‘Fashion, you’re incomprehensible!’ Teenage girls, *Jackie* magazine and fashion as a negotiated social statement in the early 1970s

Angela McRobbie’s seminal work *Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity* (1978) offered a groundbreaking analysis of the hugely popular magazine for teenage girls and its role in preparing its readers for their role as ‘future wives and mothers’. It paved the way for many successive examinations of ‘bedroom culture’ (such as Kearney 2007, Lincoln 2012) and, more broadly, of the role of popular media in establishing gendered and patriarchal social norms. It also stimulated interest in analysing specifically gendered forms of cultural production, such as magazines aimed at women and, in the case of *Jackie*, teenage girls. The immense and deserved success of McRobbie’s work in the field, though, has arguably led to a crystallising of her textual analysis of *Jackie* as a universalised statement about the magazine and its potential meanings for readers. Her initial work on *Jackie*, published like much of the CCCS’s research as a ‘working paper’, has over time come to seem more like, and perhaps uncomfortably like, a definitive statement about what *Jackie* was and what it meant. It should be acknowledged that McRobbie herself has been admirably willing, far more so than many scholars, to revisit and indeed critique her own work. Nevertheless, the *Jackie* study, while not intended to be a final statement on the matter, has come to occupy that position for various reasons; the most obvious one being that further *textual* exploration of the magazine, following McRobbie’s example, has been limited by its scarcity and ephemerality as a material object.

The research presented here makes use of editions of *Jackie* from 1973-1974, held in the Femorabilia collection of twentieth-century girls’ and women’s magazines at Liverpool John Moores University, to re-examine its fashion content, and to revisit some of McRobbie’s propositions in her 1978 work on *Jackie* and of her work with co-author Jenny Garber in their important 1976 essay ‘Girls and subcultures’. While these critical works position girls as aligned with the domestic and preoccupied with the personal emotions of romance, this article will argue that *Jackie* is a media product itself highly attuned to the wider media landscape in which it exists, including the film, TV, music and fashion industries. The magazine encourages its readers to engage with those spheres in their self-expression, and in their pursuit of how their engagement with fashion shapes and is shaped by their excursions into the public sphere, as well as their domestic circumstances.

The selection of issues from 1973-74 enables an exploration of a period which deserves a more nuanced treatment and understanding of both the continuity it maintained and the changes with which it was marked. The 1970s in Britain as a decade has been homogenised, and as such characterised by drabness, disaster, and economic failure (Black 2012; Poiron 2016; Turner, 2009) In this section of the decade, though, the sense of continuity with the 1960s which can be observed (Beckett 2010: 209) exists alongside the acknowledgement of the seismic developments in culture and in progressive politics resulting in social and legislative advances for women and other minority groups (Poiron 2016: 303). Drawing on Black’s argument that ‘the ambiguities of this period are important’ and that it offers ‘liberation and power, not just crisis and decline’ (2012: 184), I wish to advance a view of *Jackie* in 1973-1974 that demonstrates its cautious ambiguity in fashion coverage. This ambiguity can both support increasing power and liberation for teenage girls, yet also circumscribes this with regard to persisting notions of tradition, gender roles and the structures of the family. *Jackie*’s fashion coverage shows the importance of particular domestic, and feminised, values and virtues – moderation, careful budgeting – in line with

McRobbie's interpretation of *Jackie*'s 'ideology of adolescent femininity' (1978). However, less acknowledged aspects of this content show the importance of fashion as also supporting social interaction in a wider sense, beyond readers' success in finding a male partner. *Jackie* in this period can also be seen as embracing a culture of consumption as increasingly central to teenage life, and I describe the impact of this in both changing feature formats and in their content. Consequently, the *Jackie* reader's ability to navigate the sphere of fashion is done with regard to family structures, but also their developing self-realisation, as well as their standing with friends and a wider audience of unknown others.

This article argues for the role of archival research in furthering this critical conversation and presents findings based on archival work with the Femorabilia collection. The analysis presented here focuses on fashion features as being characteristically directed at how girls prepare themselves for social encounters outside the home. It also considers how other features touching on fashion, such as reader opinion pieces and letters, represent the balance of moderation, experimentation and adaptability offered by the *Jackie* reader's self-presentation as a fashionable young woman. Findings demonstrate the heterogeneous meanings on offer in the magazine: while *Jackie* readers of this period are frequently positioned within the domestic sphere, they are also addressed as an audience who are nevertheless impatient to go out into the wider world, dressed and ready for it.

McRobbie's work, girls and space

McRobbie and Garber addressed the issues of girls and the spaces they tended to occupy in contemporary life in their essay 'Girls and Subcultures'; first published in 1976, it describes the period in which the *Jackie* issues examined here are also produced. The essay argues that girls have been largely invisible in accounts of subcultures and subcultural spaces, and where present are discussed in terms of their sexual attractiveness (1980: 209). As a result, girls' claim on the public sphere is a gendered, secondary one, with girls rendered marginal to cultures of work but central to a subordinate but complementary sphere of 'the family', domesticity and home (McRobbie and Garber 1980: 211). McRobbie's individual work, *Jackie: an ideology of adolescent femininity* (1978) argues that it offered girls a structure that prepared them for adult life as women within the dominant ideologies that govern women's lives. Her examination of the magazine uses semiotic analysis to identify its dominant 'codes' of romance, domestic life, fashion and beauty (revising this later to include pop music). She finds that the magazine encourages girls to see their futures as 'future wives and mothers' (McRobbie 1978: 12), complying with patriarchial norms, focusing primarily on finding a suitable male partner, and needing to negotiate what she and Garber describe as 'the double injunction of "having fun" while not "getting yourself into trouble"' (McRobbie and Garber 1980: 213). This makes girls' negotiation of the public sphere a matter of walking a careful line.

While much of the analysis in both publications continues to be acute and relevant, my aim here is to re-evaluate McRobbie's focus on the domestic as girls' default habitat, and McRobbie and Garber's analysis of the marginality of girls in the public sphere, by re-examining the way *Jackie*'s coverage of fashion and dress represents a negotiation of the tensions between domestic life and their activities outside the home. Recognition of the significance of McRobbie's work can be found in the many scholars who have followed her lead in examining cultures of girlhood and their close links with the regulation of youth and femininity and who have worked to expand and re-examine these ideas. Kearney (2007) notes

that ‘the importance of McRobbie and Garber’s essay cannot be overstated (2007: 126) but nevertheless argues for the need to critique its findings on a number of fronts: not only has girlhood undergone ‘profound transformations’ in the decades since its publication, but so have its critical perspectives and framing of girls’ leisure, so that ‘a critical analysis of their theory is long overdue’ (2007: 127). In terms of McRobbie’s textual findings and methods, Barker’s critique (1989), conducted several years later than McRobbie’s own and drawing on a larger and more rigorous sample of actual issues, but from an overlapping period, offers a comprehensive insight into the limitations and inflexibilities in her reading. Barker argues persuasively that while *Jackie* is not necessarily ‘a source of hidden virtues’ (1989: 134) it is more complex than McRobbie’s findings allow, and challenges the notion that it offers straightforward meanings and ‘instant moral fables’ (1989: 138). That said, while Barker acknowledges that a misleading sense of unity is attributed both to the readership and to the varied contents and feature types of the magazine (1989: 139), his detailed textual analysis focuses predominantly on *Jackie*’s stories and problem pages. My aim here is to direct discussion towards some of the *Jackie* feature types that have received less critical attention, while noting that, as Barker puts it, their structuring and content serves ‘no tidy scheme of ideology’ (1989: 195) and illuminating some of the tensions at play.

This article, then, aims to contribute to critical debate in its analysis of archived issues of *Jackie* which are contemporaneous with McRobbie’s original examination of *Jackie*, in order to bring into focus its structuring of girls’ self-presentation in the public sphere. In particular, it challenges one of McRobbie’s original assertions that ‘*Jackie* addresses girls as a monolithic grouping’ (1978: 3) in favour of later arguments by other scholars (and McRobbie’s own later work) that girls’ magazines ‘cannot be regarded as ideological monoliths providing a single unchanging view of girlhood, class and agency (Gibson, 2018: 133). Its fashion coverage strikes a careful balance between being open to new looks, to adaptability and experimentation, yet also approaching these with some caution and moderation.

Archival research and the Femorabilia archive

In the last decades of the twentieth century, popular girls’ magazines like *Jackie*, *Just Seventeen* and *My Guy* were significant sources of advice and instruction for their readers (Hermes 1995, Gough-Yates 2003, Rice 2000), but were regarded as ephemeral and not necessarily retained. The Femorabilia archive at Liverpool John Moores University holds over 130 different titles and more than 3,500 items, including extensive runs of many popular twentieth century girls’ and women’s magazines. This unique collection allows for close study of these texts, and research on significant archives of popular media material.

Nickianne Moody has discussed the Femorabilia collection as a resource that ‘addresses and serves multiple audiences’ (2018: 15) including students, present and future researchers and local communities. In preserving copies of girls’ and women’s popular periodicals of the twentieth century, it aims to recover a reading culture which she views as ‘very much in danger of being lost and spoken for only by the academics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who have had access to these texts as they were published, if not to the culture itself’ (Moody 2018: 1). Given the basis of McRobbie’s 1978 work in textual analysis of recent contemporary issues, later scholars have found this difficult to challenge or divert from because of the difficulty of not having access to the texts in order to conduct fresh analysis.

The resources of the Femorabilia archive's extensive collection of girls' magazines enables wide-ranging analysis of these historical media texts, with the opportunity to re-examine previous assumptions and develop fresh insights on the basis of archival evidence. This article aspires to address some of the aims articulated by Moody as 'prevent[ing] this popular media form from being understood as a homogenous mass' (2018: 2) and 'challeng[ing] theoretical perspectives and models about popular cultural products' (2018: 3)

Methodology and approach

This research is centred on textual analysis, which remains a central component in examinations of representation in media and culture (Hall, Evans and Nixon 2013, McKee 2003) While it has unavoidable limitations in its methods and findings, notably that it should not be taken as a direct and unproblematic version of how readers would read the magazine (Hermes 1995, Caldas-Coulthard 1996) it nevertheless enables specific discussion of the production and circulation of meanings in popular media forms, and of contextual and historical analysis of such texts (Gibson 2018, Gough-Yates 2003, McKee, 2003). Furthermore, I would argue for historically and culturally informed textual analysis as a vital and ongoing activity within the research process, to guard against enshrining particular critical and / or 'expert' readings and to continue to invite other perspectives, a key principle of cultural studies-based research. While readers of the issues of *Jackie* examined here, published in 1973 and 1974, are themselves now a resource accessed with difficulty, opportunities for fruitful work can be located in conducting archival textual analysis that is mindful of over-assuming about historical readerships from our current vantage point, but gains the benefit of the renewed and preserved availability of the texts as material artefacts.

My use of these archival materials has taken into account the need to balance availability and representativeness, alongside Moody's caution about being reliant on 'spectacular examples rather than quotidian ones' (2018: 6) in such analyses. Having chosen to examine the 1973-74 period, careful analysis was undertaken with all the issues of *Jackie* held in the Femorabilia archive from this period, comprising five issues covering the period from March 1973 to September 1974. This sample is based primarily on availability and on considering each issue as a whole, rather than isolating features as if they would not have been read intertextually and collectively, and draws examples for discussion from across these issues. The research also considers the need to present findings based on archival materials sensitively in relation to issues of ethics and privacy. Published material is often considered to be freely citable in this respect, in comparison to unpublished archival material such as private letters (McKee and Porter 2012) but it also seemed judicious to assume that readers still living might not wish to have their current identities associated with their childhood correspondence and would not have been adults and able to give full informed consent at the time of publication. My approach, then, with materials such as readers' letters here has been to treat them as information shared in the public domain and quote directly, but to omit any reader information to which letters were attributed, with the aim of eliminating as far as possible the likelihood of any living individual being identified by others as the author of the materials.

Fashion, features and consumerism

Jackie's fashion coverage in this period provides ample evidence of the magazine's increasing emphasis consumption that McRobbie's work describes (1978: 8), though with a

twin presence of both creativity and consumerism. Its regular features include making and modifying garments, often with the aim of working within a restricted budget, but where a growing emphasis on consumption – though on limited funds - as the pathway to looking stylish is discernible. This is shown structurally by a change in the rhythm of regular features which takes place during the period examined in this research, where, from the autumn of 1974, the established regular Patchwork page begins to appear alternately with the newly-introduced Lookout page. This evidently formed part of a larger shake-up of the overall layout of the magazine, with other regular features shifting from their usual location. The editor reassures readers that this will offer them the best of both worlds:

We got so many letters saying how much you liked our new Lookout page that it seemed only fair to give it a permanent place in the magazine where you could find it easily. It will take turn about with that other firm favourite, "Patchwork". ('The Editor's Letter', 1974b: 2)

The new prominence of Lookout reflected the corresponding expansion of items suggested for readers to purchase, rather than to make, modify or recycle themselves, as was more characteristic of Patchwork. Nevertheless, consumption does not dominate completely, as Patchwork remains a regular feature, alongside a range of other content which urges readers to reuse and remake rather than simply buy new. While perhaps for different reasons, the environmental awareness which later becomes a prominent presence in teenage media, including *Jackie*, is surprisingly well aligned with much of the 'waste not want not' culture threaded into its 1970s content. Also notable is the direct address to readers and assertion that the layout and features are chosen on the basis of what pleases the reader – they are in charge, and regularly reminded of this. Gibson notes this about 1960s *Jackie* and observes that the continuing presence of the readers' letters page at the very start of the magazine through the 1970s arguably makes the 'readers' voices central to the appeal of the periodical' (2018: 141). It is certainly a message that the production team is keen to reiterate, positioning the magazine as providing the reader with guidance, but as an advisory rather than an authoritarian resource, which focus on reflecting rather than actively shaping reader preferences.

'Fashion, you're incomprehensible!'

The title of this article comes from a line in a reader's poem which is the letter of the week in the 30 March 1974 edition of *Jackie*. It begins:

Jackie readers, please beware
About the sort of shoes you wear,
On platforms you might break your neck
Or at least your arches wreck ('Letter of the Week', 1974a: 2)

A range of shoe styles are criticised for their adverse physical and visual effects in the poem; 'needle points' can 'ruin style and bend your joints', may squash your toes or in the case of brogues 'don't look ladylike or neat', yet the reader will, the poem surmises 'follow fashion without care'. The final lines sum up:

Fashion, you're incomprehensible!

When will you make our shoes more sensible. (‘Letter of the Week’, 1974a: 2)

It might seem surprising to find a critique of current fashion winning the prize for reader’s letter of the week in a girls’ magazine whose brand is focused on the ideas of currency. Gibson observes that the ‘assertion of modernity, of activity, of agency and modernity’ (2018: 141) from *Jackie*’s early branding as ‘for go-ahead teens’ in the mid-1960s is firmly established from that point onwards. Would a ‘go-ahead teen’ reader actually be hankering for more sensible shoes? It is important to remember that, as discussed earlier, *Jackie* does not offer a single, unvarying version of girlhood to its readers. Fashion is acknowledged in this respect to be a contested area, and one which does not, for several reasons, get unwavering endorsement in all circumstances. The choice of a fashion-sceptical letter as weekly winner supports a number aspects of *Jackie*’s mode of operation, and I will detail these to set out some of the key themes and discourses found in the representation of girls, their engagements with fashion and their agency in the public sphere in these 1973-74 issues of the magazine.

The prize winning poem (the prize being £4 in cash) appears early in the magazine, as part of the emphasis on the importance of readers’ views, supported by Gibson’s argument about *Jackie*’s centralising of ‘the voice of the reader’ (2018: 142). This demonstrates that not just supportive reader views, but views that might contradict expected teenage discourses and values, can be accommodated. *Jackie* as a publication, then, shows that it welcomes a debate about current issues in teenage experience (while, nevertheless, having ways of containing those debates when it becomes desirable to do so) and readers who have differing views. It reinforces reader power to see this letter at the beginning of the magazine. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that the poem is clearly presented as light hearted content, rather than a deeply felt *cri de coeur* about platform shoes. I wish to argue that as well as centring a view of teenage life as being about pursuing fun and enjoyment – within appropriate limits – the specific goal of learning to laugh at yourself is one *Jackie* recommends for its readers. Once this is recognised as an intrinsic element of *Jackie*, present across a range of its features and content, it allows for a greater understanding the provision for *Jackie*’s treatment of fashion, as something current, important to be in the know about, but which is also at times frustrating and even absurd, from which it might on occasion be appropriate to pull back and to not take too seriously.

The presence of this viewpoint on the letters page also suits *Jackie*’s multivalent approach to fashion style and appearances across the whole magazine. While fashion features are one of its standard regular elements, these are not the only features in which style is commented upon. *Jackie*’s overall content tends to depict girls’ concern with their appearance in ways that allow for a concern with fashion and style to be kept in proportion, as I will go on to demonstrate. This avoids the charge of *Jackie* ‘following fashion without care’, as the reader poem puts it: an excessive concern with fashion is cautioned against in examples of undesirable behaviour, with moderation the goal.

Various scholarly works on girls’ and women’s magazines have observed that their contents are varied in perspective, and different feature types are potentially contradictory (see, for example, Hermes 1995, Caldas-Coulthard 1996, McLoughlin 2000). McRobbie acknowledged this herself in the first edition of her collection of essays on girls’ cultural practices, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, where she reflects on her limited awareness, in her earlier 1970s research, of ‘the internal tensions and contradictions which disrupt the

magazine, making it more open to contestation than might otherwise be imagined' (McRobbie 1990: 141). It is not, therefore surprising that *Jackie* contains such tensions and contradictions in its discourses on fashion, which appear across a range of feature types and not just in the badged 'fashion' content. I would argue that it is an aspect of maintaining *Jackie*'s explicit centring of the reader that the magazine should be adept at accommodating these varying perspectives; since its readers are not homogenous in their views on fashion, neither can *Jackie* afford to be.

However, in addition to offering fashion discourses that address it in terms of currency and being up to speed, yet also in terms of caution and even scepticism, there is a third function for the discourse of fashion in *Jackie* which can also be indirectly supported by the publication of the poem. Its penultimate line 'Fashion, you're incomprehensible!' also sets up the need for guidance in navigating this bewildering field. This role for the magazine as cultural intermediary will be highlighted in the discussion of *Jackie*'s fashion feature content that follows. Both interest in and scepticism towards fashion (on the basis of its incomprehensibility, as explicated by the reader poem, and also on the commonly-cited grounds of cost) can be met with a solution, in the form of the guidance that *Jackie* is able to offer in navigating this sphere of teenage life. This aligns both with the magazine's own tacit assertion of its relevance, and with Hermes's argument that women's magazines are a resource that offer repertoires of 'connected knowing' but also 'practical guidance' (1995: 31), both of which are provided by *Jackie*'s regular fashion features, with their coverage of fashionable garments, how to wear them and where to buy them, alongside instructions on how to customise and adapt your existing wardrobe. These features are by definition, offering guidance on how readers can present themselves in the most advantageous light when out and about in public, with the expectation that this has significant implications for girls' success in fulfilling the imperative identified by McRobbie (1978) in securing a male partner, but also for their wider social standing and network of personal relationships, as I will go on to show with regard to anxieties articulated in other feature types.

Fashion features in 1970s *Jackie* and its cultural context

The issues of *Jackie* from 1973-74 analysed in this research offer two fashion features per issue. Both are picture rather than photo features, as was the magazine's standard practice at the time; photographs feature in *Jackie* to represent the celebrities included – who are almost entirely pop stars – but not used in other features in the way which became the norm later in the magazine's history. The first type of fashion feature included took a fairly standard approach in having a theme, often loosely defined. For example, in the first issue examined from the sample, from 17 March 1973, this was titled 'Come together' and opened with:

It's not just a question of knowing what's in fashion but, much more important, knowing how to get it together. For too long now it's been a case of "anything goes" and we've all become so mixed up in our choice of clothes that we've lost our sense of co-ordination.
What we need is a bit of breathing space, a pause to collect our thoughts and think of some beautiful clothes that are simply longing to get together! ('Come Together', 1973a: 19)

Jackie's themed fashion feature often tended to emphasise this idea of conveying a sense of knowing how to put outfits together, while also directing the reader to the outlets where suitable items were available. The increasing consumerism of the era is evident but is

tempered with a sense of restraint regarding the retailers: well-known high street names like Dolcis, Freeman Hardy Willis, or C&A. However, the expected higher-end labels associated with fashion content are not entirely excluded; in 'Come Together', two suits from Richard Green are included, one without any reference to price – unlike most items in the feature – and the other stating 'Price: details from us'.

A similar theme is used in 'All Together Now' in the 21 September 1974 issue, advising readers on putting a trousers-and-top outfit together: 'decide on a fairly basic colour for the trousers and then go wild with stripes, flecks or just plain colours if you're in the mood!' ('All Together Now', 1974b: 29) This characteristic approach is to pair a classic item with something more demonstrative, but if in doubt to revert to caution and 'just plain colours'. The direction to 'go wild' is one with clear limits. Advice on how to combine separates is a common theme: 'Team Spirit' demonstrates how to mix and match tops and trousers but also beads and hats to 'make life a little more exciting' ('Team Spirit', 1974a: 19) though again, moderation and versatility are key.

There are also features about unified outfits, though which also draw on consistent themes: the 'Changing suits' feature of the 24 November 1973 issue highlights 'suits that put you in a looking good, feeling great mood. Just right for all occasions' ('Changing Suits', 1973c: 31). The latter point seems a fairly implausible claim; formal wear is not a dominant part of the *Jackie* reader's lifestyle, and the general tendency towards conservatism, if in doubt, would draw the reader away from seeming overdressed. However, these statements reinforce *Jackie*'s habitual emphasis in fashion features on its role in foregrounding the fun and positive aspects of teen lifestyle, and of coupling that with the expectation of doing so in a thrifty and budget-conscious manner. Special occasion outfits should be justified by reference to their wider versatility, not seen as one-off purchases. The suits featured are less the professional business skirt suit associated with John T Molloy's influential advice in *The Woman's Dress for Success Book* (published just a few years later in 1977) and more two-piece matching ensembles, with softer lines in the collars and patterns.

It can be seen from the themed fashion features that *Jackie*'s approach was based on the assumption that its teenage readers were operating with very limited finances. This is emphasised and centred in the format of the second type of regular fashion feature found in the 1973-74 issues, titled 'So Far Sew Good', with the subtitle 'Cheap and cheerful fashion ideas'. So Far Sew Good characteristically instructs readers on ways of customising and transforming garments they already own. In the earliest issue from the sample, 17 March 1973, the feature is titled 'Twinkle toes' and is a monochrome depiction of how diamante can be added to footwear as 'Sparkling shoes are news!' though the advice extends to clothes too, suggesting readers 'put diamante studs on your jean or sew diamante flower buttons down the side seams' ('Twinkle toes', 1973a: 20). The instructions in 'Twinkle toes' are brief but clear; while some versions of the feature give ideas for the modifications rather than detailed guidance, there is always an illustration to give readers a sense of how the customisations might look, mostly in colour.

Appropriating school uniform items to produce more exhilarating effects appears repeatedly: one So Far Sew Good feature is titled 'Cardie Tricks' instructs on how to modify a school cardigan into 'a more fashionable narrow shape' ('Cardie Tricks', 1974a: 24). Even Look Out, the more consumer-driven feature made permanent in 1973, includes advice such as

using ‘your old school panama’ as the basis for a new decorated hat (‘Look Out’, 1974b: 3). However, it should also be noted that immediately underneath ‘Cardie Tricks’ is ‘March into Spring’, an entirely consumption-based fashion feature about seasonal shoes to buy: ‘strappy sandals or elegant platforms’ (‘March into Spring’, 1974a: 24). It is entirely normal in *Jackie* for contrasting approaches to fashion and dress to be found on the same page, and also for features which typically embody a particular perspective – buying fashion items or customising existing garments to enhance their fashionability – to move into occupying another perspective on occasion.

The So Far Sew Good features are centred on the deployment of domestic skills, yet characteristically guide readers through reinventing their clothing and appearance for the public sphere, in a way that aligns with contemporary fashion. In the 21 September 1974 issue, the So Far Sew Good feature is seasonal both in its title – ‘Autumn sleeves’ and in its guidance on how to adopt ‘the 50s look’ by creating cap sleeves for dresses and blouses (‘Autumn sleeves’, 1974b: 10). Only one feature might seem to be more domestically focused, ‘Nightlies’ from the 17 November 1973 edition, but even here, the accompanying text makes it clear that this is aimed at public wearing: ‘just made for lounging about in and going to parties in, not to mention sleeping in’ (‘Nightlies’, 1973b: 30).

These activities are clearly signalled as ones that can offer personal gratification and increased self-esteem stemming from a reader’s pride in her own enhanced wardrobe, but also as undertaken with the expectation of an audience and public appreciation of her appearance and her efforts. The So Far Sew Good features echo Hermes’s argument about women’s magazines as a resource that offer repertoires of ‘connected knowing’ but also ‘practical guidance’ (1995: 31) in order to make themselves meaningful to their readers. Women have historically expected to be able to sew as a key skill in running a household, although the existence of sewing classes attended by girls and women throughout the twentieth century (Montgomery, 2006; Shrimpton 2017) as well as their presence on the school curriculum for decades, demonstrates that not all girls learned this domestic skill in full from their mothers as anticipated. Moreover, it frequently represented a dull obligation to be avoided: in a 1979 *Jackie* story where a girl is bored on a date, she thinks to herself ‘I should have stayed at home and finished the hem on my skirt’. The underlying logic of the So Far Sew Good features is that *Jackie* readers are likely to have some basic knowledge of sewing, and that it is motivation to use those skills that is being addressed.

Both types of regular fashion feature in *Jackie* during this period also align with Talbot’s concept of ‘consumer femininity’ articulated in the language of girls’ magazines (2010: 138), which can be seen flourishing in subsequent decades, but whose roots are already present here. Consumer femininity is defined as ‘the material and visual resources that they draw upon to feminize themselves; that is, both the products they buy and the concepts, practical skills and suchlike that they need to cultivate in order to use them’ (Talbot, 2010: 138) In a period of transition from ‘make do and mend’ to flourishing consumerism, and where girls’ agency is still very much negotiated with their parents, *Jackie* mediates these shifts by encompassing the knowledge Talbot outlines: its readers are guided on what to buy, and how to deploy their skills with what they already have. The emphasis in both domains is on versatility and experiments within moderation: ‘go wild’, but with limits.

As we can see, the most common theme in *Jackie*'s fashion features (though not by any means exclusive to it) is that being fashionable should not require lavish spending. Skill, taste and knowledge were more important than a substantial budget in maintaining a fashionable appearance. The backdrop to this period is one of economic volatility at national and international level, but where individual household budgets would have been likely to be feeling the benefits of the real wage increase of 40% for men during the previous two decades (Cunningham 2016: 183). The consistent advocating of restraint and moderation in *Jackie*'s approach to fashion and consumerism is one as likely, therefore, to derive from cultural norms as from economic necessities. The issues examined here from 1973-74 were published during a period marking, it has been argued, the 'end of the prolonged boom in the Western economy' that followed the Second World War' (Black 2004: 171), but where there would be an inevitable time lag before the broader impact of a less stable national economy made an impact on *Jackie*'s mediation of the zeitgeist for its readers. In the meantime, though, teenage girls would have been growing gradually accustomed to the greater availability of leisure time for their mothers (Cunningham 2016: 193) and therefore which they could expect in their own adult futures, as well as in their 'carefree' teenage years. They would also be more confident in their expectation of a future in the job market, with paid employment becoming far more typical for working class girls (Gibson, 2018: 135; Cunningham, 2016: 181). The rise of a career in which paid work would be combined with marriage and motherhood offered many new possibilities for the teenage girl. However, while by the 1970s women were entering paid work in greater numbers, there was nevertheless still a feeling on the part of many women, which persisted from previous decades, that as household members who were not formally employed and did not directly earn money, they did not have the right to leisure (Cunningham 2016: 179) and likewise less right to spend money on things that might seem frivolous. I would argue for this as an attitude likely to underlie *Jackie*'s approach to non-essential spending on items such as fashion; as its fiction content shows, girls were still expected to defer to their parents on almost all matters, and often to fathers as the authority on household decisions and conduct. In line with McRobbie's argument that *Jackie* prepared girls to be 'future wives and mothers' (1978: 12) they are advised to strike a careful balance between investing in maintaining their appearance, but avoiding seeming excessive and entitled in their spending habits as a result. They aspire to be well presented for the public sphere, in a way that supports social relationships and future romantic rewards, but without making demands on the household budget. These imperatives can be seen as also present in other feature types, as I will now show.

Letters about fashion and public presentation

A letter in the 21 September 1974 edition's Cathy and Claire problem page raises the issue of generational differences about fashion. The reader relates that her mother often buys her clothes:

> Sometimes I like them, but more often I find them old-fashioned. I really wouldn't be seen dead in some of them, except around the house, but how can I tell her this without hurting her feelings? […] My friends are always on at me for not being fashion-conscious, but I am really, if only I could get the chance! ('The Cathy and Claire Page', 1974b: 39)

Cathy and Claire's reply, supporting the reader's own desire not to appear ungrateful to her mother, suggests making tactful suggestions about garments they have seen and liked 'that beautiful blouse you saw in the boutique, or that lovely jumper in Marks and Spencer' and

also that the reader could go out shopping with her mother to keep her company and direct attention to garments she prefers. Interestingly, they summarise the issue as:

She's got 'sensible taste' in clothes as opposed to knowing what's really fashionable.

This opposition – here between mother and daughter - is one that *Jackie*'s approach to fashion, and indeed many other issues, emulates: a balance should be maintained between having 'sensible taste' and being 'really fashionable'. As the prize-winning poem from the reader's letters page shows, it is by no means the case that all readers want to position themselves at the 'really fashionable' end of this spectrum. The Cathy and Claire dilemma shows that fashion and clothing choices are made as part of a nexus of ongoing relationships and constraints, where a reader is likely to be negotiating between their wish to fit in with friends and social aspirations, and their desire to please their parents, along with an awareness that those parents will be the main providers of their clothes and the budget to pay for those clothes. While fashion features may draw on discourse that suggests more exuberance – as in 'go wild' – the tone which prevails across the range of *Jackie*'s features, and across these issues, is one of restraint: Cathy and Claire's reply states, 'remember not to be too demanding or outrageous in your choice of clothes'. Fashion is to be enjoyed, explored and indeed is expected to be part of a teenage girl's interests and lifestyle; yet it is simultaneously positioned as an interest which can be deleterious if taken to extremes, and which has to be moderated to be accommodated within family boundaries, both financial and emotional.

One textual space in which readers are encouraged to allow their more outrageous ideas free rein is in an 'On the spot interview' feature from the 30 March 1974 issue. The 'On the spot' feature asks readers (and, very occasionally, celebrities) to give their answer to a question. Some of the questions focus on personal choices, but others focus on one of *Jackie*'s major themes, the lives and personalities of pop stars. This one combines pop star interest with fashion in asking 'If you could design an outfit for a pop star, who would you choose?' and the rationales that accompany reader choices demonstrate the range of reader views and positions that *Jackie* is able to accommodate. It makes an interesting contrast to received wisdom about how shocking the images of 1970s stars like Marc Bolan and David Bowie were at the time to see a reader assert that they would put Marc Bolan in 'something really freaky […] I think he's a bit staid at the moment' ('On the Spot interview', 1974a: 7) Another would like to design 'a really sexy outfit for Mick Jagger', and another imagines a 1930s gangster outfit for Alvin Stardust: several readers take up the invitation as an opportunity to (further) sexualise their preferred pop stars. On the other hand, one reader visualises a thick polo neck pullover with long sleeves for Don Powell of Slade, 'Poor man, he looks so cold in that striped waistcoat suit without a shirt' ('On the Spot interview', 1974a: 7), bringing out the unease with fashion and with overt sexualisation that some readers voice. Another would dress all pop stars in 'frogman suits and balaclava helmets so no one could see what they looked like and would therefore just listen to the music'. While most responses discuss male pop stars, one takes up the idea of appropriate femininity for female singers:

I'd love to see Suzi Quatro in a dress for a change. She should wear something soft and feminine, like pink satin with lots of sequins. I'm sure she's really very pretty underneath that tomboy exterior. ('On the Spot interview', 1974a: 7)

While ringing the changes is a key principle of being fashionable, this also aligns with the recurrent *Jackie* theme of displaying appropriate femininity in one's appearance and behaviour, and with the popular narrative trope of a 'tomboy' embracing feminine self-presentation and being approved of as 'pretty' after all.

The challenge of making pop stars even more distinctive is felt most sharply in relation to David Bowie, who is mentioned twice, with both readers stating that he has already worn so many outrageous outfits that it would be difficult to go further. One suggests an all-fur outfit which would be 'a bit different', but the other suggests 'As a complete contrast I'd give him a traffic warden's outfit to wear!' which embraces the more imaginative idea of fashion as the unexpected and antagonistic. The range of responses, then, cover approaches from those embracing playfulness and desire, to the sensible, regulatory and conformist. The overall effect is to allow space for vicarious enjoyment of fashion – which, as a fantasy exercise, can go further that the readers might be comfortable with for themselves – but even there, traces of the need for boundaries are still present.

Conclusions

Laura Tisdall's research on adolescent girls' narratives about their own futures, drawing on essays written for school and educational purposes during the 1960s and 1970s, notes that 'adolescence was often seen as a premature reward for shouldering the responsibilities of adulthood' (2022: 496). Fashion forms one of the avenues in which *Jackie* readers can enjoy themselves and experience that reward in its own right, without reference to the preparation for their adult future as 'wives and mothers' which McRobbie emphasises. It is notable that fashion features, unlike other feature types in *Jackie*, rarely refer to boys in their textual guidance: fashion is presented as having a specifically social role, but where the audience for that self-presented is not, as might be expected, specifically articulated as being directed at prospective boyfriends. The values alluded to are more clearly rooted in a broader sense of moderated enjoyment, pleasure and consumption within reason and restraints, that is contextually situated both in the historic, social and economic conditions in which *Jackie* was being produced and consumed. They also centre on ultimately deferring to household and family imperatives, yet alongside a growing expectation of a life that will involve significant time spent in the public sphere: socialising, working, travelling, as well as in the domestic sphere outlined in McRobbie and Garber's work as the teenage girl's expected domain. I would agree with McRobbie's assertion that 'There is little of the extravagant or exotic in *Jackie*' (1978: 10) yet I would wish to assert that the notion of the girl as typically restricted to the domestic is countered by the more complex picture of socialisation, and of pleasure (tempered with moderation) in preparing oneself for appearing well dressed in public spaces, for a public audience not limited to prospective partners and future husbands. Gibson states that 'These narratives do focus on romance, but also on understanding oneself, or improving oneself, whether through education or fashion' (2018: 143). My focus here has been on re-evaluating the role of *Jackie*'s discourses on fashion, as found both in regular fashion features and in other content which highlights fashion as an issue for its readers. I have argued that these emphasise particular values and virtues whose relation to the domestic sphere is seen most strongly in the expectation that readers will act as deferential household and family members – this, of course, is still a feminised role. However, the central role of fashion supports social interaction in the wider public sphere, extending beyond the imperative to find a partner. It reflects the growing expectations articulated in *Jackie*'s output of 1973-74 that girls' futures would involve increasing time spent in the public rather than the domestic sphere.

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