Women' in E. Breitenbach & E. Gordon (eds.), *Out of Bounds. Women in Scottish Society 1800 – 1945* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 197-220; L. Jamieson, 'Limiting Resources and Limiting Conventions: Working-class Mothers and Daughters in Urban Scotland c. 1890-1925', in J. Lewis, *Labour and Love: Women's Experiences of Home and Family 1850 – 1940* (London, 1986), pp. 48-69; E. Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War I', in *History Workshop Journal*, 15 (Spring 1983), pp. 4-27; L. Sinclair, "'Silenced, Suppressed and Passive'? A Refocused History of Lanarkshire Women, 1920-1939", Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of History, Strathclyde University, 2005.

[14] Ross, 'Survival Networks', p. 9.

[15] Margaret Kelly, 4 May 2004, p. 9.

Margaret then emphasised how the networks of support where she lived were extended to the children:

> *MK:* It was usually Thursday or Friday they come out. When you read them you took them to a girl friend's usually up the same close or the next close and they had different comics, so you changed them and of course by the time they were changed with everybody in the street they were pretty dog-eared by the time you got them back. But you had to give back the ones that you had, the first lot you'd changed with, you read them, so you went to someone else to change them with those. But then you see, see if an infectious disease broke out, like diphtheria or scarlet fever you weren't allowed to change comics in that house because they said it carried infection. So that was it. Just maybe three or four closes round about here, the tenement. It wasn't every house that had children of that age, y'know. You would take them to school to swap but my mother wouldn't allow that, because she, she didn't know who you were swapping with. But anyway, we got, we swapped our comics and... it was great thing to get the comics like that y'know.[16]

A network of exchange, as described by Margaret, allowed children to access more reading material than they could afford. However, the children's exchange network would appear to have been regulated by their mothers who were more discerning than their children. Ross observes that sharing between households in working-class neighbourhoods was, to a degree, selective as some houses would have been excluded due to social conduct such as drunkenness, sexual habits and slovenly housekeeping which were not regarded as suitable.[17]

In the above excerpt the narrator explained that her mother did not allow her to swap comics at school because 'she didn't know who you were swapping with.' The narrator emphasised that her mother regulated *whom* she swapped reading material *with*. The initial concern therefore was not the type of reading material but

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[16] Margaret Kelly, 4 May 2004, pp. 10-11.
[17] Ross, 'Survival Networks', p. 14.

where the material came from, and caution was taken to ensure the children were participating in a 'healthy' swapping network, that the other families they swapped with were regarded as suitable. Mothers exercised control over who their children swapped comics with as they viewed the comics to be literally unclean and there was the possibility that they carried disease. Another narrator, Jean Rankine, explained that her aunt, who she lived with, did not like her bringing books home from St George's Cross Library: 'I think she felt germs could come from the books.'[18] Talking about the same library, Gillian Bayne recalled her mother not permitting her to borrow books because 'You didn't know where the books had been.'[19]

The narrators' use of the disease metaphor to describe comics can be extended to describe and highlight concern of the pernicious nature of comics. If children were swapping comics with children their mothers did not know, their mothers were unable to regulate the nature of what their daughters were reading. In contrast mothers knew the other families in the close or tenement and were able to judge the swapping mechanics. Mothers were careful to ensure that the house the material came from did not have disease and the people with whom the children were swapping comics with were deemed respectable enough to be seen exchanging items.

Janice Radway, investigating romance readers in one American town, concluded that although the readers purchased their novels from one particular book store in that town a reading community did not operate at the local level as the consumers did not know each other or discuss the material. Instead her readers were part of a wider 'romance community' mediated by mass publishing.[20] In contrast the narrators in this project identified specific reading communities they participated in that were locally situated in their street or building. Jean Rankine born in the St George's Cross area of Glasgow in 1927, lived in a street with seven closes and explained that 'everybody sort of knew everybody, you know, in it and you did exchange comics that you got.'[21] The shared boundaries of the tenement and proximity of other girls who read the same material allowed girls to develop their identities as readers. By swapping reading material with other readers within the

[18] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 5.
[19] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 11.
[20] Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p. 96.
[21] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 19.

same locality specific female reading communities can be defined (this discussion will be continued later in the chapter.) The young readers were also participating in a younger version of their mothers' social support network.

Male co-workers also participated in support networks by establishing collections in the workplace or pub in aid of a fellow workman's illness, funeral or widow and children.[22] These exchanges were often as a mark of respect to those people involved and were a result of loss. Ross notes that gender boundaries of exchange were rarely crossed.[23] Therefore, the degree to which men participated in the 'survival networks' specific to women's material world is difficult to gauge. However, it is interesting to note that Elizabeth recalled her father participating in an exchange system of her story papers in the shipyard with his workmates:

> *EB*: Ma father. Sometimes he got them off his friends in the work and they changed with each other. They were good at economising, really good.
>
> *HY*: In the shipyard?
>
> *EB*: Yes and he would take something in the next day. We helped each other, it was great.
>
> *HY*: How did he feel about swapping girls magazines?
>
> *EB*: He just took them in, because he kept them in a bag, with some sticky tape so they knew he wasnae looking at them. (Laughs) it was great. Saved him buying them, there was no sense us all buying them when you could get them off people and vice versa you know.[24]

The narrator suggested that her father (and by association other men working in the ship yard) participated in a wider exchange system as opposed to solely collecting and giving support in a specific time of loss such as injury or death. The narrator described her father's participation in the exchange network as routine and part of the wider network ('They were good at economising, really good.'). Exchange, even in the shipyard by men, of girls' comics was part of the 'survival network'. This narrative highlighted the transgression of gender boundaries in the shipyard which by

[22] Ross, 'Survival Networks', p. 8.
[23] Ibid., p. 9.
[24] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004, pp. 8-9.

the nature of the work has been regarded as a highly masculine atmosphere.[25] The narrator noted that the bag containing the feminine material was kept shut with sticky tape 'so they knew he wasnae looking at them.' The concern here was that her father had to maintain his masculine identity in the shipyard while dealing with an obviously feminine commodity.

Both Margaret and Elizabeth emphasised the routine of swapping reading material in their narratives. The telling of the testimony implicated the narrator in the events, but both the events themselves and the narrators' involvement in them were represented as common practice ('there was no sense us all buying them when you could get them off people and vice versa'). The narrators had already familiarised the listener or reader with the Govan area and provided a *mise en scene* about the area. The familiarisation of the street, the tenement blocks, and the room and kitchen allowed the narrative of reading and sharing the comics within the community to be palpably present in the memory. Both narrators explained the relationships within the community and social networks developed by their mothers and participated in by both husbands and children in order to swap the reading material, thus 'we helped each other.' Katherine Dixon also explained the economising nature of her family: 'You didn't just throw things away as they do now. So they [comics] were kept in the cupboard and they would be brought out if we were kept off school for any reason.'[26]

Dorothy Bell was born in 1935 at home in Carntyne, a suburb of Glasgow to the east of the city centre. Her narrative begun with the story papers and how she recalled the settings of stories:

> *DB:* So it was nice. It was just a nice, I would say very much what I now kind of look back, in retrospect with quite a middle class, eh? What could I say?... settings of things, you know there was. Don't remember anything ever happening in places like the East End of London with gangsters, you know real gangsters or anything, it was all, all very nice. Not alarming. Enjoyable. That's what I wanted to say about it. I think I said to you before, that I mean, my family we were

[25] McIvor & Johnston, 'Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies', pp. 135-151.
[26] Katherine Dixon, February 2004, p. 2.

> very... I mean my father had a good job but we were *working* class. We lived in a, actually one of the newer council houses. I lived in a house that was built in 1934 and or thirty-two, thirty-three, around that time anyway. And these were built actually on farmland now I realise and we had a bathroom and a garden but these houses were built for, well working people who worked in banks, insurance offices and things like that. I don't remember many doctors or lawyers living in Carntyne, I think that the doctor who actually practiced in Carntyne he had a big kind of double size council house. No but very good, honest, working class people.[27]

Within the narrative Dorothy shifted her focus from the story papers and took the listener or reader on a tour of the area. By means of her 'memory map', Dorothy introduced her family as working-class in contrast to the middle-class characters in the stories. She presented her neighbours and set the backdrop for her story. While the people and the place took prominence, her memories were prompted by recalling the story papers she read when she lived there. Dorothy was the central protagonist in her narrative which was emphasised by her use of the first person and she immersed herself within this past.

Some of the narrators' parents bought specific titles only for them, thus prescribing their daughters' reading. A Mass-Observation correspondent born in 1943 recalled getting *Girl* delivered to her house:

> I seem to recall that *Girl* was seen as "good quality" reading for girls as opposed to trashier stuff. Sadly I never saw the trashier stuff so I can make no comparison! Both *Girl* and the *Eagle* were published by the Rev Marcus Morris – no doubt this was seen by my parents as an indication of wholesomeness. But it was not just worthy stuff, it was really enjoyable![28]

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[27] Dorothy Bell, 25 November 2003, p. 2.
[28] B1475 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2

An oral respondent's parents bought her the *Girl* and the *Eagle* because 'they regarded them as quality and frowned on the likes of the *Beano*.'[29] Often if a child's reading was prescribed by their parents the publications they were allowed to read were those aimed at middle-class girls such as *Girl* and the *Girl's Own Paper* which had some moral and religious intonation. This was the case for Iris Adams whose mother regulated her reading. Among the titles she was allowed to read were *The Children's Newspaper*, *Morning Rays* and *Greatheart*, religious publications provided at Sunday School and *The Guide*. Iris was born in Langside, a predominately middle-class Glasgow suburb, in 1921. She left school in 1938 and trained as an orthopaedic nurse. She explained that

> *IA*: *My mother didn't approve of comics. She had to know what we were reading.* And on a Friday night we all trotted along to Langside Library which was a very good library and on Sunday you weren't allowed out to play, all other days you went outside to play, but on Sunday you weren't allowed out to play. Not in our area. You had to have a book to read on Sunday and you went to Church in the morning, we went to Sunday School in the afternoon. So mummy chose the books we had to get and you looked around and you'd see what you wanted but you had to get her approval. So there was no messing around with the, it was all good books.[30]

Iris's mother did not approve of her children reading comics. Subsequently, Iris did not locate her memories of reading within the same context of the tenement building or surrounding neighbourhood as the other narrators did. Instead her memory was focused on the school and library as places linked to her reading memories. The school and library may be perceived as being official regulators of reading. While some narrators immersed themselves within their testimony, like Dorothy Bell, Iris Adams used a more detached narrative style. Iris's use of the second and third person in her narrative ('You had to have a book to read on Sunday'; 'it was all good books') simultaneously included and distanced her from the context of the account

[29] Elizabeth Anderson, Childhood Reading Questionnaire, 27 June 2003.
[30] Iris Adams , 23 September 2003, p. 7

and its narration. This style tends to be used by a narrator who considers himself/herself to be an expert witness or social commentator.

A Mass-Observation correspondent, a retired secretary born in 1936, highlighted the gendered myth system surrounding girls reading:

> My parents didn't seem to read books much. My father worked physically hard and loved the newspapers. Three on Sunday, *News of the World*, *People* and *Sunday Pictorial* [sic]. My mother was brought up to believe that reading books meant that you were lazy and besides she never had the time [...] She never said you were reading but referred to reading as having a book in your face.[31]

What is important when analysing these oral history testimonies is how each narrator positioned herself in her own story. By discussing the women's testimonies in terms of place I do not wish to suggest that these women's narratives are simply defined in terms of their home and family. But that the narrators use their homes and neighbourhoods in order to contextualise their reading memories. The home, the building, the street and the library were central to the narrators' memories. Key phrases and choice of pronouns indicate to the historian where and how the narrator wished to place herself in her narrative, either inclusively within a common history or exclusively, out with the common history. Other positions are also available to narrators both within the discourse of the time in which the story is being told and of the time being remembered. The positions available to women constructing their narratives about their life history are bound within the discourse of gender. Therefore their stories are related to the common discourse of gender by either embracing it or rejecting it in some way.

Utilising the Myth of Schoolgirl Femininities

Chapter Three detailed the discourses of femininity surrounding story papers for girls between 1930 and the late 1950s. As was shown the meaning was ambiguous. Despite this some of the narrators used a myth of the schoolgirl heroine as independent and intrepid from their memories of reading these story papers when

[31] B1771, Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.

constructing their own narratives of girlhood reading. Dorothy Bell composed an identity for herself, which reflected the myth of the schoolgirl heroine. Irene Young presented a narrative, which was passive towards the discourse and Jean Rankine's testimony in particular was constructed around the myth of a community of girls.

Jean Rankine decided to take part in the project because she felt that she had a different story to tell. Born in 1927 in the St George's Cross area of Glasgow Jean's mother and father divorced when she was five in 1932, 'which was unusual in those days.'[32] She was brought up by a maiden aunt, although she still had contact with her mother who lived close by and she recalled receiving maintenance payments from her father. Leisure time was spent visiting her aunts' group of female friends and Jean recalled being raised in a predominately female environment. She felt this female environment was reflected in the *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* which was based around girls' boarding school environments, in which the cast were all female. As an only child and as the youngest participant in the afternoon tea soiree with her aunt and her friends, Jean longed for friendships with girls of her own age. She explained that 'the *Girls' Crystal* sounded good too, going to boarding school, you know and sleeping in a dormitory sounded as though you had a lot of good companionship which probably wasn't really the case you know. But it all sounded good, to me.'[33] The ultimate all female environment that Jean detailed in her testimony and aspired to be part of was the Women's Royal Naval Service. She was too young to be called up during the Second World War but she explained how she imagined that it would have been like the girls' boarding schools depicted in the stories she read.[34]

The narrator described the myth of a cohesive girl's community in terms of the stories and the characters but also because it allowed a group of her girlfriends to swap the comics and have a community of their own. Jean explained that 'What you read tended to be a circle of people you knew, you were friendly with, you know, that you did exchange books and I mean people that didnae read those books werenae your friends. It made, it gave you a friendship.'[35] Jean described the feeling

[32] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 1.
[33] Ibid., p. 8.
[34] Ibid., p. 7.
[35] Ibid., p. 7.

of a shared group identity, and the subsequent sense of belonging to an audience. Sharing particular aspects of girls' story papers was felt to connect members of the reading audience, expressed by friendship in this context. The sense of belonging to an audience also extended the concept of a community of readers to mean a group which alleviated feelings of isolation and offered a sense of self within a collective meaning.

The boarding school setting of the stories was also an attraction for Irene Young who recalled the anticipation and suspense of waiting for her copy of *Girl* to arrive: '*Ah just couldn't wait* for them to come in to read them.'[36] Irene was born in Bridge of Allen in 1942 when her mother was evacuated from Clydebank during the blitz. After her mother's lying-in period Irene and her mother returned to the family home in Clydebank where Irene has continued to live and where her interview was conducted. Like other narrators in this project Irene belonged to a swapping network with her neighbour:

> *IY*: The lady in the next block, her daughter used to get the *Girls' Crystal* and the *School Friend* and ah got them after she had read them. And then I got the *Girl* and she got that, *Girl*. So ah loved them because it was all about... boarding school and all that. And I just thought, and all the adventures they got up to, I thought this was fantastic. Ah could see ma self in a boarding school, y'know and doing all these things, [laughs] I went to the local school.[37]

Irene's childhood, spent growing up in a working-class community in the West of Scotland, contrasted significantly with the lives of the young girls' portrayed in the stories of the *Girls' Crystal* and the *School Friend*. Irene's father was a turner in Singers factory in Clydebank and she did not know if her own mother had 'ever actually went out to work'.[38] The boarding school tales were a favourite of Irene's. Within the above narrative she contrasted her own experience with that from the school stories she read. The difference between the two was reflected when she laughed. Her laughter acted like a safety valve releasing the pressure of her girlhood

[36] Irene Young, 16 February 2004 p. 13
[37] Ibid., p. 1.
[38] Ibid., p. 2.

dream. The narrator used laughter to acknowledge to the interviewer that she was aware how 'silly' she was to have imagined herself at boarding school, as she juxtaposed her dream of going to boarding school with reality ('I went to the local school'). Irene's inclusion of the reality created distance between her self and the ideal she imagined and produced a sense of longing in her narrative. The desire to bridge the difference between the self and the ideal was accompanied by the impossibility of its fulfilment represented by the laughter.

Many narrators described their pleasures of reading schoolgirl papers in terms of identification. This term was used in a number of ways to refer to a whole range of reader/character relations. If we think about identification in terms of a negotiation between the reader and the character or the story, at the centre of this negotiation is recognition of similarities and differences. For example, Irene concluded that 'I couldn't identify with them but ah wanted to be them, you know, it was just, they were all fantasies you know but ah enjoyed it.'[39] Non-identification with the characters and stories was what Irene enjoyed.

Other narrators also did this. Jean Rankine and Elizabeth Baine placed their own identity at the centre of their narratives and emphasised the differences between self and the ideal. Jean 'thought it would be nice to have, the things they were able to do financially you know that you never ever sort of managed to do yourself but it really sounded good.'[40] Elizabeth recalled reading the *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* and thinking 'Ah'll try and do that and ah'll try and do that, you know. If it concerned money it was no no.'[41] Both narrators highlighted the desire to bridge the gap between self and ideal and transform their own identities, despite acknowledging the impossibility of the fulfilment. Where the comics or magazines did not represent reality, this did not prove problematic to these readers, as Elizabeth continued to explain: 'Reading about the kind of things these kids were up to and things that we weren't allowed to do, it was good fun. They possibly had more money, the families, you know. So we missed out on that, but that didnae matter.'[42]

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[39] Ibid., p. 14.
[40] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 14.
[41] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004, p. 8.
[42] Ibid., p. 6.

The characters in the stories also served a normative function to the extent that they were often read as role models. One Mass-Observation correspondent born in 1943 who read the *School Friend* and the *Girl* noted that 'there was also a feeling that girls at such schools must have come from nice respectable homes and so it was safe for us to read about it.'[43] Another Mass-Observation correspondent recalled that

> these fictional schoolgirls were role models; they were full of team spirit, the good of the school, honesty, helping others. Their worst misdemeanours were to have midnight feasts. All good clean fun. All in all perfect propaganda for producing worthy conforming girls and good wives for the future![44]

When asked if she thought there were role models in the *Girls' Crystal* Elizabeth Baine exclaimed '*Oh yes I think so!* We used to read about different schools, high class schools and think I would try be like them.'[45]

The assumed agency and power of the schoolgirl heroines was also attractive to some readers. Dorothy Bell composed a narrative in which she played the role of the adventurous schoolgirl heroine:

> *DB*: I mean we got reading in school but I, I was quick, I mean I knew exactly where I would be, and I would be sitting reading here [whispering] and in my ear I would hear the girl before me what she was reading and I could get the spot but in the mean time I was reading this [the *Girls' Crystal*] because I knew, [getting louder] I didn't need to read these books in school, I knew, I knew, [getting louder] I knew, *I knew* how to read. I didn't need this stuff that we were getting.[46]

In this excerpt Dorothy used anecdotal references to position herself as the central protagonist in her narrative. Testimonies characterised by anecdotes are often very dramatic and the use of anecdotes is often assumed to be the mark of a good

[43] B1475 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[44] M1979 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[45] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004, p. 9.
[46] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, p. 8.

storyteller. Anecdotal memory is characteristically delivered in first person narration, where the narrator constructs herself/himself as the central protagonist. Simon Dentith has noted that anecdotal memory discourse may have a specific function in working-class autobiography, acting as 'a way of mediating between rawer, unformulated experience and more general or formulated truths; it does so by turning such truths into narrative and character.'[47] Dorothy composed an identity for herself as the rebellious schoolgirl character of the story, making her narrative a performance in the present. She felt good about herself in the interview situation while explaining how she used to subvert authority in the classroom by reading the *Girls' Crystal* under her desk. This is evident by her expressiveness, beginning to whisper and then coming to a crescendo when repeating 'I knew'. Simultaneously, she presented herself as good and as a rebel within the discourse available. She showed awareness, although did not say this specifically, of a 'perceived' concern of children reading story papers or substituting it for conventional schoolroom texts and placed the comics into a hierarchical order in relation to school reading texts. Yet, she introduced justification of her rebelling by including the teacher's voice in the narrative:

> *DB*: The teacher knew. You know, at one of the parents' time, she [the teacher] said 'I know Dorothy sits and reads under the desk, but' she said, 'she's reading and that's all that matters.' You know, so ah used to read the *Girls' Crystal, Picturegoer, Picture Post.*[48]

Dorothy created an image of herself as the daring schoolgirl heroine within her narrative by using both anecdotal evidence and immersing herself within the past. Dorothy recalled a discourse of adventure and intrigue surrounding the stories of schoolgirls she read as opposed to emphasising the boarding school environment as restrictive. The characters in the stories were active outside the traditional school and domestic setting of the house, sometimes in exotic countries. Although the *Girls' Crystal* is viewed as being schoolgirl fiction with a considerable amount of the stories based around boarding school antics, Dorothy identified the genre as action

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[47] Dentith, 'Contemporary Working-class Autobiography', p. 71.
[48] Ibid., p. 8

and adventure, 'they would meet up and have adventures.' The schoolgirl papers offered some readers fantasies of power and action outside their own experience.

Both Irene and Dorothy used variations of the phrase 'they were doing things' to describe the action in the schoolgirl stories:

> *DB*: 'They would meet up and have adventures. Very naïve things, you know, but they were *doing things*.'
>
> *IY*: 'Ah could see ma self in a boarding school, y'know and doing all these things'.

Marie-Françoise Chanfrault Duchet explains that refrains such as 'It was natural' or 'We were obliged to' are formal markers in a narrative that emphasise a relationship between the self and the social sphere. These refrains can express conflict or agreement with the discourse of the time.[49] With this in mind Dorothy and Irene's' stress on the phrase *'doing things'* suggested that this material was the first material they had come across that placed female heroines dynamically at the centre of the action in comparison to both other material they had read or their own experiences of growing up.

Other refrains, which showed the schoolgirl papers presented a discourse that transcended the readers' experiences in a positive way, were apparent throughout these women's narratives. Dorothy explained that as a reader she 'wanted just a wee bit more, I'll not say romance a wee bit more kind of *life* outside of the school situation'.[50] Jean explained 'that [the *School Friend*] gave you a wee bit about life that you didn't really know much about.' [51] Dorothy was reluctant to say romance and opted instead to use the word life. She was careful not to undermine women's or girls' reading experiences and their changing position in a period that, she suggested, was ambivalent towards women's place in society. She appeared to be conscious of and acknowledged the idea that romance could be viewed as a flimsy term in relation to girls' story papers and magazines. Both narrators recalled that stories were set in other places, not just the domestic setting of the boarding school or the home. The

[49] M. Chanfrault-Duchet 'Narrative Structures, Social Models and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story' in Gluck & Patai (eds.), *Women's Words*, p. 79.
[50] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, p. 8.
[51] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003.

schoolgirl discourse allowed for some narrators to experience a sense of adventure and autonomy that they would not normally have experienced within the period they grew up. These narrators acknowledged that the stories did not reflect their own experiences. Yet 'in spite of this, or because of this' as one Mass-Observation correspondent wrote 'I found these stories absolutely fascinating. They were a real form of escapism.'[52] As often in memories of cinema-going, escapism and fantasy emerged in the women's narratives of reading experiences.

Escapism and Fantasy

With the luxury of time and distance from childhood many of the narrators began to talk of past desire and dreams. The theme of escapism was apparent in several of the women's testimonies, which they related to the period and area they grew up in. The feeling of escapism the female narrators recalled experiencing by reading comics differed to the escapism that the male narrators detailed. The female narrators focused on what they felt they were escaping to when they read schoolgirl or older women's magazines and emphasised wishes for the characters' clothes, hairstyles or school.

As already detailed the narrators placed themselves as young girls within a specific historical time and place in their oral testimony. This was necessary in order for them to express how and why their reading allowed them to escape this. Elizabeth Baine's narrative was an example of this. At the beginning of the interview Elizabeth had been asked if her father had ever gone on strike when he worked in the shipyards in Govan:

> *HY*: Was your father ever out of work at all?
> *EB*: Out of work? No. Sometimes there was no overtime, so the wages werenay big but he was always in the shipyard Fairfield's shipyard, always.
> *HY*: What about when there was maybe strike action, was he ever involved in strikes at all?

[52] L1691 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2

EB: He never got involved with them personally. He just had to, if they said strike, he had to do what the rest were doing you know.[53]

At this point her narrative did not include herself and she answered the questions without emphasising how she or the rest of the family were affected when her father was on strike from the shipyard. When asked later on in the interview if she identified with the stories in her comics, she placed herself within the context of the strikes her father was involved in and how her reading facilitated and fulfilled her wishes at that point in time:

HY: Did you identify with them [schoolgirl boarding stories]?

EB: No ah used to just kid on that was me, ah used to wish it was me doing the things that they did.

HY: Why did you wish it was you?

EB: I just wanted something better, have a room of my own, ah would have loved that. But it wasn't to be. I wasn't unhappy. It wasn't *just exactly* poverty because ma father always worked you know. Sometimes on strike, maybe unemployed for three months and that was a big blow because there was no money coming in but we just had to live with it.[54]

The desire to be occasionally 'taken out of oneself' and your situation was also acknowledged by Jean Rankine:

HY: Why did you buy them?

JR: I think it was something that you felt you were escaping from, the hum drum of life. And reading that you felt you were escaping to a good life.

HY: Could you expand a little bit more on that for me?

JR: Well, having been brought up, I was brought up with a maiden aunt and things were tight when I was very young when you came in you changed out of your clothes and put on old clothes. I didn't particularly like putting on clothes

[53] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004, p. 4.
[54] Ibid., p. 9.

> that had darns in the elbows and things like that so I think probably they seemed to have money to do things that you, you know that I wasn't able to do, not that I was envious in anyway but it was just excitement that they were doing something that I would have liked to have done.[55]

Elizabeth's and Jean's explanations were interesting for a number of reasons. Both narrators were eventually very frank about how the stories of boarding school contrasted to their own life. They acknowledged and compared their families' situation of 'making do' with what they perceived to have been the glamour of the stories, yet emphasised how their own circumstances were never all that bad ('It wasn't *just exactly* poverty'). They highlighted the sense of leaving behind one world and entering another ('you felt you were escaping from, the hum drum of life') and there was a feeling that life was better while reading the comics ('And reading that, you felt you were escaping to a good life').[56]

Both women's narratives were very much located within their own perceptions and memories and not attached to a 'popular memory' of comic reading. Jean shifted between using the first and second person while talking, and at one point intentionally corrected herself ('they seemed to have money to do things that *you*, you know, that *I* wasn't able to do'). By doing so she repositioned and implicated herself in her narrative rather than just emphasising a possible popular memory of why working-class girls read these comics. When initially asked about what comics she had read as a young girl, Elizabeth had explained 'we used to get comics and girls' books you know, cheap magazines, paper backs.' When asked if she could recall what they were called she replied, 'no anything special ma mind wont go back that far.'[57] Her initial reluctance to return to the past supported her later 'wish' narrative of being the characters and suggests that her memories were very much in and indeed for the present moment of narration rather than being attached to popular memory.

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[55] Jean Rankine, 9 October, 2003, p. 2

[56] Jackie Stacey notes that women experienced similar feelings of escapism when they attended the cinema in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, *Star Gazing*, pp. 90-3, 96-7.

[57] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004, p. 5

While some narrators explained that they would have liked to have been the characters in the stories, one narrator detailed how she acted out her fantasy. Katherine Dixon was born in 1943 in the Anniesland area of Glasgow, the youngest of three children. Her father was a labourer in the shipyards, who often struggled to get work, and her mother worked in a grocers shop until she was married in 1933. I have quoted Katherine at length here as the detail of her memory is contrasted by her sharp self-reflection at the end of the quote. When asked about the *Girls' Crystal* and *School Friend*, Katherine exclaimed

> *KD*: *Oh loved them!*
>
> *HY*: What was it about those that you loved?
>
> *KD*: Oh, really just the sheer make believe. The *School Friend* had 'The Silent Three' on the front. That was the, the characters that we really loved, 'The Silent Three', who by donning their, their cloaks, the grey cloaks with their hoods could just about go anywhere and solve any problem. And I remember that after the war that coupons were still on clothing and mum and... mum and dad said they were going to get us raincoats and ah said 'oh that's wonderful,' because my friend had just got one which almost looked like poplin as we know it today, with a beautiful hood and my dad came home and he said 'I got you a lovely grey raincoat with hoods' and we thought oh brilliant and when we got them they were the hardest grey rigid rubber (laughs) and we could hardly get the hoods to stay up because they were *so* rigid. So I remember my girlfriend and my sister and I, we were 'The Silent Three' going to school with the, we would put our hoods up and that turned us in... again.... It was just escapism, you know, although I'm saying we dressed up as them it wasn't that you really wanted to be them it was just a bit of escapism.[58]

[58] Katherine Dixon , 21 February 2004, p. 13.

Katherine detailed the childhood game of make-believe she and her friends used to play through the physical identification of characters with costumes such as raincoats. The mystery of 'The Silent Three' whose cloaks and hoods were central to their storyline contrasted with the comical image of Katherine's rubber raincoat, whose hood refused to stay up. Pretending to be particular characters from magazines extended the private act of reading to involve other people in a collective game. For example, looking for adventure as a young schoolgirl in 1930s Dunfermline Edith Ruddick wrote in her *Theatrical Autobiography* that 'I allied myself to the character of Polly Linton, the Madcap of The Lower Fourth. My real-life ally was Mina Brown and together we broke a lot of rules.'[59]

There is constant movement between past and present in all of these narratives about escapism and fantasy, as memories of past activities and feelings are brought back into the present. Katherine used memory to bridge the past and the present from the perspective of the present ('looked like poplin as we know it today'). By doing so she placed time in her narrative in the manner of what Alessandro Portelli calls 'shuttlework': the story was being told with the present in mind.[60] In contrast to Elizabeth and Jean who discussed the escapism they experienced from reading in positive terms, Katherine disregarded her memories of acting out her favourite stories. The narrator stopped abruptly in her memory of acting out 'The Silent Three' ('we would put our hoods up and that turned us in... again... it was just escapism'). She dismissed this 'girlish nonsense' by justifying it as escapism, something that belonged in the past. Similarly, a Mass-Observation correspondent commented that 'the more modern style of girls' magazines, with their realistic and down to earth approach to today's matters, makes me feel relieved. They are worth so much more than the escapist, non-challenging stuff we got.'[61] By rejecting the escapism of the story papers and comics both Katherine and the Mass-Observation correspondent commented on the status of the material both in the past and in the present.

[59] E. Ruddick, *My Mother's Daughter. A Theatrical Autobiography* (Braunton, 1995), p. 12.
[60] A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, And Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York, 1991), p. 65.
[61] B1475 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2

Rejection of Schoolgirl Femininities and Reading Boys' Comics Instead

While some narrators embraced the discourse and escapism of schoolgirl story papers and utilised the myth to construct their narratives, other narrators rejected schoolgirl femininities in their accounts. As was noted in Chapter Three the elementary schoolgirl papers, the *School Friend* and the *Girls' Crystal* did not specifically identify an audience by class. However, the stories were set in an environment which emphasised a distinction between working and middle class and were outside the majority of readers' experiences. A number of the women interviewed for this project who read the *School Friend* and the *Girls' Crystal* came from working-class families and emphasised how these publications did not compare with their own experiences of class, background or opportunity. Unlike the women who enjoyed the gap between reality and make-believe this was a problem for other readers.

When asked why she liked reading the *Girls' Crystal*, Margaret Kelly did not answer the question. Instead she explained why reading the *Girls' Crystal* did not correlate with her experience of growing up in the Govan area of Glasgow in the 1930s and 1940s:

> *MK*: It was really a brain washing time if you really want to know when ah think about it. Because they weren't all working-class. They were all at boarding school and they all had adventures. It was fantasyland as far as we were concerned honey. When ah look back on it, it really, it didn't really touch our lives, it was like a dream or something like that. It was all at boarding school and they had midnight feasts out in the ground, having adventures and oh maybe somebody got stuck in a lake or things like that. But it took you out yourself, it was a fantasy. But it was not, certainly nothing to do with life as it was when we were young. We probably wouldn't have read if it was. Y'know, it was, you followed up their adventures from one week to the other. The *Girls' Crystal* that was a wee bit older, they were

thinking about going onto university, ah mean come on in
our age, what youngster got to university?[62]

In comparison to the narrators who recalled the adventure narrative of schoolgirl papers as positive, Margaret questioned the power these publications had on her as a reader ('It was a brainwashing time'). The narrator valued the difference she experienced when reading the *Girls' Crystal.* Yet while she acknowledged the escapism and fantasy she experienced ('it took you out yourself') she rebelled against the schoolgirl heroine of the time and placed herself outside the approved discourse of the time. Gillian Bayne, born in 1937 in the Kelvinside area of Glasgow also recalled that

> *GB*: They [the characters] all went to very good schools and they were very well brought up and things like that but even I knew that they were a step away from the life that I lead, you know, you could tell, you just knew, by their attitude and things like that you know.[63]

Class awareness was strongly evident throughout the narratives collected. Both Margaret and Gillian compared and acknowledged the contrast between the schoolgirl characters and their own lives in Glasgow ('they were a step away from the life that I lead'). The narrators took time during the interview to position themselves within a class in relation to the class they perceived the characters in the stories to be. Margaret explained that comics were 'nothing to do with life as it was when we were young. We probably wouldn't have read if it was.' This was an observation about a historical moment thanks to the benefit of hindsight. Positioning of the narrator was a tool used within the oral testimony by all of the narrators in order to understand and convey their perceptions of their reading habits. She positioned herself within the memories of her reading and explained why she felt it did not reflect her own experiences. The narrator introduced her class position into the testimony herself. She was keen to highlight that the *Girls' Crystal* did not reflect her own life and acknowledged that it was a 'fantasyland'.

The women who rejected the schoolgirl story papers and comics and myth of autonomy often employed a gendered myth about reading material for girls which

[62] Margaret Kelly, 4 May 2004, p. 11.
[63] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 19.

placed girls' story papers and comics low down in the hierarchical status of reading. The readers also emphasised how they recalled that the characters and tales within the girls' stories conformed to the traditional school tale of instruction in respectable femininity. When asked if she could remember the stories from the *School Friend*, the *Girls' Crystal* or *Girl*, Gilllian Bayne recalled that 'They were mostly about girls doing good deeds, girls at boarding school, things like that. Very... you know, they were just silly.'[64] By using the word 'silly', the narrator inferred simultaneously that the stories did not reflect reality. She identified the schoolgirl heroine as weak. Gillian, an avid *Eagle* reader, 'bought the *Girl* when it came out but' she noted 'it was a bit too fluffy for me at times.'[65]

The majority of the women narrators identified their childhood reading material as gender specific. Jean Rankine who never read boys comics recalled that 'they certainly had boys' books, the *Rover*, you know magazines, the *Rover* and various things like that. That was for boys and that was for girls, you know.'[66] Similarly, a Mass-Observation correspondent born in 1930 recalled that 'Sometimes I would read their [her brothers'] comics but they were definitely for boys alone.'[67] Gillian Bayne detailed a more subtle understanding of the readership of the *Eagle*: 'The boys thought it was a boy's paper. The girls read it, they knew it was a boy's paper but they still read it, a sort of subtle difference.'[68]

The reasons why young girls read comics intended for a male audience varied amongst these narrators. To some, boys' comics were more interesting than the female genre as they involved adventure in foreign countries and were not stuck in the boarding school genre traditionally featured in girls' schoolgirl papers:

> *IA*: The boys' ones were always more exciting than the girls' ones because the girls were all the chalet school and things like that, and the boarding school which was a snobby kind of English thing.[69]

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[64] Ibid., pp. 18-19.
[65] Gillian Bayne, Childhood Reading Questionnaire, 27 June 2003.
[66] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 16.
[67] H260 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[68] Gillian Bayne, 8 March 2004, p. 8.
[69] Iris Adams, 23 September 2003, p. 16.

> *HY*: Did you read your brothers' *Rover* and *Hotspur*?
> *MK*: If I was really stuck I did. And they were a bit better than the girls' things because it wasn't all this boarding house things. It was a couple of young guys out on an adventure.[70]

> *DB*: I suppose I quite liked the kind of adventure stories because boys' comics, their stories were set in different places throughout the world and that's what interested me in the *Wizard* and the *Adventure*, they were climbing up in the Rockies or they were hacking their way through the jungle or they were in Nepal or that was, I wasn't interested they had the things about sports you know, playing football, that still leaves me cold, so I wouldn't read these.[71]

Iris and Margaret found boys' comics such as the *Rover* and the *Wizard* more exciting and accessible compared to story papers or comics intended for girls. Using the first person narrative Dorothy located herself within her account as the reader who had choices to make. She was an avid reader who knew what she liked to read. The narrator compared the past with the present to locate herself as a reader with preferences in the present ('that still leaves me cold').

Gillian Bayne emphasised how the different setting of the stories in the *Eagle* took her out of her normal surroundings. Gillian's father died in 1946. Her mother, a teacher, was left with five daughters to bring up. Gillian also attended an all girl fee-paying school. 'This [the *Eagle*] was [pause four seconds] it made you think beyond of the environment that you actually lived in, in an odd kind of a way. You know, living in an all female household and all going to an all girl school.'[72] Similarly, Dorothy Bell recalled that boys' comics were 'broadening your horizons a bit.'[73] The 'horizons' Dorothy referred to in this statement were not obvious. She could have meant young girls' horizons, the horizons beyond the east end of Glasgow, a young

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[70] Margaret Kelly, 4 May 2004, p. 12.
[71] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, p. 14.
[72] Gillian Bayne, 8 March 2004, p. 4.
[73] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, p. 8.

woman's horizons or she possibly meant pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable, respectably feminine. Despite this both statements emphasised distance and boundaries that the narrators felt they were overcoming or were being opened up to them by reading material that was meant for boys.

The boys' genre was considered by some female narrators to be more relevant to their experiences of growing up during or just after the Second World War. A Mass-Observation correspondent born in 1931 noted that 'no boy would be seen reading "*Girls Crystal*" but some girls read the Boys comics because they had real stories in them and everyone was interested in planes, and tanks and spies as we were at war.'[74] Emily Turner recalled reading a series in the *Wizard* about the 'Deathless Men fighting the Nazis' and continued to contextualise her reading:

> You've got to remember the war had only finished about five years, six years before I started to read this. There was still rationing on. In fact the first term of boarding school I took my rationing book with me. That didn't finish until the end of fifty-three. So there was still a lot going on about the war.[75]

Despite acknowledging that they read boys comics when they were younger and describing how they pushed back the gendered boundaries of reading material some narrators struggled to maintain identities of themselves as female readers of boys comics. Dorothy Bell was defensive when asked why she read boys comics. She quickly interjected the interviewer's question with a defensive answer ('because ma brother got them'). Despite establishing herself as an active reader, who made decisions and knew what she liked to read, she implied that because boys' comics were there she read them; it was not an active choice. Dorothy preferred to construct an identity for herself that was comfortable within the discourse of the time being remembered by emphasising the gender stereotyping of children's popular reading ('they were boys' things, they were not for me.')

Another narrator, Doreen Thomson born in Cowdenbeath in Fife in 1939 also read the *Eagle* as a young girl. Her husband, Alex, was interviewed for the project and recommended Doreen as a potential narrator. During his interview he had

[74] B1898 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[75] Emily Turner, 28 October, 2003, p. 9.

mentioned that his wife had read the *Eagle* as a young girl within the context of explaining that he did not think the *Eagle* would have appealed to girls. Alex's knowledge that his wife had read the *Eagle* suggested that the couple had previously discussed their childhood experiences of reading comics and story papers. Because he recalled Doreen had read the *Eagle*, I assumed she had chosen to read the comic and enjoyed it. However, Doreen explained during her interview that she read her 'tomboyish' friend's copies of the *Eagle* and did not enjoy it:

> *DT*: The only thing I remember about the *Eagle* was Dan Dare. And I read it I suppose... I'm not interested in sci-fi, sci-fi leaves me cold. And I used to think Dan Dare was sci-fi, I mean I suppose it was, 21st century. Still leaves me cold. I just didn't care for the sci-fi, the aliens I mean, I thought the aliens were sometimes, I didn't like the look of them. I thought they were repulsive, ugghh![76]

Doreen continued to compose a narrative about why her girl friend read the *Eagle*: 'I think comics in those days were gender specific quite definitely. [Pause three seconds] I think, I suppose because she was a tomboy I didn't think it was strange but I used to wonder why she read it.'[77] Her narrative focused on the comparison between her 'tomboyish' friend's choices of reading material and her own which she defined within gendered terms. Doreen continued to compose a narrative that was safe and she was comfortable with telling within the boundaries of the gender discourse of the time being remembered.

Reading Romance into Schoolgirl Fiction

Tinkler suggests that 'the lack of romantic interest in schoolgirl papers was seemingly inconsistent with the experience and interests of school-aged girls, particularly those of working-class girls'.[78] Boyfriends were a growing interest and area of anxiety for magazine readers who corresponded with *Girl* magazine in the early 1950s (see Chapter Three). However, most notably, papers for elementary schoolgirls focused almost exclusively on friendships and also rivalries between girls

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[76] Doreen Thomson, 21 February 2003, p. 6.
[77] Ibid., p. 7.
[78] Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, p. 132.

while those for older women were preoccupied with romantic encounters between the sexes, courtship and marriage. In contrast to boys' comics which 'left me cold' Jean Rankine and Doreen Thomson both emphasised the traditional fairytale ending as something they looked for in their reading of girls' comics and story papers:

> *JR*: I think my stories I always wanted them with happy endings (laughing).[79]

> *DT*: I'm a bit of an escapist in that I'm looking for a happier ending.[80]

Dorothy Bell also employed the romance genre in her narrative when recalling the male characters in the *Girls' Crystal*:

> *DB*: Well, you see in the *Girls' Crystal* there was always one that was blonde and one that was dark haired and they were always good looking, nice chaps, mannerly, always looked after the girls, you know, just like "you stay here and I'll go and investigate this." So the boys in the *Girls' Crystal*, I'm sorry to keep going on about the *Girls' Crystal*, but I loved it, but they looked after the girls. There was never any mention of marriage or anything in this or love, that was sissy stuff but you always had the feeling that they would eventually go and get married, they were just so right for each other. As a group they were all good chaps and you know looked after the damsels in distress and just the kind of boy you wanted to know.

Although Dorothy admitted according to her memory there was no story line of love in the *Girls' Crystal* her description of the male characters was in line with the romance genre. The narrator adopted the use of key phrases that would be used in the romance genre: ('damsel in distress', 'the kind of boy you wanted to know'). The male characters fitted the ideal of a good husband: mannerly, good-looking, nice, chivalrous, protective heroes. Although the narrator suggested that these stories were

[79] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 16.
[80] Doreen Thomson, 21 February 2003, p. 2.

devoid of 'sissy stuff', she would imagine the fairy tale ending, as 'they were just so right for each other.' Her reading memory adopted the gendered genre and language of the reading material when recalled. What was apparent from the above excerpts was that some readers imposed a romantic narrative onto the schoolgirl fiction even if one was not apparent within the storyline. These women were able to project well composed identities for themselves within the discourse of femininity, as romance was and is assumed to be a feminine objective. However, other narrators and Mass-Observation correspondents struggled to compose past reading identities for themselves due to present discourses surrounding girls reading material.

The telling of a narrative takes place within the present. A meaning is conferred onto the past experience in relation to the present, in order to contribute to the meaning of the past. Doreen Thomson explained that

> *DT*: Kids nowadays would poo poo it [the *School Friend*] because it was so naïve, genuine, simple, you know. There was no instruction on how to cope with boyfriends, no questions and answers page or anything like that. Oh definitely not. Nothing about how to use make-up, ah mean you just didn't use make up in those days.[81]

Some Mass-Observation correspondents also compared magazines for girls and women of the 1940s and 1950s with magazines for young girls today and simultaneously invoked past and present discourses of femininity: 'They were always counselling frugality, rather than the "over the top" of today'; 'They didn't have the sort of advice etc that is in them now! It has come full circle – now I feel embarrassed to read the front covers giving the subjects covered inside'; 'In those days they were no where near as explicit as they are these days.'[82] These Mass-Observation replies to the directive were short and concise suggesting the correspondents were unable or unwilling to consider composing past identities for themselves as readers of girls' story papers or comics. A sense of loss infused some of the women's narratives usually expressed by the past/present trope as a comparison between then and now: magazines today are too preoccupied with consumption and sex; magazines then were safe and respectable.

[81] Doreen Thomson, 21 February 2003, p. 8.
[82] C2654; P1637; F1373 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2

Part 2: Girls Reading Women's Magazines

Changing Life-Cycles

Jackie Stacey notes that 'Remembrance is simultaneously an acknowledgment of the loss of those times and a means of guarding against their complete loss.'[83] The nostalgia evoked in some of the women's memories may be for former feminine identities, for the period itself or for the reading material of the time. I asked Irene Young why reading the *Girls' Crystal* and *School Friend* was such a vivid memory for her. I have quoted her narrative at length as she demonstrated how the life cycle impacted on her experiences and subsequent memories of reading:

> *IY*: I think it's just because it was a nice time in my life. It was in fact, it was just lovely, you know, ah don't remember having any *worries* or...No. But that was a special time, just a special, special time when your, ah think your just on *the verge* of becoming a full blown adult you know with all the adult responsibilities but it was just that time before you're no just a child either, you know what ah mean and your begging to 'Oh let me get out there' you know ah think that's why I remember them so much [...] Obviously when you get older things, your family and your that's the highlight of your life then but I'm talking for just me ...when ah, before ah had any responsibilities or anything that's really what it reminds me of, you know.[84]

The concept of 'treasured memories' has been used to refer to memories people have in which they have a particular personal investment.[85] Irene was the narrator who, as was mentioned in Chapter One, highlighted her concern about seeing original copies of *Girls' Crystal* and *School Friend* that I took to the interview because she did not want to be disappointed. The above excerpt emphasised her concern not to upset or lose the 'treasured memories' she possessed of reading schoolgirl story papers or what they meant to her at the time. To Irene her 'treasured memories' represented and conserved a past self ('just on the verge of becoming a full blown adult').

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[83] Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p. 153.
[84] Irene Young, 29 March 2004, p. 5.
[85] Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p. 151.

Memories of adolescence, as Sally Alexander points out, bear the weight of possibility. Readdressing those memories in the present may emphasise that the dreams of a better life or of a more beautiful self were not achieved. What is lost with age is that space of possibility that pervades the adolescent's 'intense wondering about what she might become.'[86] The investment Irene made in her treasured memories of reading schoolgirl story papers was about her own transformative moment from girlhood to womanhood.

A Mass-Observation fieldworker noted in 1947 that 'Some of the [school] girls have those *Women's Own* and *Home and Beauty* – sometimes they have them with them – I expect they borrow them from their mothers.'[87] Another contemporary observer acknowledged that publishers of women's magazines knew how to attract readers with stories of home life and love. This subsequently explained 'the great attraction of this reading matter for the adolescent girl whose interests are principally concerned with home life, home and school and love.'[88] Both of these observations emphasised a blur between the definition of girlhood and womanhood leisure practices. Historian Claire Langhamer employs oral testimony and feminist theory in order to readdress the previously held male, wage-earner model of leisure.[89] For the women that Langhamer interviewed the concept of 'leisure' was experienced differently during distinct periods of their lives. The life cycle was pivotal to how women in Manchester experienced 'leisure'.[90] Youth was considered a period of 'legitimate' leisure when the women had no responsibilities or duty to others and when they felt they had in fact 'earned' their leisure time. Once married the freedom and independence previously associated with leisure was replaced with duty and service to their new families. The life-cycle is also an important concept when considering girls' reading habits and exploring how young women's experiences of reading developed and changed. Reading older women's magazines blurred the

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[86] S. Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and 1930s', in G. S. Jones & D. Feldman, (eds.), *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations Since 1800* (London, 1989), p. 257.
[87] File Report 2545B 'A Report on Penguin World' December 1947, p. 205.
[88] Dr Wall, *The Adolescent Girl*, p. 106, cited in Fenwick 'Periodicals and Adolescent Girls', p. 37
[89] C. Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920 – 1960* (Manchester, 2000).
[90] C. Langhamer, 'Towards a Feminist Framework for the History of Women's Leisure, 1920 – 60' in A. Gallagher, C. Lubelska & L. Ryan (eds.), *Re-presenting the Past: Women and History* (Harlow, 2001), p. 209.

distinct periods of girlhood and womanhood for some of the narrators interviewed for this project and defined the transition from girlhood to womanhood for others.

'*Woman* and *Woman's Own* were initially conceived as service magazines for lower middle-class housewives.'[91] Mary Grieves, the editor of *Woman* in the 1930s, explained that it was important that readers 'should see her own life reflected in the pages not the life of some luckier, richer, clever' woman.[92] However, from interviews conducted for this thesis it has become apparent that schoolgirls were reading their mothers, aunties or grandmothers' copies and buying these magazines by themselves. The breadth of magazines read by the women from the age of eleven in some cases included *The People's Friend, Woman, Woman's Weekly, Woman's Own, Red Letter, Red Star, Secrets* and *SHE.* Seven of the women interviewed for this project recalled regularly reading magazines intended for young women or mothers when they were young girls. This section aims to place women's reading in an active world of negotiation. The women interviewed used these magazines to traverse the line between modern femininity and challenge the previous traditional discourse of femininity.

Acquiring Women's Magazines

The rituals of sharing networks through which young girls swapped schoolgirl story papers and comics with each other were discussed earlier in this chapter. A Mass-Observation correspondent born in 1923 recalled the network her aunt devised for sharing women's magazines among her group of friends:

> My aunt ran a kind of magazine club, a number of friends of my aunt including my mother paid a small sum every year, and every month she bought a good magazine for each member, covered them in Baine paper, stitched the cover on with thin string, sometimes I would be given the pleasant job of delivering them round the village, I can't remember all the titles, but *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman's Journal* were among them, at the end of the year, all were collected

[91] D. Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918 – 1939* (London, 1989), p. 15.
[92] Grieve, *Millions Made My Story*, p. 90.

together and shared out between the subscribers. I hope she made a bit of money out of it, because it entailed quite a lot of work.[93]

The swapping network devised by this correspondent's aunt represented a distinct reading community that women paid to be a part of. Both this network and the previous networks described earlier in this chapter were developed between readers of similar age and interest groups, notably schoolgirls swapped with schoolgirls and women participated in reading groups with other women possibly with similar interests. These two groups of female readers represent easily definable and distinct points on the life course of womanhood.

Networks between older women and young girls also facilitated the transfer of material and information and created another distinct reading network. Both Dorothy Bell and Jean Rankine received women's magazines from older women. Dorothy explained that she received the *Red Letter* and *Red Star* directly from older girls.[94] Jean recalled that she read her aunt's magazines secretly: 'It wasn't sneaking reading because I always read lying face down in the carpet'. She continued to explain that 'from the age of eleven I was starting to read you know, the *Red Letter.* I read quite a lot of the paper magazines that an aunt had, you know, she was a spinster and whether she liked, you know, the sort of romantic ones and plus the *Secrets* and this kind of thing.'[95] When asked who she thought the *Red Letter* and *Secrets* were aimed at Jean replied '*Oh I would say they were for young women!*'

HY: Why?

JR: Well they were all kind of love stories you know and the *Secrets* they had quite a lot of ...not murder stories you know but sort of crime stories that were in it but the other ones I would say were more love stories which I would say in my day you, you wouldn't have a courtship before you were about eighteen.[96]

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[93] H266, Autumn Directive 2003, part 2

[94] A female Mass-Observation correspondent, B1898, born in 1931 also recalled the *Red Letter* and *Red Star* 'were passed from neighbour to neighbour till they fell to bits.' Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.

[95] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 19.

[96] Jean Rankine, 9 October 2003, pp. 3-4.

Dorothy also quickly progressed from reading the *Girls' Crystal* to the *Red Letter*. She continued to explain: 'And then there was this [laughs] the *Red Letter* it was called, and I mean people actually *kissed* in this and went *to the dancing* in the stories.'[97] Both narrators blurred the discourse of femininity within their narratives. The definition between girlhood and womanhood was hazy. The young women's magazines were resplendent with love stories which fitted snugly within the traditional discourse of femininity, and as Jean pointed out, young women were not supposed to start courting until they were eighteen. Yet, both women were reading about love and issues of courting at the age of eleven:

> *DB*: Och I'd be what, when I could get ma hands on one. Trying to think who I got them from. Usually an older girl would say 'Here do you want to read this?' Maybe be what? Eleven? Twelve. *But you have to* remember that when we were eleven and twelve we were still wee girls. I mean when I was fourteen I was still wearing socks and out playing football... in the street. You know?[98]

Dorothy changed her narrative from the first person quickly into the second person emphasising the past/present mode of narration, commenting on the present in relation to the past. She situated her narrative in the present time of the recording ('*But you have to remember* that when we were eleven and twelve we were still wee girls.') By doing so she commented on young girls today growing up in comparison to when she was growing up and implied a loss of childhood innocence. She also introduced the interviewer's subjectivity into the narrative, as a younger woman who she felt was perhaps able to sympathise. Ambiguity arose in the narrative, as she was only eleven when she was reading older women's magazines. Yet, the narrator negotiated a sense of composure for herself within the narrative by shifting back to the first person narration and reclaiming a sense of childhood innocence in comparison to reading about love in young women's magazines ('I mean when I was fourteen I was still wearing socks and out playing football... in the street').

As well as surreptitiously acquiring women's magazines some of the women remembered buying women's magazines themselves. Gillian Bayne recalled that

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[97] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, p. 8.
[98] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

> *GB*: We bought those [*Woman* and the *Woman's Own*] when we were teenagers. Ah remember we used to put them in the drawer, came in the house and put them in your wardrobe drawer out the way because you weren't very sure if your mother would approve of them you know.[99]

The women's memories of their introduction and acquisition of older women's magazines contained perceptions of how the magazines were viewed both at the time of reading and also at the time of recollection. Dorothy's memory of receiving older women's magazines was not problematic as some older girl would simply pass on the material to a younger girl; Jean acknowledged that the content of the material was perceived to be for older girls or young women, hence her recollection was couched in terms that suggested she was not supposed to read it; while Gillian recalled a sense of doing something that she was not supposed to. Reading covertly, hiding magazines and belonging to a network were all strategies employed by the narrators to acquire older women's magazines. Using such methods suggests that these women wanted to read these magazines. By reading magazines aimed at older women these narrators blurred the definition between girlhood and womanhood by crossing a boundary.

In contrast another narrator, Irene Young, experienced a distinct gap between girlhood and womanhood evidenced by her reading material. Like the other narrators, Irene also read older women's magazines such as *Red Letter* and *The People's Friend* at the age of sixteen yet she suggested that this was not her choice.[100] When asked if she read her mother's magazines when she was younger Irene explained that she had not because 'You wouldnae have done anything that your mother did, you know, or taken up anything that your mum did, least ah wouldn't have anyway. She was too old.' [101] Irene highlighted a gap between how she perceived her mother, as an older, traditional woman and herself, a young girl. Irene explained that she had left school at the age of fifteen and then went on to complete a shorthand and typing course. She was then married and became pregnant

[99] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 19.
[100] A female Mass-Observation correspondent, C2654, born in 1942 in Birmingham recalled that 'comics, magazines and newspapers were passed from house to house so we all had the benefit of them. What we read was not necessarily our own choice.' Autumn Directive 2003, part 2.
[101] Irene Young, 16 February 2004, p. 16.

at the age of sixteen with the first of her three children. Irene explained how her reading practices had progressed in her life: 'It's funny how your reading kind of develops because ah went on from there [the *Girl* and the *Girls' Crystal*] to read Enid Blyton books and then from there when ah got married first, his old granny used to give me *The People's Friend*.'[102] In contrast to the other women interviewed Irene did not actively choose to read older women's magazines. She did not secretly read, buy or hide them. She continued to explain that

> *IY*: If ah hadn't been married then ah don't think ah would have read these ones, it was only because his gran gave them to me and I read them, that ah kinda got into them. But if I had been still goin' about wi' ma pals and all that, *there's no way* ah would have read them no way ah would have even have *looked* at them far less read them, you know that wasnae the thing to dó for goodness sake, no. It was only because she used to hand them on to me [whispers].[103]

The shift from girlhood to womanhood for Irene was represented by the change in reading material. The narrator's grandmother-in-law perceived this shift, indicated by Irene's marriage and pregnancy, and started to pass *The People's Friend* on to her. This network of sharing introduced again the idea of women passing knowledge and information on and maintaining women's communities through the dissemination of women's magazines, a network of information and possible help. The magazines could have been escapism perhaps from the household tasks that Irene was about to have to take on as an expecting mother and new wife. Irene became part of a women's network which she had not pursued herself.

Re-constructing the Romance of Femininity

The women's narratives of reading pivoted around experiences of growing up. As one Mass-Observation correspondent wrote reading older women's magazines 'was the grown up thing to do.'[104] The narrators often juxtaposed their own lifestyle with those presented in the magazines that they read. They placed their

[102] Ibid., p. 13.
[103] Irene Young, 29 March 2004, p. 2.
[104] K310 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2

reading material in the public world of relationships, sex, and consumer durables in contrast to their experiences as single, non-sexually aware, financially insecure young girls. Their memories of girlhood and growing up were placed within the discourse of the 1950s teenage boom. Gillian Bayne explained why she hid her copies of *Woman* and *Woman's Own* from her mother:

> *GB*: *Well*, you know they raised sort of interesting topics sometimes, you didn't quite know about, you know, talked about things, about sex and of course [whispers] ma mother would never ever, ever talk about anything like that.[105]

In the above excerpt the narrator whispered at the point she explained her mother would not have approved of her reading. Whispering during the act of recalling memories accentuated the feeling of crossing a boundary within femininity from girlhood to womanhood and stressed the perceived cloak of mystery surrounding womanhood. Whispering created an air of secrecy. The narrator was speaking about a subject that was taboo when she was growing up. She was performing in the interview the feelings and emotions of secrecy that she had had to go through in the past when hiding the magazines. She perhaps lowered her voice in the interview situation because she was used to whispering about the topics in the magazines.

Similar narrative traits were evidenced in Dorothy Bell's testimony when she recalled the content of women's magazines:

> *DB*: There were other kinds of, there was *The People's Friend*. Now once you were old enough to read that, I mean that was really the breakthrough. That was going into more adult way of living. You were getting girls of eighteen and nineteen with boyfriends [pause four seconds] and you know, they chase, kiss and all this.

The narrator paused when recalling the content of these older women's magazines. The pause may represent a number of thought processes the narrator went through. It could represent the narrator's space for thinking about what she was going to say because she thought it was perhaps a risqué topic. Or she was possibly judging the interviewer's reaction to her introducing the topic of romance. Or she might have

[105] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 19.

been considering whether to continue. Could she discuss a sensitive issue with the interviewer?

Despite the caution these narrators took when discussing the content of the women's magazines they read when young girls, they emphasised a change in the discourse of femininity presented in the women's magazines. Both Gillian and Dorothy alluded to the same metaphor to explain why they read older women's magazines:

> *GB*: *Woman*, *Woman's Own*? *Well*, it was a [pause six seconds] it was opening a door to a different way of thinking than what you had already and it gave you ideas about what, about what you could do and what you couldn't do.[106]
>
> *DB*: I think they performed a useful function as I say in that they opened the door, *just to an inch*, for you to see.[107]

The metaphor of the 'opening door' suggests they were stepping out of one sphere into another, from girlhood to womanhood. The image of a door opening also breaks down ideas of barriers between the girlhood and womanhood, making the crossing easier. By extending the metaphor, the crossing was also controlled in the sense that this door was the only option. The style of these women's memories of growing up was more focused on the next phase of the life cycle. Although, there was some hesitancy within their narratives: Gillian paused for six seconds to compose her thoughts, and Dorothy used the word 'inch' to describe the speed the door opened. The gap between the ideal and the self and the bridging of this gap was the focus of these women's narratives at this point.

The narrative form traditionally associated with femininity is romance.[108] Irene Young used the romantic narrative to compose her memories: 'when I was young and ah, dreaming a bit ah would get married and ah would get married to really, you know really nice guy, which ah did in actual fact but you know it did

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[106] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 20.
[107] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, pp.16-7.
[108] J. Radford, (ed.), *The Progress of Romance. The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London, 1986).

influence you, yeah uh huh.'[109] Dorothy Bell also embraced the narrative of romance:

> *DB*: Well you see you had girls that would be... you know in the story they would be...you know in the story sitting in front of, and putting their lipstick on, and nylons... and going out on dates and meeting up with boyfriends, and maybe meeting somebody and sitting on the bus and...when ah think about it now, it was all so naive *but it was romance.* You know it was the kind of thing that you were seeing to a certain extent in the cinema. I mean I can only tell you my interpretation of all this but that was, the door to life just inching open for you a wee bit, wee glimpses about, that boys weren't just for hitting and punching and playing football with. You know? They did have other uses they could take you to the pictures, I mean girls in these magazines were *taken to the pictures* you know, you know and sitting in the best seats and holding hands and *"oh my mother won't approve of you"* kind of style. You know you got all this kind of *drama* as we saw it.[110]

The narrator placed the magazines in the past and in the present simultaneously, ('it was all so naïve *but it was romance*'). She also emphasised the step between childhood innocence (that she had previously stressed) and growing up. The narrator looked back and described how she remembered seeing the stories: exciting, glamorous, grown up, pushing boundaries of childhood into young adulthood, challenging parental authority. Dorothy explained that her reading material reflected what she saw in her neighbourhood:

> *DB*: and the kind of *Red Letter* type, it was showing you what the bigger girls, how the bigger girls behaved with their lipstick and getting their hair done and going on dates and everything but again it was, you saw other girls, older girls

[109] Irene Young, 29 March 2004, p. 3.
[110] Dorothy Bell, 25 November 2003, p. 9.

that lived round about you, going out all dressed up on dates.[111]

In her romantic narrative Dorothy presented herself as the heroine of her story that was about the heroines in the magazines. Her narrative stressed a tension and was structured like a romantic narrative. To begin with she described the act of preparing for a night out which was punctuated by the door opening. The conclusion was the actual date. The memory was not only structured like a romantic narrative but she employed stock dramatic phrases.

The glamour of the magazines attracted young girls. Film magazines had started to run features on fashion and makeup in the 1930s, while the women's press crossed over into the film world by running items on film stars and how to achieve their look.[112] One Mass-Observation correspondent recalled the excitement that came with '*Picturegoer* every week, with pictures and stories of the stars and their families.'[113] In Gillian Bayne's words the cheaper weekly women's magazines 'were much, much more up to date' with information on latest trends, fashions and styles than the monthly glossy magazines such as *Vogue*.[114] Jean Rankine emphasised that 'I would have liked to have been in their shoes. I thought it would be nice to have the things they were able to do financially, you know, that you never ever sort of managed to do yourself.'[115] The women's narratives and memories of reading women's magazines were based on their teenage years during which self-transformation and change were central to their desires.

The feminine ideal presented in the fiction of the magazines was supported by the information presented in articles on health and beauty. The narrators emphasised how the magazines presented knowledge and practical information that was important within the dominant discourse of femininity at the time. According to Gillian Bayne the *Woman's Own* was useful 'from the make up point of view and things like that, y'know, tips about how to, how to put on your makeup.'[116] Contributors to Jean McCrindle's and Shelia Rowbotham's *Dutiful Daughters*

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[111] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, p. 17.
[112] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 124.
[113] M2290 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[114] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, pp. 20-1.
[115] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 14.
[116] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 21.

detailed how women's magazines had been useful in learning about sex and menstruation. Fiona McFarlane born in the early 1930s in Glasgow explained that

> through reading women's magazines – they never did mention it [menstruation] in those days, this would be 1946 – 1947, it just wasn't mentioned – I gradually worked out that these periods must happen regularly, because look at all the advertisements for sanitary towels there were, and if it only happened once in a lifetime you wouldn't need this massive advertising campaign, and it was then I realised that this must happen regularly.[117]

Barbara Marsh, born in 1941 in Kingston Jamaica and moved to England in 1962, also explained how she learned about menstruation and sex from reading older women's books and magazines.[118] In her analysis of girl's reading habits Pearl Jephcott cited the experience of a seventeen-year-old 'daily' girl whose

> house is full of Women's Novels, The Moon Series and True Love Series. Two other brothers who work at the pit enjoy Randland Romances. The girl and her 19-year-old sister buy *Family Star*, *Red Letter*, *Silver Star*, *Lucky Star* and *Red Star Weekly*. The latter they like best of all. Their mother thinks that 'Nurse Elizabeth's Column' which gives advice on men as well as on personal hygiene, is useful for young girls to read.[119]

Some of the oral narrators and Mass-Observation correspondents who recalled reading the problem pages explained that they were unsure about what they were reading about and were not necessarily better informed after.[120] As one Mass-Observation correspondent put it 'We read the Agony Aunt's advice to readers from which we glimpsed in a shadowy sort of way the mysterious world of sex! [...] Most of us were interested in sex but confused by the information on the letters page.'[121]

[117] J. McCrindle & S. Rowbotham (eds.), *Dutiful Daughters: Women Talk about Their Lives* (London, 1977), p. 219.
[118] Ibid., pp. 247-8.
[119] Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, pp. 100-1.
[120] F1373 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[121] W2588 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2

The women interviewed initially acknowledged that they had either read or not read women's magazines when they were growing up. On one hand narratives such as Gillian Bayne's and Dorothy Bell's were vivid. Both narrators used numerous anecdotes to contextualise their stories of reading and support their opinions and placed themselves at the centre of their narratives. They both appeared to enjoy the opportunity to tell their stories and used various narrative techniques and motifs of storytelling. This suggests that they achieved 'composure' in both senses of the term. However, a number of other women did not compose such coherent narratives of their experiences of reading women's magazines when younger.

The women who detailed that they had read publications such as *Red Letter*, *Woman* and *Woman's Own* remembered generic formulas of stories and they recalled that the magazines carried basic information on health and beauty which they had found useful. However, when asked to recall the articles in more detail and the reasons why they used older women's magazines in this way a 'cultural silence' fell. Some of the narrators were unable to discuss why they read these magazines. Some of these women consistently deviated from discussing women's magazines to discuss other life experiences and topics important to them such as experiences of school, family-life and work. These women had been able to compose narratives about reading *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* whether they had accepted, negotiated or resisted them. However, when discussing older women's magazines their narratives began to be characterised by short, disrupted, incoherent statements followed by discussion of other topics or in some cases halted discussion altogether.[122]

The Impossibility of Romantic and Service Femininities

Many of the women remembering back to women's magazines of the 1940s and 1950s presented a critical awareness of their reading material. Jean Rankine recalled that 'They had wee pages of people writing in and I used to think, I cannae believe people would write in and ask questions like that. No I would say it was really very light reading.'[123] Some of the women spoke about their enjoyment of

[122] Penny Summerfield discusses the issue of narrators misremembering and not being able to compose a coherent narrative in 'Culture and Composure', p. 83.
[123] Jean Rankine, 5 August 2003, p. 14.

reading women's magazines with a hint of embarrassment about their pleasure and later re-focused their narratives to criticise the genre.

Other narrators composed narratives about their experiences that did not fit comfortably within the discourse of femininity presented within the magazines. Elizabeth Baine was the narrator who had required memory aids to prompt her memories of reading schoolgirl story papers, as discussed in Chapter One. Prior to seeing the memory aids her recollections were disjointed. With the memory aids she was able to compose a coherent narrative in which she recalled feelings and desires she had had as a young girl to emulate the 'ideals' of femininity she remembered presented in the *Girls' Crystal.* Elizabeth recalled that the *Girls' Crystal* had made her want to 'try and better herself' and she considered the schoolgirl characters as 'role models'. She had also read *Red Letter* from a young age.[124] When asked about reading this when she was younger initially she maintained the same narrative style talking again about how she wished to have bettered herself and attempted to do the things the women in the magazines did. Yet when asked more focused questions about the content of the romance magazine the narrator's coherent narrative began to falter again. In contrast to her free flowing reading memories of schoolgirl dreams of living in a bigger house and achieving a good job her memories of other aspects of women's service and romance magazines such as beauty and relationships became stilted and were represented by short answers. When asked if the magazines helped her with fashion and beauty tips such as make-up, she replied hastily '*No. No. I never interfered with that.*'[125] Questions about beauty tips and romance narratives upset the narrator's 'composure'. Simultaneously, the interviewer's composure was also disrupted, as I was not prepared for such a closed, negative reaction to the question. And the discussion continued in another direction about how the narrator acquired her reading material.

One possible reason for the change in narrative style is that the narrator was again struggling to remember the romance magazines and needed another memory aid to prompt her recall. Although, this seems doubtful as she remembered key parts of the women's magazines and 'forgot' others. She had also volunteered to take part in the interview understanding the nature of the project which suggested that she had

[124] Elizabeth Baine, 18 May 2004, p. 7.
[125] Ibid., p. 8.

a story to tell. As a member of the Govan Reminiscence Group she had participated in a session on reminiscing about children's comics and other topics such as men and women's changing roles.[126] Given the nature of reminiscence work it would be acceptable to assume that she was used to composing narratives about the past for an audience.

A 'cultural explanation' for such a change in tone is also possible.[127] The contradictory character of discourses constituting 'woman' is particularly visible in the context of women's magazines in the 1940s and 1950s. The 'ideal' woman who was both mother and moral foil for the family, whose femininity was accentuated by respectable personal attributes, such as maintaining a suitable feminine appearance, was juxtaposed against the 'bad' or 'other' woman whose personal appearance was exemplified by extreme hair colour, clothes and make-up. Another oral narrator, Margaret Kelly, also stressed the cultural ambivalence with regard to femininity specifically exemplified by the use of make-up. When asked why she read older women's service magazines at the age of sixteen Margaret recalled that the *Woman's Own* 'would tell you how to put make-up on and about problem pages.'[128] However, as she continued to explain, her experience of reading about make-up within a discourse that emphasised the importance of a suitable feminine identity contrasted significantly with her first experiences of wearing makeup:

> *MK*: Ah wasn't allowed to put makeup on or anything.
>
> *HY*: Until you were how old?
>
> *MK*: Ah must have been about twenty. Ma brother Tommy hated makeup, ah remember ah must be about eighteen going out and ah thought ah was beautiful. Got ma sisters lipstick and had it all on and we had these stairs that we used to rub with step stone and we had this special cloth, they were both hard you know and they were lying outside the window and I was going out and ah was slippin' out and ah thought 'ah look lovely' and away ah was going out and he

[126] ACCN2491 COMICS CD251, Govan Reminiscence Group Archive, Glasgow University Business Archives
[127] Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p. 86.
[128] Margaret Kelly, 4 May 2004, p. 12.

> came, he came in the door as ah was goin' out and took me by the back of the neck through to the, and rubbed ma face with this cloth, he wet it and rubbed it and it was all scratched and took ages to heal up. Never put make-up on until he was married and out the house after that [laughs].[129]

Both Elizabeth and Margaret highlighted a perceived concern about women and how they presented their femininity and sexuality. Yet Margaret's narrative was more composed in both senses of the term than Elizabeth's, which verged on discomposure at points. Margaret laughed at the end of her narrative and simultaneously lightened the tone of her story. Historian Judy Giles found that the life stories of the working-class women she interviewed 'signified performance and public speaking and, as the women felt it, required a *public* image and hence self-censorship.'[130] With this in mind Elizabeth's disjointed and defensive narrative about women's magazines can also be read as her attempt to compose a suitable identity for herself in the interview situation, one that was comfortable for her to tell to an unfamiliar audience and one that remained within a discourse of respectable femininity.

The feminine ideals presented in women's magazines of the period fundamentally contradicted each other for example in relation to the constructions of motherhood and sexual desirability. Memories of women's magazines had a particular significance to female readers who recalled the pressures of an ideal femininity and who feel they never 'fulfilled' the representation or who, with hindsight, believe the representation was flawed. Irene Young 'felt that as you got older and you sort of look back on these daft stories you think "Oh that's no like life at all," you know. Ah think they did have an influence on you a bit.' [131] A Mass-Observation correspondent born in 1932 wrote

> I do think magazines affected the way I perceived married life as the women were always perceived as being wonderful at everything. Clean your windows with newspaper dipped in vinegar. Put the children to bed before your husband

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[129] Ibid., p. 4.

[130] J. Giles, "'You Meet 'Em and That's It': Working Class Women's Refusal of Romance Between the Wars in Britain", in L. Pearce & J. Stacey (eds.), *Romance Revisited* (London, 1995), p. 281.

[131] Irene Young, 29 March 2004, p. 3.

comes home from work. Have a wonderful meal waiting for him. Comb your hair and refresh your make-up.
After a stressful day with 2 children under 2, no TV for them to watch or videos, no fridge or freezer, no washing machine, I was often exhausted and having cooked this wonderful meal seeing it sit on top of a pot of boiling water keeping it hot whilst it dried out and me at screaming point [...] Why didn't that happen in the magazine? No one said it isn't an ideal world, but it was as portrayed in *Woman's Own*.[132]

The prospect of marriage had been the keystone of articles and fiction in working girls' magazines throughout the period of 1920 to 1950 and continued to be significant throughout the fifties. 'Marriage and later motherhood were presented as the ambition and fulfilment of every 'normal' girl.'[133] Women's service magazines continued to present marriage as woman's first and finest ambition after the Second World War. Doreen Thomson born in 1939 recalled that when she read her mother's *Woman's Weekly* as a teenager it 'was mainly to do with housewifery or it seemed to me a lot to do with housewifery and at that time I wasn't into being a housewife.'[134] A Mass-Observation correspondent explained how her mother encouraged her to read women's magazines in order to raise her marriage potential:

> It was sad for me, a plain, bespectacled teenager that there was so much emphasis on female beauty and charm. I was a disappointment to my mother whose constant cry "You'll never get married if you..." drew attention to my most recent gaucherie, facial blemish or unacceptable posture. She referred me regularly to the Charm sections with their advice on choice of make-up and manners. Information about acceptable female -male behaviour implied it was unwise to appear too keen. There was guidance on how to behave

[132] F1373 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[133] Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, p. 134.
[134] Doreen Thomson, 21 February 2003, p. 5.

when asked out, the first kiss etc... but the emphasis was all
on the desirability of marriage.[135]

These women's narratives were constructed around the mismatch between the actual self and the ideal femininity they recalled presented in the women's magazines.

For another Mass-Observation correspondent her 'first sexual encounter was a lesbian one.' She explained that she 'fell in love with a fellow student at an all female teacher training college. Such relationships were frowned on and discouraged [...] Homosexual relationships were never mentioned in the Agony Aunt columns. I wonder if the present lot of girlie mags [sic] are any more frank about such topics? Perhaps I should have a look at one!'[136] For this narrator born in 1923 the portrayal of female sexuality in the magazines she read did not conform to her experiences and subsequently a feeling of loss and disapproval surrounded her testimony. She was crossing boundaries of approved femininity, which were not endorsed, by the schoolgirl papers or women's magazines. The narrator questioned whether the present discourse of femininity is more inclusive and open and her suggestion of checking out today's magazines for reference to homosexual relationships is refreshing.

The age gap between the intended reader and the actual reader was for some narrators the reason to read older women's magazines to understand the changing lifecycle. However, for two women this was not the case. Irene Young and Katherine Dixon explained that they could not identify with the characters of some of the women's magazines they read as young girls. Instead of reading romance and excitement into their narratives they recall identifying older women's magazines with an older generation of women, their mothers. The women portrayed in *The People's Friend* had reminded both narrators of their mothers' experiences and not their own.

As other narrators had done with their memories of schoolgirl papers Katherine used topographical references to place *The People's Friend* within her reading memory. Katherine's mother and father had both been born in Partick, 'did their courting in Partick' and their first child was born there in 1935. In 1938 the family moved from Partick to Temple in Anniesland where Katherine and her sister

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[135] N1592 Autumn Directive 2003, part 2
[136] W2588, Autumn Directive 2003, part 2

were born, in 1943 and 1938 respectively. The narrator juxtaposed the social change she experienced by living in a new house with a bath, in a new area with her mother's reading material which she imagined was set in the older neighbourhood in Partick that she regularly visited:

> *KD*: When I read *The People's Friend* I thought of my mum's growing up, not my own self [...] Again, I think, because as they [the characters] talked about their lives and everything, I pictured it in Partick, I didn't picture it in this new place in Temple, I don't know why, it was as if the, the things that happened within the story would have happened in Partick but they wouldn't happen in, it's a strange thing when you think, when you ask that question, that you think about this new environment that you lived in.[137]

When asked if she read her mother's magazines when she was younger Irene explained that she had not because 'You wouldnae have done anything that your mother did, you know, or taken up anything that your mum did, least ah wouldn't have anyway. She was too old.' [138] Irene highlighted a gap between how she perceived her mother, as an older, traditional woman and herself, as a young girl. Instead of a sense of loss about the gap between the ideal and the self, these women emphasised a changing discourse of femininity. They were of a younger generation of women, young, modern and more up to date than their mothers. Their reading material did not reflect their interests and experience but accentuated the gap between traditional womanhood and modern womanhood.

When experience did not equate with the discourse a sense of loss did not always permeate the narrative. In her testimony Dorothy Bell also recalled that marriage was the prevalent discourse of material that she was reading:

> *DB*: Oh everybody got married. *Everybody* got married and always, especially in *The People's Friend* when the engagement ring was produced *oh* that was Vall Halla. Everybody got married. If a couple ran away that was oh that was terrible that was oh, oh, we were shocked didn't want to

[137] Katherine Dixon, 21 February 2004, p. 14.
[138] Irene Young, 16 February 2004, p. 16.

> know, didn't want to read anymore about that. Everybody got married. It was the same if there was a divorce, you know, what was that, oh that was something out of the *News of the World*, divorce? Oh god! Oh that's awful. You know nobody got divorced in these books or if they did it was oh just 'I told her she should never have married him' you know and it would be just, never specific about it. You just got the impression he was just not a very nice person, he maybe hit her or he drank too much you know, which maybe in our minds at that time was about four whiskeys you know. But no, no, marriage, *there was no options. There was no options.*[139]

Within the above narrative Dorothy re-enacted what Annette Kuhn terms 'girl talk'.[140] When discussing the topics of their adolescence chats and memories of cinema going in the 1930s, Kuhn's female narrators re-enacted the style and manners of their conversations for each other and the interviewer. Dorothy re-enacted the shock and other emotions surrounding her reading material in a style that was reminiscent of chatting with her girlfriends. She used the first person 'we' to include herself and others in on the action. She shifted between the past tense ('if there was a divorce') and the present tense ('*Oh that's awful*') as if she was including the interviewer within the memory being recalled. But then quickly reverted back to the past tense, to distance herself from the narrative.

It was at this point that Dorothy revealed how she negotiated and resisted the desirable images and representations of womanhood and motherhood in the 1950s. Having described the discourse of marriage she explained that she resisted it. When asked if she felt pressure to marry in relation to the discourse of marriage she described, she replied 'Not at all. Not at all.' She was twenty-eight when she first got married: 'I can't think of any of us that ever felt pressure to get married. But then you have to remember that we were coming into a time when girls' had... their horizons were, you know, a bit better than they had been.'[141] The images represented

[139] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, pp. 11-2.
[140] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 116.
[141] Dorothy Bell, 27 October 2003, pp. 12-3.

on the pages of the story papers and magazines that Dorothy read were in tension with her experiences post 1945, yet her reading memory was located within the discourse of the time. Divorce was the anti-ideal, marriage was the goal and a heterosexual relationship was the norm with children being the ultimate career.

Of the other eleven women interviewed nine of them married and two remained single. The average age of marriage for this group of women was twenty three and a half years of age. The oldest was married at thirty-four years and the youngest at sixteen. There is a close relationship between working and marriage and the women's experiences of both differed in a number of ways from the discourse of the time presented in women's magazines. All of the women interviewed who worked prior to marriage returned to paid work after having children, at some point, except two who stayed at home to care for their new family. They recalled the discourse of the time to explain their experiences of not working after marriage. Evelyn Wilson explained that 'it was *very*, *very* frowned upon, when I married Peter, that I would work.'[142] Emily Turner described her role as a mother and housewife as a profession and career:

> *ET*: I was a full time wife and mother. I got my degree in chemistry and then got married and had a very happy career as a full time wife and mother. So I suppose I'm the last of the generation... that you weren't expected to go out and work [...] I was perfectly happy doing... you know, my, I think it worries my daughter that I never did. But I was very happy in the job that I was doing and I considered it was a worthwhile job. You know I've never felt badly done by or deprived by it.[143]

Emily did not read women's magazines. Therefore, she acquired the discourse of 'marriage as a career' in her memory from a different source. She noted that she was 'the last of the generation' of women who stayed at home to look after their family, which implied that in remembering she was aware of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s and the impact they had on women's equal opportunities both at home and in the workplace. Her daughter, the next generation

[142] Evelyn Wilson, 14 May 2003, p. 11.
[143] Emily Turner, 28 October 2003, p. 6.

of women, was concerned about her mother giving up a career as a chemist for marriage and motherhood. These statements suggested that Emily used the more recent discourses of working women to compose an identity for herself in the past as a woman who had a job to perform for her family.

Some of the women who did work after marriage, such as Irene Young, explained that it was due to financial necessity:

> *IY*: But the thing was, ma husband and I worked together, do you know what ah mean we both, when I eventually did go to work and it was purely financial, purely for financial, the kids were getting bigger and ah couldnae think, you know, clothes and things, you were scrimping and scraping and a thought, 'auch this is a piece of nonsense ah could be out working'.[144]

Irene continued to explain that 'you got articles on careers and things like that [in *Woman's Own* and *Woman*]. And it was just kind of starting to make you see that you could be a mother and a working person as well. You know they were starting to bring all that in so yeah you could see yourself doing a day's work outside, coming home and working.'[145] Katherine Dixon waited twelve years after the birth of her first daughter to return to work as a part-time secretary, and then as an auxiliary in her daughters' school. I asked how her husband had felt about her returning to work:

> *KD*: Now that's strange because when, when I left to have, my work to have Lynn he said "If I can help it you will *never* work again." He liked to come home and whenever he came home from the shifts he liked to feel I was there. But then when I did go back to work he kept saying, "Oh you could maybe manage a few more hours" because I think he found the money was quite handy [laughs] so, because police pay wasn't great at that time. When, when we were married Jeff's salary was £9 a week and my salary in the hospital was £11. So as a clerical assistant in the hospital I was being paid more than a police officer. So you know

[144] Irene Young, 16 February 2004, p. 15.
[145] Ibid., pp. 14-5.

that's probably quite a change from, but my salary was the greater of the two when we got married.[146]

Both Irene and Katherine explained that working after marriage was unusual in the period. Irene stressed her reason to work was 'purely financial' which suggested that she was aware of criticism levelled at working mothers. Yet working was important to them as they had both been economically independent prior to getting married and they significantly maintained the household income after marriage.

In contrast Gillian Bayne, 'went to a school where women were expected to do well'.[147] After leaving school she attended the Glasgow and West of Scotland College of Domestic Science and trained to become a secondary school teacher.[148] After successfully completing her training she worked as a domestic science teacher in London and Glasgow. She did not recall reading about careers for women in girls' papers or women's magazines:

> *GB*: Careers? [pause six seconds] Ah don't think so. Ah mean, careers there were no careers when I was at school. I mean the school I went to you did, there was a choice, you went to the teacher training college, you went to university, be able right if you were, did medicine or law. If you did *any other degree* whatsoever, you would automatically do postgraduate teacher training and you'd become a teacher. That was your careers choice. There were no, nobody ever, ever suggested that the other avenues opened to you.[149]

Both Gillian's father and mother had been teachers and although Gillian created a career for herself within the same profession she suggested that this was predetermined. She also subverted the ideal discourse of the time by not marrying until she was thirty-four. She explained that she 'Never [felt] any pressure to get

[146] Katherine Dixon, 21 February 2004, p. 12.
[147] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 22.
[148] The Glasgow and West of Scotland College of Domestic Science was established in 1908 and was fondly known as the 'Dough School'. The college was an amalgamation between the Glasgow School of Cookery and the West End School of Cookery. In 1975 the college received a Royal charter and was renamed The Queen's College, Glasgow. In April 1993 Glasgow Polytechnic and The Queen's College, Glasgow amalgamated to form Glasgow Caledonian University.
[149] Gillian Bayne, 30 January 2004, p. 23.

married.'[150] Gillian was one of the narrators who contrasted the women's magazines of the 1940s and 1950s with the feminist discourse of the 1960s and 1970s. She remembered 'when *SHE* came out and it was really, *oh boy*, was it different, you know. It was completely different, you know. It was the bee's knees when it came out in the sixties.'[151] When asked how *SHE* was different to previous women's magazines Gillian explained 'Because it tackled a lot of contemporary issues. It was much thicker than the *Woman's Own*. It was a monthly but it was not like the other monthlies. And it talked about feminism and all sorts of things like that. Things that were kind of, you didn't read about those in any of the other glossies that you ever came across.'[152] Similarly, Dorothy Priestly, a single woman who worked as a secretary, recalled that

> *DP*: *Cosmopolitan* focused on single women or women who had, they weren't called career women in those days but that's what they would be, I mean women who had a life of their own, who didn't have children, who didn't have a regular boyfriend, who weren't married or engaged, who didn't have a home to run who just had a job and money and wanted a good time [...] As I say the comics were different because that was all sort of before watershed, before things began to get out of hand, as say mother and father and two point four children and everything was very cut and dried. I mean that's the way it was.[153]

None of the women's experiences of marriage and working fitted snugly into the discourse of femininities and service that the magazines they had read projected. They negotiated ideal and the anti-ideal femininities in a variety of ways and sometimes rejected them completely.

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[150] Ibid., p. 16.
[151] Ibid., p. 21.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Dorothy Priestly, 12 October 2003, p. 19.

Girls Who Did Not Read Women's Magazines

Emily Turner, Iris Adams and Evelyn Wilson did not read women's magazines regularly when growing up or as older women. As has been detailed other narrators had bought, borrowed or sneaked older women's magazines from a young age keen to acquire a knowledge and understanding of what was to come. Their narratives were constructed around the discourse of romance and service. To varying degrees these women accepted, negotiated and resisted these discourses of femininity offered in women's magazines. The women who did not read women's magazines constructed narratives that did not acknowledge the discourse of romance.

Parental or guardian censorship of reading material continued to be a reason for these women not to have read women's magazines. Iris's mother had controlled her reading material from an early age and had only allowed her to read religious or 'good quality material'. Iris recalled reading *The Guide* in her teens and did not mention any women's magazines in her narrative.[154] Similarly, Emily explained that 'by the time I got to my teens I was at boarding school. *There* reading matter probably would have been censored.'[155] Their mothers did not read women's magazines either therefore there was no opportunity to borrow or covertly read them. Limited spending power as teenagers and schoolgirls also impacted on these women's ability to consume women's magazines. Compared to the other narrators who left school between the ages of fourteen and fifteen Emily and Evelyn continued to higher education until aged twenty-two and twenty-one respectively. Iris continued to train as a nurse after secondary school until aged twenty-three. The women emphasised that they did not have the financial ability at this time to buy women's magazines.

These narrators also employed gendered stereotypes about women's reading material as reason for not being interested in women's magazines. Emily explained that 'they were not meaty enough for me, I like good solid reading.'[156] Iris presented her mother who controlled her reading as a conscientious reader, who after leaving school at fourteen to look after her father 'educated herself right up until she died,

[154] Iris Adams, 23 September 2003, p.20.
[155] Emily Turner, 28 October 2003, p. 14.
[156] Ibid., p. 12.

she was educating herself because she was a reader. She had a love of books.'[157] Women's magazines were viewed as frivolous and not suitable reading material.

Unlike the narrators who had read women's magazines these women were not likely to have experienced the gap that others had between the ideal and the self. They achieved narrative composure in a number of different ways. They composed life-stories and identities for themselves within the discourse of respectable femininity that was available to them from other sources. Emily Turner described the discourse of the time which was her own experience despite going onto Higher education: 'The perceived picture was that you perhaps got a bit of education, you got some sort of qualification but you would probably be expected to marry and have a family rather than a career. That was still in the future.'[158]

Iris Adams achieved composure during the interview by presenting herself as an expert witness or social commentator. Despite listing numerous titles of publications in the Childhood Reading Questionnaire prior to the interview, Iris was unable to recall all of these titles during the interview implying no personal memory of reading children's popular literature. It transpired after the interview that in order to complete the questionnaire she had asked friends what titles they had read as children.[159] Her questionnaire did not represent her own experience, but she had wanted to aid the researcher as much as possible hence she asked other people about their experiences and memories. This showed that the narrator was aware that her own experience was not the 'norm'. Despite this she composed a narrative in which she continued to be the expert witness. This was highlighted by her use of the second person throughout her narrative which distanced her both from the context of the account and the narration but at the same time, embraced and included her in a community of readers.

From the vantage point of old age Iris weaved her narrative of childhood around the past and present. This incorporated a sense of loss, change and difference into her narrative. The past/present memory device emphasises how time is arranged in memory narratives and may highlight a range of relationships between the

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[157] Iris Adams, 23 September 2003, p. 10.
[158] Emily Turner, 28 October 2003, p. 14.
[159] Hilary Young, Research Diary, conversation with Irene Addie 23 September 2003 and 14 February 2006.

narrator, story and interviewer. As a member of a local family history group Iris hung her reading memories on to bigger themes of history such as loss of childhood innocence and domestic changes within the home rather than focusing on her own experiences of growing up. Emphasis on how 'things were better' when she was growing up were present throughout her narrative.[160] The narrator was unaware of shifting back and forth between the past and the present. This memory style incorporates accounts which show a depth of engagement on the informant's part with the activity of remembering and with the detail of what is remembered. The importance Iris attached to historical provenance was shown by the attention she paid to 'correcting' the transcript of her interview which she returned three times before finally being satisfied with it.

Conclusion

The relationships between readers and texts are complicated. This chapter has focused on both women's enjoyment and dissatisfaction with popular story papers, comics and magazines for girls and women in Britain during the mid-twentieth century. The chapter has also highlighted that pleasure was not simply determined by identifying with a character or a message. Audience enjoyment may depend on deviant or inverted readings of a text. It may be due to pleasure in gossip or fantasy. Highlighting the different experiences of reading has also disrupted the assumed homogeneity of the reading audience. Previously, women's magazines have been viewed as oppressive and female readers were placed within a passive system of meaning. The oral testimony gathered here challenges this textual determinism. The women actively negotiated, rejected and used the material in a variety of ways. The women placed their childhood memories of reading within the context of their own lives. They related their memories of reading to real life experiences. For some of the women the material played a significant role in their lives between girlhood and womanhood.

[160] In a letter received from Iris expressing her willingness to take part in the project she placed her childhood in a specific time and place: 'The horrors of the First World War made a big change impression on children – and reading and books were very important to us. There was very little radio and no TV. My great nieces and nephews have an entirely different childhood from that we had.' Letter from Iris Adams, 11 July 2003.

In their narratives some of the Glasgow women became the central protagonist of their stories and acted out their adventures and experiences for an audience, while others took a more sedentary role, suggesting the times they lived in dictated their reading experiences. The women contextualised their reading memories within a 'place' but this was not synonymous with the home and family discourse traditionally ascribed to women's oral testimony. The women described their background in relation to the public sphere by emphasising their familial and area's social class position. The narrators jumped between using the first person pronoun 'I' and the more inclusive 'we'. By doing so the women simultaneously positioned themselves within the changing discourse of femininity experienced personally and collectively between the 1940s and 1950s. Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame suggests that the feminine 'I' does not designate the narrator as subject, but as one pole of a relationship; 'I' is used in relation to another person.[161] This may be so in some cases but the use of 'I' by these women presented an active voice within a passive myth system, which some of them were conscious of.

These women's accounts of reading women's magazines at a young age pivoted around the sharing and the gaining of knowledge of femininity whether there was mutual assistance in acquiring the material from older women or not. Yet the reasons for reading publications like the *Red Star Weekly* and the *Woman's Own* varied from narrator to narrator. For some reading women's magazines was an escape from the type of life they led. The women's narratives of reading and non-reading were composed in response to the myths surrounding girls reading whether they rejected, negotiated or accepted these myths. Due to the variety of material that the women read at this pivotal point in their life-cycle their memories were spread across their girlhood and early womanhood, blurring the transition. The women offered more memories from adolescence than young childhood in stark contrast to the men's memories which were based predominantly in boyhood. Although two narrators relied on anecdotal memories to compose consistent narratives, other female narrators used a variety of memory models when recalling their experiences of reading.

[161] Bertaux-Wiame, 'The Life History Approach to the Study of Internal Migration', p. 193.

Femininity was the appeal of these magazines and comics. The papers' targeted audience was first of all based on gender and not class and its references based on femininity. The women's reading memories reflected the active negotiation of reading them and their gendered discourses. These memories were woven in amongst their memories of growing up and becoming women. While the material these narrators recalled told stories of more intrepid adventures and glamorous lives, the memories of reading engaged most significantly with the 'real' world and were strongly concerned with the reader's position within it.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Illustration 6.1: Girl and boy reading a comic at Waterloo Station, London c. 1950.
Source: www.gettyimages.co.uk

This thesis has explored three central themes: what reading British children's popular literature meant to a group of both male and female readers between 1930 and 1967; how readers used both the cultural discourses and cultural objects in their everyday lives, and how gender was articulated and produced by the readers' media consumption. It is not possible to represent one single experience of reading. The 'cultural circuit' surrounding the activity of reading, namely how discourses of reading, childhood and gender inform narrators' memories of their childhood reading practices, has been assessed through this work.

Natalie Zemon Davis challenged historians to 'be interested in the history of both women and men [...] Our goal is to understand the significance of the *sexes*, of gender groups in the historical past.'[1] This thesis has considered the particular discursive mechanisms of story papers, comics and magazines that both male and female child readers engaged with meaningfully. By doing so I have attempted to consider both experiences in equal measure, and not focus on one at the expense of the other, in order to understand how concepts of gender are woven together and inform each other.

Jacqueline Rose observed a distinction between writing for boys and writing for girls in the late nineteenth century. Whereas writing for boys included contributions from well-known writers and followed a consistent practice in marking out distinctive literary sub-genres with clear masculine prototypes and recognised narrative rituals – the adventure story and the public school story for instance – girls' popular literature frequently seemed to be little more than an arbitrary collection of material thought appropriate for untrained female minds. The critical implications of this division on the reception of writing for girls and boys are severe as Rose comments:

> The sexual differentiation of children's literature was, therefore, not so much an equal division as a breaking away of one form into a more 'adult' space. In this sense, girls' literature is best described as what got left behind.[2]

[1] cited in Leydesdorff, Passerini & Thompson, *Gender and Memory*, p. 7

[2] Jaqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London, 1992), p. 84.

Girls' fiction and women's writing simultaneously became to be seen as a sub-genre within the already devalued area of juvenile publishing. Lissa Paul has remarked on the similarity between the two and the ways in which 'both women's literature and children's literature are devalued and regarded as marginal or peripheral by the literary and educational communities.'[3] However, through research involving real readers, the meanings of girls' and boys' popular literature as discourse and material objects have been shown to be essential and valuable tools to children growing up after the Second World War in Glasgow. By considering the cross-gendered readership of girls' and boys material I have attempted to re-balance the status of girls' and boys' reading material and highlight how both offer considerable cultural capital to a variety of readers.

Collecting both men's and women's memories of childhood reading provided me with the opportunity to explore if and how men and women recall or compose narratives differently. I attempted to do this by following the narrative styles and techniques used by male and female narrators. Men's narratives have previously been characterised as public performances constructed around their working lives and often heavily focused on their own actions, exemplified by the first person pronoun 'I'. The men interviewed in this project also performed in the interview, provided authorial voices on the genre and emphasised their boyhood activity. However, these modes of narration were also complimented by more personal accounts of boyhood friends, difficult living situations and familial relationships. What was most interesting and striking was how the men drew on a 'collective memory' of comics, using the same language and stock phrases to describe characters. This collective memory emphasised the significant place of reading within a past boyhood culture of play.

The narratives of the women interviewed were based less on collective memory. Although the women emphasised the reading communities they belonged to, more often their memories emphasised the importance of comics and magazines in the acquisition of their own personal, feminine subjectivities. The most common form of memory for them was that of habit, emphasising reading as a common leisure pursuit practised regularly with friends. A couple of the narratives were very

[3] L. Paul, 'Engima Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows about Children's Literature', *Signal,* 54 (1987), p. 149.

striking with two women basing their narratives on anecdotal memories and using the narrative style of the romance genre to reconstruct some vivid accounts. Another woman's narrative stood out because she used a more impersonal and distant form of narrative to discuss her reading habits. This was because her mother had controlled her reading material when she was growing up and she did not have personal memories of the 'common' story papers. Instead she had 'borrowed' memories from her friends for the interview.

The process of remembering, mis-remembering and not remembering is pertinent to any oral history. The silences and discrepancies within the memories collected here were important and not problematic to the research. They raised more questions about the relationship between the past in the present moment of narration. Memories are recollections of the past constructed through changing discourses. Assessments of the story papers and magazines will have been affected by changing discourses of femininity and masculinity, and childhood. These changing discourses were apparent in how reading as an activity has been gendered and how present discourses of reading and consumption are changing and under question.

In a recent oral history of readers in Australia, Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taska identified specific gender myths surrounding reading.[4] The male readers that Lyons and Taska interviewed created and used a conventional myth system to disguise or reject their own boyhood reading: sport and the outdoor life were allegedly incompatible with reading.[5] In stark contrast, for the majority of men interviewed for this project reading was synonymous with their boyhood and they did compose coherent narratives of their boyhood reading activities. Although they did not discuss masculinity explicitly within their narratives, it was possible to identify narrative techniques and styles used by the men to construct suitable masculine identities for themselves as readers. Publicly available discourses of men's reading practices today impacted on how these men composed identities for themselves. However, they did not embrace the discourse surrounding men's lifestyle magazines and instead they used anecdotes to emphasise a manly discourse of reading during the time being recalled. The men emphasised that their experiences of reading involved a public performance either in acquiring the material or during their make-believe games and

[4] Lyons & Taska, *Australian Readers Remember*, p. 6.
[5] Ibid., p. 7.

that their reading was a group activity as opposed to a solitary private pastime. The actual physical comic played a significant role in the men's memories of reading as something to swap, find, or acquire in some entrepreneurial scheme. The style and format of the comics was important to some male narrators who based their reading identities on being 'experts' about the genre.

Although official reading surveys of the time did not suggest that boys read periodicals intended for girls and women, some of the men interviewed in this project did recall reading their mother's and other female relations magazines. Some readers did not discriminate between gendered publications and recalled that the girls' material was similar to their own. However, as they grew older the 'otherness' of older women's magazines and more readily available publications from America became more obvious both in terms of the information learned about the other sex and also in terms of the way women were presented as sexualised objects.

For the female narrators in the Australian oral history of reading, household duties imposed a rigid work ethic and subsequently reading was equated with idleness.[6] Subsequently, the female narrators downplayed their reading habits as children and at the time of interview as a waste of time. In contrast the gendered myth of girls' reading material as 'easy' and 'silly' was rejected by a number of women interviewed in this project. Instead they emphasised how reading story papers for girls, romantic 'bloods' and women's service magazines developed their awareness of themselves, their reading skills and an interest in literature. In addition to the horizons they thought the girls' story papers and women's magazines crossed in relation to young femininity in the period, they emphasised the educational aspect and interest in literature they developed by actively reading a wide variety of material intended and not intended for girls.

Considering representation and consumption of reading from the readers' experience entails a rethinking of theories and models of the relationship between texts and readers. This has involved privileging the role and activity of reading and admitting a broader range of engagements into the relationship. This in turn allows a deeper understanding of the point at which modes of readership intersect with the feelings and behaviour of social audiences. The emotions and imaginings on which

[6] Ibid., p. 159.

reading draws may inform people's daily activities and interactions with family and peers. The concept of 'active audiences' allows the historian to explore the wider significance of the actual story papers and magazines in children's lives.

Both women and male narrators were members of childhood swapping networks, which for some were an extension of their mothers' (and father's), already established and thus suitable, social support networks. These systems introduced the children to the community ethos of support in their neighbourhoods and simultaneously allowed them to read more than they could afford. The networks also helped establish specific reading communities located within the neighbourhood or tenement and legitimised the activity of reading which for some of their parents' generation had been identified with laziness and effeminacy. Some of the male narrators detailed the innovative strategies they employed to acquire comics such as raking midges and running errands for neighbours in order to overcome the financial restrictions they experienced and acquire a comic. These activities were in stark contrast to other readers' experiences who were prescribed reading material by their parents and received them regularly with the family newspaper. For both sets of readers, who found or whose reading material was controlled there was an emphasis that reading story papers and comics was a mechanism to improvement beyond their childhood experiences.

The fantasy and escapism that was generated by reading story papers and comics was an important memory for both the men and women. However, the men's memories of fantasy did differ from the women's. The men's memories focused more on how what they read fuelled their boyhood play both at home and in the street. 'Making do' with household props, freebies from the comics and ultimately a specially made cowboy costume were vivid memories that introduced play and performance into the construction of masculine identities. The men regularly named specific characters from their reading who they recalled as important to their boyhood selves and the escapism they experienced while reading. The working-class athlete or 'hooligan' Alf Tupper who slept in disused railways and barges, lived on fish and chips, ran in his bare feet and always outperformed the professional 'swanks' was important to young boys who were able to identity their own difficult living conditions in the story. Similarly, the superman character Wilson was

identified as central to the men's memories of fantasy as he performed superhuman feats of strength but was not recognisably different in stature to ordinary young men. The new war story for the post war generation, Dan Dare, was also central to the men's memories. The character epitomised the Second World War hero to young boys who had lived through the war and were expected to perform National Service. The new format, colour and style of the *Eagle* captured in these men's memories a moment when they were consumers of something new and exciting. These memories of fantasy, escapism and the means of acquiring reading material emphasised how rich children's imaginative play was even in poor households.

The women's memories of escapism and fantasy also revolved around escaping the hum drum of their own lives to the excitement and privilege they read about in girls' boarding school and boys' adventure tales. In contrast to the men who identified key characters, the women struggled to recall specific characters (with the exception of one narrator who recalled playing out 'The Silent Three' with her friends and their new raincoats). The women emphasised aspirational feelings towards the lives the characters lead and implied glamour and romance onto schoolgirl stories in their memories even when it did not exist. But more strongly their fantasies pivoted around growing up, adolescence and womanhood.

The women consistently read across the grain. The 'preferred reading' of a text was sometimes made redundant or altered by the contradictions of the women's own experiences. Both school based and girls' adventure narratives were recalled as important reasons to read schoolgirl papers as they emphasised the autonomy and independence of the characters to some readers who perhaps did not experience this at home. The 'gap' between the reader and character was further reason to read this material as it encouraged readers to strive for success and ultimately try to emulate the looks, scholarly success or liberty of the characters they had read about. Communities of schoolgirls were a common feature of early twentieth century boarding school tales, yet by the early 1950s this type of tale was disappearing. Despite this some of the readers' memories were constructed around this notion of a girlhood community, from which they recalled a feeling of belonging and a sense of inclusion. The sharing of schoolgirl papers amongst friends further included the

isolated girl in a community of readers and legitimized an identity of girlhood within that group.

The gap between their own life and those they read about was one of the reasons why some of the women read 'erotic bloods' and service magazines when younger. The women explained how they had acquired older women's romance and service magazines at a young age easily as part of a swapping network from older girls in the neighbourhood and surreptitiously from the corner shop or from their mothers. They detailed how they had read material intended for working women and mothers in order to negotiate the transition between girlhood and womanhood as it offered glimpses of what to expect. Simultaneously they blurred the distinction between both. The tales of single women negotiating jobs and romance and married mothers coping with childcare and housework introduced the readers to a world they knew from their home life and surrounding neighbourhood, but also a world they did not understand as they were too young. By reading the stories, non-fiction articles and letter pages the women hoped to gain insight and make sense of their own and future lives by negotiating and rejecting the representations of femininity on offer.

The ideals of schoolgirl heroines and femininities were embraced by a number of the female narrators, yet were consciously resisted and vehemently rejected by some of the working-class women narrators. Some of the women remembered rejecting schoolgirl papers altogether due to what they recalled as their focus on 'traditional' boarding school tales and domestic concerns. Instead these readers read material intended for boys such as the *Wizard* and the *Eagle* and found in this literature what they considered to be suitable adventure and more 'realistic' narratives of the time they were growing up in which they could relate to their own experiences. By rejecting girls' story papers these women rebelled against the models of girlhood presented within the material. They recalled that tales in boys' story papers and comics were set in foreign countries and often they led to more exciting adventures than the girls, even though girls' story papers began to introduce more intrepid tales of adventure from 1950 onwards. These women blurred traditional gender boundaries involved in reading and tended to be proud of this when recalling it in the interview.

A different experience, but a common one, was not being allowed to read the most popular children's story papers. One reader was prescribed what her mother deemed more morally and literally sound publications to read such as the *Guide* and *The Children's Newspaper*. A number of narrators, both male and female, also remembered reading story papers clandestinely because of the bad reputation the material had and emphasised that official regulators of reading such as the school deemed the material to be low-grade and dangerous for children to consume. This 'official' interpretation of the material informed some of the narrators' memories initially and often their personal memories of reading, using and swapping the material were silenced under these understandings. Once the visual aids were produced during the interview the narrators often expressed surprise at the quality of the writing in the story papers and commented critically from their position now as a more experienced reader on the material and questioned the past official understanding. At the same time the material objects stimulated their everyday memories of reading the material and their childhood experiences became more palpable in the present moment of recalling.

For some women the discourses of 'good' and 'bad' femininity they had read as young women did not equate with their real life and the activity of recalling this process aggravated more 'traumatic' memories. This was highlighted by the difficulty they experienced in composing narratives about the content of the women's magazines and the discourses of femininity attached to them. Issues of wearing make-up and what it signified were difficult for some women to talk about and instead they switched conversation to easier topics to discuss or waited for the interviewer to direct the questions. Some of the Mass-Observation replies were more candid about this mismatch between real life and the ideal discourse and detailed how they felt about this. I would argue that the anonymity guaranteed in the process of writing for the Archive allowed these women to elaborate on topics such as the demands of being a mother, the pressures to marry and feelings of homosexuality, whereas the oral narrators discussed topics that they considered more acceptable and composed suitable public images for a younger female interviewer.

The men's transition from boyhood to manhood was marked when they stopped reading story papers and comics. When the men started to discuss their

adolescent experiences of work and courtship their narratives of reading began to change. Going to work, at a very young age in some cases, with a group of older men, meant that the boys had to reject the ephemera of boyhood in order to project a suitable manly identity. For some the financial cost of their reading material infringed on other 'manly pursuits', such as courting, and the former had to be sacrificed. The use of the comic to explore men's masculinity has been an important tool. This allowed me to ask questions about boyhood through the vehicle of the comic that a female interviewer may at other times struggle to ask in an interview. Indeed, when I began to ask questions about adolescence, because at this point in their life some had rejected the material, it became more difficult to explore the construction of masculinity and the men's narratives were less coherent.

This thesis adds a new perspective from which to view the reader in history. While readership histories of the mid to late twentieth century may employ oral history techniques to uncover readers' experiences, readership histories of earlier periods can also consider and apply theory related to active audiences through more traditional means of finding readers, such as diaries and memoirs. Due to space restrictions this thesis has been unable to pay due respect and attention to the Mass-Observation directive replies. Future work would focus on these replies as autobiography in response to audience research. The Mass-Observation Archive correspondents are generally older than the oral narrators therefore the replies would possibly present an older generation's response to the gendered myth of reading practices.

Regional case studies may also highlight different reading experiences. For example William Kay, born in 1918 in Port William, Galloway, recalled that his mother 'churned butter twice a week at the farm,

> and she used to be turning the churn and reading *The People's Friend*. Yes, turning the churn and reading *The People's Friend*, and then she would put it down and then she would say... she would put *The People's Friend* in the sitting room, in the back sitting-room, and she would go back and read it in the afternoon. She always went to bed for about an hour in the afternoon, my mother, and she

would then come out all dressed as it were, you know, out
of her apron that she had on on the farm.[7]

Memories of reading evoke images and recollections of other significant activities and practices. The place of literacy, reading and leisure in people's familial and working lives becomes more visible and salient.

By employing the concept of active audiences this thesis has taken more seriously children's experiences of reading and questioned the premise that children are passive recipients or cultural dupes of the media. The issue is not what the media did to children but what children did with the media. Acknowledging girls and boys as consumers of reading material in a period of significant social and economic change provides another set of voices to comment on the history of gender and childhood. By including the voices of readers who were not allowed to read story papers, those whose reading was prescribed and those who read papers not intended for them a wider picture of childhood identity, femininity and masculinity has been uncovered. The differences between and within the men's and women's narratives emphasise that femininity and masculinity are never a single, linear experience. Within social and historical circumstances gendered identities and subjectivities are accepted or rejected but more often than not, negotiated.

[7] William Kay interviewed by Sue Bradley, 29 April 1999, C872/16/01, *Book Trade Lives*, National Life Stories, British Library Sound Archive. I must thank Sue Bradley at the National Sound Archive for drawing my attention to this lovely reference.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1

Demographic Information of Oral Narrators

Table 1: Gender

Male	11
Female	12
Total	**23**

Table 2: Year of Birth

1919	1
1920 to 1929	4
1930 to 1935	3
1936 to 1940	5
1940 to 1945	8
1947	1
1955	1

Table 3: Place of Childhood

Aberdeenshire	1
Birmingham	1
Bradford	1
Cambridge	1
Edinburgh	1
Fife	1
Glasgow	17

APPENDIX 2
Biographical Details of the Oral Narrators

These interviews were conducted and transcribed by Hilary Young. The transcripts will be stored in the Scottish Oral History Centre Archive (SOHCA), Department of History, University of Strathclyde.

Iris Adams

Born	Langside, Glasgow, 1921
Parents	Mother, housewife. Father, bànker.
Education	Primary school and secondary fee paying school until age 17, Orthopaedic and Physiotherapy training in Shropshire until age 23.
Work	Orthopaedic nurse and physiotherapist during and after the Second World War
Marriage	Single
Contact	Poster campaign, 2003.
Interview	Strathclyde University, 23 September 2003.

Elizabeth Baine

Born	Govan, Glasgow 1925.
Parents	Mother, prior to marriage factory worker, after marriage charwoman. Father, plater in Govan shipyard.
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 14. Night school after children grew up.
Work	Secretary
Marriage	1945
Contact	Govan Reminiscence Group 2004
Interview	Govan Oldhill Trust, 18 May 2004.

Gillian Bayne

Born	Glasgow 1937
Parents	Mother, Primary Schoolteacher. Father, Secondary Schoolteacher
Education	Fee paying all girl school primary and secondary to age 18; teacher training to age 22.
Work	Secondary Schoolteacher
Marriage	1971, three children
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003.
Interview	Strathclyde University, 30 January 2004 and 8 March 2004.

Dorothy Bell

Born	Parkhead, Glasgow, 1935
Parents	Mother, shop manager Father, accounts clerk
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 17.
Work	Accounts clerk until 1966. Secondary School teacher from 1970.
Marriage	1st marriage 1963 No children.
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003.
Interview	At home, 27 October 2004 and 25 November 2003.

John Cooper

Born	Parkhead, Glasgow 1947
Parents	Mother, French polisher Father, tool maker
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 16
Work	Bus driver
Marriage	1965, two children
Contact	Glaswegian Newspaper, 2002.
Interview	At home 15 May 2002 and 21 May 2002

Katherine Dixon

Born	Anniesland, Glasgow, 1943
Parents	Mother, shop manager Father, general labourer
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 15
Work	Clerical work
Marriage	1965, two children
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003.
Interview	At home, 21 February 2004.

Kenneth Doran

Born	Townhead, Glasgow 1940
Parents	Mother, housewife Father, welder at Howden's Electrical Co.
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 15
Work	Electrician, electronic technician/draughtsman, senior buyer with Rolls Royce, Hillington
Marriage	1972, three children
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003.
Interview	At home 29 January 2004 and 4 March 2004.

Hamish Fraser

Born	Keith, Aberdeenshire 1941
Parents	Mother, owned a tea room Father, wool mill worker
Education	University, 1959 – 1963, Sussex University 1963 – 1966.
Work	University lecturer
Marriage	1965, one child
Contact	Personal Contact
Interview	Strathclyde University, 30 May 2002.

Andrew Gummers

Born	1940, Glasgow
Parents	Father, dentist Mother, housewife
Education	Primary school and secondary school to age 18; University to age 22.
Work	Dentist
Marriage	Married, two sons
Contact	Personal contact
Interview	Strathclyde University, 20 April 2006

Peter Halfpenny

Born	Govan, Glasgow 1919
Parents	Mother, worked in a bakery Father, railway worker (suspended)
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 14
Work	Boot repairer, army 1939 – 1945.
Marriage	Single
Contact	Govan Reminiscence Group, 2004.
Interview	Govan Oldhill Trust, 11 May 2004.

Richard Ingram

Born	Alloa, 1939, grew up in Edinburgh
Parents	Mother, housewife Father, engineer
Education	Primary and Secondary school; Edinburgh University, 1957 - 1961
Work	Secondary school teacher
Marriage	Four children
Contact	Evening Times Newspaper, 2002.
Interview	Strathclyde University, 15 April 2002 and 7 May 2002.

Margaret Kelly

Born	Govan, Glasgow 1931.
Parents	Mother, housewife Father, blacksmith at Fairfield's Shipyard, Govan
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 15
Work	Seamstress
Marriage	date unknown
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003.
Interview	Govan Oldhill Trust, 4 May 2004.

Rowland Marshall

Born	Govan, Glasgow 1935.
Parents	Mother, housewife and part time cinema usher after marriage Father, chemical mixer at India Tyres
Education	Primary and secondary school until age 15.
Work	Stable hand aged 10. Cooperative delivery driver aged 15. National Service aged 18 Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineer; Driver and Engineer.
Marriage	1966, three sons
Contact	Govan Reminiscence Group, 2004.
Interview	Govan Oldhill Trust, 4 May 2004.

Ron Paterson

Born	Glasgow, 1939
Parents	Mother, Father,
Education	Primary and secondary school to age
Work	Printing trade unionist
Marriage	Divorced, two sons
Contact	Evening Times Newspaper, 2000.
Interview	Three Ships Pub, Glasgow, 17 May 2002.

Dorothy Priestly

Born	Glasgow 1955
Parents	Mother, housewife Father, insurance Clerk
Education	
Work	Secretary
Marriage	Single
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society
Interview	At home, 12 October 2003.

Jean Rankine

Born	Maryhill, Glasgow, 1927
Parents	Mother, hotel work. Father, cobbler; Divorced 1932. Brought up by a maiden aunt, fancy box maker
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 14
Work	Clerical work
Marriage	1953, three children
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003.
Interview	At home, 5 August 2003 and 9 October 2003.

John Robertson

Born	Paisley, 1920
Parents	Mother, housewife Father, minister
Education	Primary and secondary school to age ?
Work	D.C. Thomson writer 1953 – 1984 part time; Secondary school teacher full time
Marriage	Divorced, remarried 1984, no children
Contact	Personal contact, 2003.
Interview	At home, 29 July 2003 and 18 March 2005.

Alex Thomson

Born	Birmingham, 1939, brought up in Forth, Lanarkshire
Parents	Aunt, housewife Uncle, miner
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 18 University to age 22
Work	Research chemist, 1962 -1971; Secondary school teacher
Marriage	1965 two sons
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003.
Interview	At home, 9 August 2002.

Doreen Thomson

Born	Cowdenbeath, 1939
Parents	Mother, housewife Father, headmaster
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 18. University to age 22; Teacher training college
Work	Secondary school teacher
Marriage	1965 two sons
Contact	Recommended by husband, Alex Thomson 2003.
Interview	At home, 21 February 2003.

Emily Turner

Born	Bradford, 1940
Parents	Mother, housewife Father, in RAF during the war and then brewer
Education	Private schooling to age18; University from 19 until 22
Work	Housewife
Marriage	1963, two children
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003.
Interview	Strathclyde University, 28 October 2003.

Evelyn Wilson

Born	Cardross, Dumbartonshire, 1945
Parents	Mother, teacher Father, university lecturer
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 18; teacher training college to age 21
Work	Housewife
Marriage	1966, three children
Contact	Personal Contact, 2003.
Interview	At home, 14 May 2003.

Hugh Wynne

Born	Cambridge, 1944
Parents	Mother, librarian Father, Dentist
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 18; University
Work	Chartered engineer
Marriage	Single
Contact	Poster campaign , 2005.
Interview	Strathclyde University, 2 December 2005.

Irene Young

Born	Bridge of Allen, 1942, grew up in Clydebank
Parents	Mother, housewife Father, engineer at Singers, Clydebank.
Education	Primary and secondary school to age 15, Secretarial college to age 16
Work	Secretary, shop assistant part time after marriage
Marriage	1959, three children
Contact	Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society, 2003
Interview	At home, 16 February 2004 and 29 March 2004.

APPENDIX 3

Glasgow Childhood Reading Oral History Letter and Questionnaire

Hilary Young
Department of History
McCance Building
16 Richmond Street
University of Strathclyde
Glasgow G1 1XQ

Tel: 0141 4221224

Wednesday 13th July 2002

Dear Mr Watson,

Childhood Reading, 1940 – 1968

Your participation and interest in this project is very highly valued and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for getting in touch and volunteering.

My research is concerned primarily with children's popular literature post 1940 such as story papers and comics, and from our conversation this afternoon on the telephone, I am sure you will have no problem answering the questions. The questions are designed to allow you to write as much or as little as you like. If you would like to add any other memories or comments of childhood reading material in the 1940s and 1950s, I would be extremely interested to read them!

Please find enclosed a copy of the "Childhood Reading" questionnaire for you to complete at your leisure. I have also enclosed a "Clearance and Copyright" form for you to complete and return to me along with the completed questionnaire in the self-addressed, pre-paid envelope. If you have any questions regarding either the questionnaire or the consent form please do not hesitate to get back in touch. As I mentioned in our conversation the next step after I receive the questionnaire back is to arrange a time to conduct the interview at a suitable location for you.

I look forward to your reply.

Kind Regards,

Hilary Young

Childhood Reading Questionnaire

Your Name:
(Voluntary Entry)

Present Address:
(Voluntary Entry)

Date of Birth:

1: Please tell me a bit about your family, in your own words – for instance, about your mother and father and other siblings, if any. Where did you live when you were a child? What school did you go to? What did your mother and father do? Did anyone else live with you. Please feel free to reflect widely.

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2: What do you think are the most important things I should know about you as a child...

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3: Please tell me a bit about your life after you left school. What was your first job? What did you like about it? What did you not like about it? Were you still living home or did you move away? Why did you leave that job and what job did you do next? Please feel free to write as much as you want.

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4: What comics and magazines do you remember reading below the age of 16 years (including adult magazines)? If you can, can you itemise roughly at what age you read each comic and magazine?

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5: Which stories/comics/magazines do you remember particularly enjoying? What did you enjoy about them? What was the attraction of reading them?

6: Which stories/comic/magazines do you remember disliking? Please give as many reasons for your preferences as you can.

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7: What other forms of reading do you recall in your childhood – including novels, knowledge based magazines and why did you read them?

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Additional Comments:

Please mention anything you recall about reading children's magazines and comics as a child. For example how did you acquire the material? Did you ever play at being the characters you read about in the comics? What did your parents think about you reading the comics and magazines? When did you stop reading the comics and in your opinion why?

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CO-OPERATION

The Mass-Observation Project
Autumn 2003 Directive

Part 1:
Public and private spaces/places

This directive is about your feelings and use of public places. Think broadly - parks, streets, buildings, public facilities of any kind.

What kind of public spaces do you like best and feel most comfortable in?

What kinds of public spaces do you like least?

Where do you feel safe and where do you feel unsafe?

Can you describe why you like some places and not others.

As usual, please start all three parts of your reply on a new sheet of paper with your M-O number, (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently within your reply.

Those places you like

How often do you use them?

Whom do you see/meet there?

If you were in charge of running your local area how would you improve the public spaces there.

The difference between private and public

What do you think the difference is between private and public space?

Are there things that you would do in private but not in public and vice versa?

Do you feel differently when you are at home as opposed to when you are out in the street?

Do you think about different things and behave in a different way when you are inside or outside?

Meeting people: your experience

Can you describe the last time you met a person or a group of people who were very different from you outside of your home?

How did it make you feel?

How did you interact, if at all?

Do you find mixing with people who are different from yourself an enjoyable or an awkward experience. Tell us a story about one or more such experience.

Part 2: Childhood reading: comics & magazines

Please start by noting down your year of birth so that we know exactly which years your childhood covered.

Did you read comics and/or magazines as a child? If you did, please describe whatever you remember. Our researcher is especially interested in the influence of comics and magazines on the way we grow up. As always, the questions below are prompts to get you going but if you think of other things which are relevant, please add them. If you didn't read comics as a child, we would still be interested in your views.

Did you have a regular comic ? At what age? Did this change over time?

Who bought the comic? And who paid for it? Were your parents involved in the choice?

Did you read it with your parents or with other members of your family? Can you recall the experience? As usual, all details appreciated.

Did you have favourite characters or story lines? Please describe.

It is sometimes said (at least in the past) that some comics appealed to girls and some to boys. Was this so in your case? What do you think?

Question for men and women: did you ever read your mother's (or sister's) magazines? What attracted you to reading them? Did they offer advice on careers or marriage?

How do you think comics or magazines affected the way you grew up? Please feel free to reflect widely!

Part 3: Day diary for New Year's Eve 2003

Please keep a diary from waking to sleeping on New Year's Eve 2003.

Nothing is too trivial or too boring for us so please don't write and tell me that you haven't bothered because nothing happened!

And even if your day is completely untypical, we still want to hear about it.

Please end with a list of your hopes (personal and general) for 2004.

Send in your replies to the whole directive after the New Year.

DS/Nov 2003 Dir. No. 70

The Mass-Observation Archive ~ FREEPOST BR2112 ~ The Library ~ University of Sussex ~Brighton BN1 1ZX

email: moa@sussex.ac.uk

APPENDIX 5

Story Papers, Comics and Magazine Titles Named by Oral Narrators

Title	Publisher	Publication Dates
Adventure	D.C. Thomson	1921-1961
*Archie**	Archie Teen Comics	1942 to date
Boys' Own Paper	Religious Tract Society	1879-1967
Champion	Amalgamated Press	1922-1955
Classics Illustrated	Thorpe and Porter	1951- c.1960s
Comic Cuts	Amalgamated Press	1890-1953
The Children's Newspaper (Incorporated with *Look and Learn*)	Amalgamated Press	1919-1965
Cosmopolitan	Hearst Corporation	1972 to date
Eagle (Incorporated with *Lion*)	Hulton Press	1950-1969
Film Fun		1921-1962
Girl (Incorporated with *Princess* 1961-1966)	Hulton Press	1951-1964
Girls' Crystal (Incorporated with *School Friend* 1963)	Amalgamated Press	1935-1953 1953-1963 comic
Girl's Own Paper (Incorporated with *Heiress* 1950)	Religious Tract Society	1880-1950
Good Housekeeping	Hearst Corporation	1922 to date
The Guide	Girl Guide Association	1910 to date
Heiress	Religious Tract Society	1950-1956
Hotspur	D.C. Thomson	1933- 1959
Knock-out	Amalgamated Press	1939
*Ladies Home Journal**	Curtis Publishing Co.	1883 to date

Magnet (Incorporated with *Knock-out* 1940)	Amalgamated Press	1908-1940
The People's Friend	D.C. Thomson	1869 to date
Picturegoer (various titles)	IPC	c.1913-1960
Red Letter	D.C. Thomson	1899-1987
Red Star Weekly	D. C. Thomson	1929-1950
Rover (Incorporated with *Victor* 1961-)	D.C. Thomson	1922-1961
School Friend (Incorporated with *June* 1965)	Amalgamated Press	1919-1929 1950-1965
Secrets	D.C. Thomson	1932-1990
SHE	Hearst Corporation	1955 to date
Skipper	D.C. Thomson	1930-1941
Vogue	Condé Nast Publications	1916 to date
Wizard	D.C. Thomson	1922-1963
Woman	Odhams	1937 to date
Woman's Own	Newnes,	1932 to date

*These publications were American.

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A: Original Research and Unpublished Primary Sources

Representation and Reception Oral History Project in Glasgow

These interviews were conducted and transcribed by Hilary Young. The transcripts will be stored in the Scottish Oral History Centre Archive (SOHCA), Department of History, University of Strathclyde. Some of the respondents are identified by pseudonyms as anonymity was assured at the time of interview.

SOHCA/RR/02	Miss Iris Adams
SOHCA/RR/03	Mrs Elizabeth Baine
SOHCA/RR/04	Mrs Gillian Bayne
SOHCA/RR/05	Mrs Dorothy Bell
SOHCA/RR/06	Mr John Cooper
SOHCA/RR/07	Mr Kenneth Doran
SOHCA/RR/08	Mrs Katherine Dixon
SOHCA/RR/09	Prof. Hamish Fraser
SOHCA/RR/10	Mr Andrew Gummers
SOHCA/RR/11	Mr Peter Halfpenny
SOHCA/RR/12	Mr Richard Ingram
SOHCA/RR/13	Mrs Elizabeth Kelly
SOHCA/RR/14	Mr Rowland Marshall
SOHCA/RR/15	Mr Ronnie Paterson
SOHCA/RR/16	Miss Dorothy Priestly
SOHCA/RR/17	Mrs Jean Rankine
SOHCA/RR/18	Mr John Robertson
SOHCA/RR/19	Mr Alex Thomson
SOHCA/RR/20	Mrs Doreen Thomson
SOHCA/RR/21	Mrs Emily Turner
SOHCA/RR/22	Mrs Evelyn Wilson
SOHCA/RR/23	Mr Hugh Wynne
SOHCA/RR/24	Mrs Irene Young

Replies to Autumn 2003 Directive, Part 2 on Childhood Reading Experiences
Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex

While all replies to this directive were examined, only those that are directly quoted are listed below. The first number refers to individual respondent's Mass-Observation number whose contribution is always coded with this prefix. Years of birth are listed as known.

Female Correspondents

MO-No	Year of Birth
B1475	1943
B1898	1931
C2654	1942
E743	1951
F1373	1932
H260	1930
H266	1923
L1691	1943
M1979	1938
M2290	1929
N1592	1931
P1637	1929
W2588	1923

Male Correspondents

MO-No	Year of Birth
B2710	1929
C110	1933
H1543	1930
L1504	1926
R450	1926
S2246	1923
W565	1927

B: Archival Primary Sources

British Newspaper Library, London
Children's Newspaper 1925, 1942, 1950, 1955

Everywoman, 1945, 1946

Girl's Crystal, 1949 – 1950, 1954

Lucky Star and Peg's Paper 1950, 1955, 1960

Miss Modern, 1940

Modern Woman, 1945, 1950

School Friend, 1950, 1955

Rover, 1949 – 1950.

D. C. Thomson, Dundee
Red Letter, January – December 1950

Red Letter, January – December 1960

Red Star Weekly, January – December 1950

Romeo, January – December 1966

Secrets, January – December 1950

Secrets, January – December 1960

Govan Reminiscence Group Archive, Glasgow University Business Archives
ACCN2491 COMICS CD251

Peter Halfpenny

Jim Wallace

May Kelly

Tommy Stewart

Sid Smith

Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex
File Report (FR) 62 'Literary Questionnaire', March 1942.

FR 367 'Leisure', August 1940.

FR 2086 'Childhood Reading', May 1944.

FR 2545B 'A Report on Penguin World', December 1947.

FR 3012 'Children Out of School', June 1948.

FR 3078 'The Importance of Leisure', 1949.

FR 3150 'Teenage Girls', August 1949.

Mitchell Library, Glasgow
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Boy's Own Paper, 1879 – 1917, 1942 – 1967

British Weekly, The, April 1950.

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QD1/FLWE/69

QD1/FLWE/98

QD1/FLWE/173

QD1/FLWE/284

QD1/FLWE/296

QD1/FLWE/303

QD1/FLWE/382

QD1/FLWE/386

QD1/FLWE/MUC/2002

QD1/FLWE/MUC/2016

QD1/FLWE/MUC/2023

QD1/FLWE/MUC/2041

QD1/FLWE/MUC/2049

QD1/FLWE/MUC/2058

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http://toughofthetrack.net/remembered.htm
BBC Radio 4's programme, 'Tough of the Track', by Stuart Storey, 30 July 2005 can be listened to at the above address.