CHAPTER FIVE

"Suitable for Us Girls"

Subjectivity and Community in the Victorian Periodical Press

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Although the rise of girls' magazines is often signalled by the emergence of *Seventeen*, an American publication first appearing in 1944, such a perspective overlooks the late nineteenth century as a pivotal moment in girls' media history.[1] Periodicals were an important vehicle for girls' reading in the 1880s and 1890s when declining paper prices and an increasingly gendered market for children's literature meant that girls were increasingly understood to comprise a significant segment of the market. The Victorian periodical press was part of the emerging public discourse that began to articulate the female adolescent (Driscoll 35). This period, argues Sally Mitchell, marked the emergence of a "new girl" who "occupied a provisional free space" that "suggested new ways of being, new modes of behavior, and new attitudes that were not yet acceptable for adult women" (3). In the girls' print culture of the period, readers were offered a degree of imaginative independence, even if it was not always realised in the everyday reality of their lives.

The most popular British girls' magazine of the Victorian period was the *Girl's Own Paper*. Launched in 1880, the magazine catered to girls between the ages of approximately thirteen and twenty-three. Girl was an ambiguous category in the late nineteenth century since definitions of British girlhood typically referred to both girls and unmarried young women. As Michelle J. Smith explains, because young women often did not marry until their mid-twenties, the readership for the magazine included "a substantial proportion of young women in their late teens and early twenties" (29). Moreover, the target readership of this periodical shifted

over time. The magazine was renamed the *Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine* in 1908, suggesting an aging readership.[2]

As editor Charles Peters explains, the magazine was intended to help train girls "in moral and domestic virtues, preparing them for the responsibilities of womanhood and for a heavenly home" ("Your Valentine" 320). These "virtues" were based on nineteenth-century feminine ideals of duty, charity, and family. But between the articles on needlework and painting, the magazine also provided spaces for girls to engage with more political topics such as education and employment. Recognizing girls as political subjects, Peters created opportunities for girls' voices to appear in the magazine as girls submitted pieces of art, wrote letters that were answered by the editors, and contributed short essays and articles. In doing so, the *Girl's Own Paper* allowed girls to participate in the discursive formations of Victorian girlhood as it interpellated a community of girl readers.

Although the *Girl's Own Paper* attempted to create a single community of girl readers, it understood that its readers came from different socio-economic groups. The availability of the magazine as both a one-penny weekly and a six-penny monthly reflected this reality. This bifurcated implied readership meant that the magazine occasionally had difficulty incorporating competing class-based feminine ideals. For example, middle-class girls were generally discouraged from working outside the home, while working-class girls obviously needed to work to support their families (Moruzi and Smith 429). These expectations were at least partially related to girls' health, since middle-class girls and women were defined by "a permanent state of illness" (Patton 112) while working-class girls were expected to be healthy.

The changing nature of women's rights in the last decades of the nineteenth century also influenced the contents of, and girls' contributions to, the *Girl's Own Paper*. In the late eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft first argued in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that girls should be better educated for their future roles as wives and mothers. This argument was expanded in the second half of the nineteenth century as women agitated for political and legal rights related to suffrage, employment, and education. In the 1860s and beyond, girls had access to more and better educational opportunities, including access to university degrees. By 1880, girls seemingly had access to a wider variety of educational and employment opportunities, yet the *Girl's Own Paper* had to balance this more progressive content against traditional expectations of girlhood.

Previous scholarship on Victorian girls' periodicals by Sally Mitchell, Michelle J. Smith, Beth Rodgers, Terri Doughty, and Kristine Moruzi demonstrates that these magazines posit multiple girlhoods and offer imaginative spaces where girls can see stories and images about girls like themselves. However, by framing Victorian girls' magazines within the field of girls' media studies, influenced by scholars

such as Dawn Currie, Mary Celeste Kearney, Catherine Driscoll, Sherrie Inness, and Angela McRobbie, we explore how girls actively participated in the discursive formations of Victorian girlhood as articulated in the *Girl's Own Paper.* This chapter argues two related points about girls' engagement with the magazine: First, by including girls' writings in the magazine, the *Girl's Own Paper* provided spaces for girls to discuss ideas and ideals of girlhood, albeit in ways that were contained by the technological, organisational and ideological structures of the Victorian press; and second, readers of *Girl's Own Paper* engaged with the magazine in ways that interpellated them as members of both local and transnational communities of girls. The media studies framework offers a new lens through which to examine the magazine and the agency of its readers.

Underpinning much of girls' media studies is the recognition of "girls as active producers of their own cultural artifacts" (Mazzarella 75). Drawing on cultural studies, girls' media studies acknowledges girls as agential beings in the production and reproduction of girls' culture and girls' social structures, including the structures of subjectivity.[3] What this means for a study of girls' magazines is that girls are understood to be actively engaged in the ways that media texts define and frame what it means to be a girl. The girl subject is discursively constructed out of knowledges of being, and girls actively participate in these discursive constructions of knowledges. While it would be easy to assume that in the Victorian era, girls were not actively engaged with how magazines defined and positioned what it meant to be a girl, our research shows that girls were engaging with the Victorian periodical press and that texts like the *Girl's Own Paper* were participatory in their orientation. But this participation was limited by the structures of the Victorian periodical press.

This participation of girls was contested; for example, the magazine staff encouraged girls to write letters to the editor and submit their writings for contests, but often published only the responses to the letters or the names of the winners of competitions were published. Thus girls' voices were sought by the *Girl's Own Paper*, but were often contained within adult editorials and/or judgements about the value of their work. In the broader context of girls' media culture, this reveals that girls have a long history of active engagement with the cultural artefacts produced for them. The readers of the magazine were heavily invested in the construction of their own subjective selves.

This chapter is part of a larger project in positioning the Victorian press as a critical moment in the history of girls' media culture, which has mostly overlooked this historical moment. As Kearney has noted, girls' media culture scholars tend to focus on girls in the contemporary moment to the detriment of scholarship that historicizes girlhood. She labels this oversight as a "presentist approach" (4).[4] This tendency is partially owing to the fact that girls' stories are largely absent in the official recorded history and archived documents, and accessing girls' history

is difficult (Mazzarella et al. 117). It can also be attributed to the development of girls' media studies in response to the "girl power" media culture of the mid-1990s (Zaslow). Kearney suggests that girls' media studies needs to take a step "backward" and begin to pay more attention to the historical development of girls' media culture ("New Directions" 82). While there are exceptions to this oversight—see for example Jacobson (2004), Schrum (2004), and Thiel-Stern (2014)—the focus of girls' media history often begins with mid-twentieth-century girlhood. Kearney calls the girl-centered media culture that began in the United States in the late 1930s and lasted until the 1960s, the "first wave" of girls' media culture which began with the rise of girls' radio programmes, magazines like *Seventeen* and girl-centered films that were produced "in the hopes of capitalizing on public interest in the teenage girl" ("New Directions" 82). Focusing on the early to mid twentieth century in the United States as the "first wave" overlooks the rapid emergence of a girls' media culture in the late nineteenth century with the launch of numerous British magazines aimed at middle- and working-class girls, such as *Every Girl's Magazine* (1878–1887), *Atalanta* (1888–1897), and the *Girl's Realm* (1898–1915). Even a magazine like the *Girl's Own Paper*, which was directed towards British and colonial readers, had a limited American readership.[5]

A number of factors bolstered the success of the *Girl's Own Paper*, including increasing literacy levels as a result of the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which mandated schooling for children between the ages of five and twelve, and the improved commercial viability of children's periodicals after reductions in duties and taxes between 1855 and 1863. Although popular boys' periodicals had appeared as early as the 1850s, no similarly successful girls' periodicals appeared until the 1880s. Earlier girls' periodicals did exist, and Kristen Drotner has identified the 1860s as the decade in which the possibility of the adolescent female audience was discovered (119).[6] However, as Michelle J. Smith explains, the *Girl's Own Paper* was the "first magazine to capture a massive [female] audience" (23). In the 1880s and the 1890s in particular, no other girls' magazine attracted the volume of girl readers as the *Girl's Own Paper*. This success was partly due to its strategy of issuing weekly and monthly issues at different price points, but also due to the magazine's ability to understand and attract a young female readership which was facilitated by contributions from actual girls.

In this chapter, we focus specifically on the *Girl's Own Paper* between 1880 and 1907. Peters was the editor during this period, which was also characterised by significant changes in ideas about girls and their culture. After Peters' death in 1907, Flora Klickmann assumed control and made significant changes, most notably eliminating the weekly issue and making the magazine less affordable for working-class girls. She also shifted the magazine's orientation from exclusively targeting "girls" to including women, adding *Woman's Magazine* to the title at this time.

Prior to the publication of the *Girl's Own Paper* girls were mainly assumed to be part of the audience of women's magazines. Thus the magazine "pioneered a new style…aimed squarely at young girls" (Smith 24) in the 1880s that was imitated in the following decade by other magazines such as *Atalanta* and the *Girl's Realm*. It quickly became one of the most popular British girls' magazines of the late nineteenth century, boasting circulation numbers at a height of 260,000 after its first year (Smith 25) and distribution networks throughout the British empire to Canada, Australia, India, and South Africa. Published by the Religious Tract Society, the *Girl's Own Paper* was envisaged as a preferable alternative for "increasingly literate young people … to the romantic novelettes and blood-and-crime 'penny dreadfuls' that were the most readily available cheap reading matter" (Mitchell 29) at the time.

The *Girl's Own Paper* was a sixteen-page weekly magazine that offered serialised fiction, short stories, non-fiction, and poetry for the low cost of one penny. Featuring numerous illustrations, as well as articles on cookery and fashion, the magazine targeted a wide range of girls. Most of its content was produced by paid contributors, including well-known girls' novelists like Rosa Nouchette Carey, Sarah Doudney, Evelyn Everett Green, and Anne Beale. Lengthy serialised fiction by popular writers often ran for an entire year. With its evangelical orientation, the magazine's "improving function" (Smith 28) was designed to help girls be useful to their families and their communities. This formula worked, and the *Girl's Own Paper* was very popular with girls. An average print run of the magazine was 189,000 (Smith 25), making its circulation much larger than the *Young Woman*'s (1892–1915) estimated 50,000. Its popularity is clearly articulated by eighteen-year-old "Pansy" who writes that it "would be impossible" to publish a magazine "more suitable for us girls" ("The Girl's Own" 52). Pansy's letter, printed in full in the 23 October 1880 issue, highlights the magazine's "suitability" for girl readers, implying that the content of the magazine was both geared to, and helped to produce, the tastes and desires of the girl reader. By catering to this readership, the magazine simultaneously interpellated girls into a broader community of girlhood, the "us" that Pansy so eloquently evokes.

The *Girl's Own Paper* invited girls to contribute to the "shifting formulation of the 'girl' in late Victorian print culture" (Smith 24). By producing content for girls and about girls, the magazine helped to draw girls together into a specific community of readers and by extension legitimated girlhood as a site of subjectivity. In addition, as Drotner explains, the magazine carried numerous articles "dealing with practical and personal problems confronting readers in their daily lives" (150). It tried to ensure that the concerns of girl readers were reflected in its content, and girls were encouraged to contribute their own content. The inclusion of girls' own voices happened in numerous ways, such as through amateur contributions, letters to the editor, and essay and fine art competitions. This participation was, however, limited by the editorial staff who controlled the production of the content.

AMATEUR CONTRIBUTIONS

One of the spaces that the *Girl's Own Paper* created for girls to participate in the magazine was in the "Amateur Contributions." This section appeared only occasionally between 1880 and 1907 and typically filled a single page. Readers could submit poetry, letters, and short essays to be published. The logic behind including "Amateur Contributions" was clearly outlined in the first appearance of this section on 23 October 1880. Peters explained the rationale for including this occasional page of amateur contributions: "There are few habits so conducive to a well-regulated mind as the careful writing down of one's thoughts and sentiments in black and white…This page is started with a view to encourage our girls in the practice of committing their thoughts and experiences to paper for the benefit of their sisters" ("The Girl's Own" 52). It is striking that the editor calls for girls to contribute their thoughts to the magazine for the benefit of "their sisters." A community of readers was articulated through the inclusion of girls' voices, a concept that we will return to later in the chapter. This participation was, of course, subject to the views and morals of the magazine. Peters explicitly stated that the magazine was acting as gatekeeper on certain topics and entries that failed to satisfy the moral expectations of the magazine. He reminded potential contributors that he would "print only such verses or papers as shall be written in correct taste, interesting in subject to the general reader, and shall contain the age of the writer, and be certified as her *bone fide* work by a parent, minister, or teacher" ("The Girl's Own" 52).

Peters' words reveal the contested conditions of girls' participation in the *Girl's Own Paper*. Girls could contribute, but since amateur content is only an "occasional page," this content would never overwhelm that provided by paid contributors. Peters clearly wished to find the voices of "real" girls since all contributions had to include the age of the writer and be certified by an adult that the contribution was authentic. However, while Peters strove to find the voices of real girls, their contributions were constrained by the need to appeal to the tastes and morals of both the magazine's editorial staff and the "general reader".

This "general reader" was an imagined construct of girlhood as defined by the magazine staff. This general reader is, as Daniel Cook has argued, "a figment of the commercial imagination" (7) produced according to the needs and logics of the magazine. The imagined "general reader" was an amalgam of girlhood, and would have been informed, at least in part, by the letters and contributions of the many girls who wrote in to the magazine. These materials produced by the girl readers would have provided insight into the girl reader, almost functioning as an early form of market research. This is a key component of the complexity of girls' participatory culture. While girls' voices would provide resources to construct an imagined "general reader" on the part of the magazine, only the aspects of girlhood

that fit the commercial and ideological needs of the magazine would have been included in its framings of the "gender reader."

Amateur contributions highlight the ways in which girls responded to the subjective framings of British girlhood developed elsewhere in the magazine. In a piece entitled "A Girl's Summer Afternoon Walk," reader B.G.S. confesses her afternoon walk was prompted by an article by paid contributor Dora Hope about "A Girl's Walking Tour" that appeared in June and July of 1880. Hope's article begins with the narrator explaining how a group of friends were "mourning over the various pleasures that girls are debarred from, just because they are girls, and not men, who can do anything they choose without anybody being shocked or scandalised" (Hope 371). However, one of the girls declares that "I do not see why we should not go for a walking tour…and, as we six are all good walkers and delight in the country, I believe we could make a glorious tour together, without a single gentleman or *chaperones* to interfere with us" (Hope 371). Inspired by this act of redefinition of Victorian subjectivity to allow for unchaperoned female travel, B.G.S. and her friends decided to organise their own half-day "ramble on the hills and moorlands" ("The Girl's Own" 52). B.G.S. concludes in her story of their adventures that "[i]t was a pleasant time that we shall long remember, and we fully acknowledge our obligations to THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER for the bright idea which proved such a great success" ("The Girl's Own" 53). Hope inspired B.G.S. and her friends to adopt its model of girlhood by taking their own afternoon walk and by writing their own contribution for the magazine.

Hope's article also motivated other girls, even when they should not be so inspired. Cora Vernon is corrected for thinking that she might also be able to undertake a walking tour. The editor explains in the 31 July 1880 "Answers to Correspondents" section that "girls of fourteen are not old enough to make a walking tour" (495). The editor's response unhesitatingly quashes Cora's hope, but reveals the tension in the *Girl's Own Paper*'s framing of girlhood. Some girls—but not all—could push the acceptable definitions of Victorian girlhood. In this case, only girls of a certain age are permitted to embody the model of girlhood promoted elsewhere in the magazine. Smith explains that although "[g]irls sought visible entry to the community of *GOP* readers through its correspondence column and essay competitions…these constructions largely function prescriptively, bolstering the *GOP*'s construction of the ideal, self-sacrificial girl" (31). The magazine's responses to B.G.S. and to Cora reveal how it offered inspiration for the redefinitions of girlhood, but only within certain limitations, in this case by age.

Girls' contributions to the magazine had to satisfy the editor's expectations about content and tone. Girls' participation in the magazine, and by extension in its model of subjectivity, was limited. Not all contributions were published or received comments and all had to be certified by an adult. This certification added a further barrier to girls' contributions since girls may have been hesitant to share

their writing with an adult. Moreover, at the same time that girls were invited to reassert their status as vital contributors to the magazine and its ideas about girlhood in the late Victorian period, their agency was also suspect since they might otherwise submit work that was not their own or misrepresent their age. A 12 November 1881 "Postscript" to "The Girl's Own Amateur Contributions" from Peters demonstrated the need to verify submissions. He was "much pained" ("Postscript" 109) to realise that not all contributors adhered to the model of female subjectivity he defined in his rules for "Amateur Contributions." He explained that a poem submitted as an original composition of E.W., aged 18, and published in October, "is now proved, after some attempt at equivocation, to be nothing more nor less than a copy of an old hymn" ("Postscript" 109). He warned readers that, "had this not been the first instance of fraud in the matter of amateur contributions, he would have published the full name and address of the culprit, both as a punishment for the offence and as a warning to others" ("Postscript" 109). E.W.'s fraudulent submission contravenes the spirit and the code of female subjectivity that Peters has attempted to institute in these amateur pages. His threat to publicly expose E.W. by publishing her name and address has the potential to make her explicitly identifiable to her friends and family, a public shaming for failing to adhere to the definition of girlhood constructed in the magazine. A partial explanation for this fraud comes from an "Answer to Correspondents" published on 17 September 1881. "Noie Paper" is informed that "[o]ur insertion of amateur contributions entirely depends on their merit, not on the age of the girl from whom it comes" (814). In order for a girl to see her name and her contribution in print, her submission must be of adequate quality. E.W. may have feared that her original submission would fail to satisfy this ideal when she chose to plagiarise her hymn or, perhaps more likely, she may not have understood what plagiarism was and merely wanted to share the hymn with others.

Readers of the *Girl's Own Paper* were invested in—and occasionally rebelled against—constructions of their subjectivity as Victorian girls. Like B.G.S. and her discussion of her afternoon walk, other contributors underscore the degree to which girls were responding to substantial changes in late-nineteenth-century ideals about girlhood. One such example is a letter to the editor from Bertha Mary Jenkinson, who writes in response to an 1883 article by M.P.S. on "The Disadvantages of Higher Education." M.P.S. embodies a traditional model of female subjectivity as she explains that the higher education of women is not "altogether advisable" because this learning displaces knowledge of other traditional feminine skills: "It is the fashion now rather to sneer at darning, mending, and other trifling household duties; but if a woman is to be a wife and mother, she will need a good deal of such knowledge" (333). M.P.S. evokes the Christian ideal that woman "was created as an helpmeet for man, not as his equal or rival" and that woman's influence follows "naturally" (333) from this position. Bertha, aged 14 years and 7 months, performs

an opposing model of female subjectivity when she writes that M.P.S.'s article must have been written by a man. (An editorial note, however, explains that M.P.S. "is *not* a man, but the daughter of an illustrious dignitary of the Church of England" [Jenkinson 444].) Bertha presents a pointed, articulate response to M.P.S.'s critique, arguing that "[a] woman's education must go on all her life, exactly the same as a man's, or she will never be even a helpmeet for her husband" (444). Her letter also demonstrates the extent of her own reading, as she quotes Victorian writer Sidney Smith in which he justifies the habit of vigorously exercising a man's mind because it is "one of the great objects of his existence" (Jenkinson 444). Bertha concludes that this "applies equally" (444) to women. Bertha's reference to articles appearing elsewhere in the magazine shows that girls were responding to, and contesting, ideas of girlhood promoted by the *Girl's Own Paper* and elsewhere. That different attitudes towards higher education are published in the magazine shows how the magazine attempted, to a certain extent, to provide spaces for girls to articulate and refine a variety of models of female subjectivity.

These changing attitudes to girls' education were part of a wider social push to reconsider traditionally held beliefs and values about women's roles in society. Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the earliest proponents of girls' education. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) in particular, she argued for girls' access to education to help them become better wives and mothers. Girls were expected to prepare for what was referred to, in the nineteenth century, as the "separate sphere" which enshrined women in the domestic space, separate from public life where they were the intellectual inferiors of their fathers, brothers, and husbands. In the mid-nineteenth century, advocates such as Emily Davies, who would go on to establish Britain's first women's college, revised Wollstonecraft's ideas and declared that girls should be educated because "the object of female education is to produce women of the best and highest type, not limited by exclusive regard to any specific functions hereafter to be discharged by them" (7–8). For Davies, girls' education was important because it enabled them to fulfil their potential as girls and women, rather than because they would require such knowledge in the future as wives and mothers. After mandatory education was legislated through the Forster Education Act in 1870 and particularly in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, girls' access to education increased substantially. Letters in the *Girl's Own Paper* like Bertha's reflect the extent to which girls had begun to assert their right to equal education.

Many Anglo-American girls were interested in redefining and contesting narrow models of girlhood towards the end of the nineteenth century. Using diaries, Jane Hunter has demonstrated how American girls provided "a collective self-portrait which features [them] as subjects rather than objects, as agents rather than as symbols within a world whose painters, writers, and commentators often supplied them with multiple, richly encoded meanings" (2–3). In the pages of

the *Girls' Own Paper*, colonial girls were also keen to challenge narrow models of girlhood. Although the vast majority of contributors in the magazine come from Britain, letters from girls in the British colonies and elsewhere were also common, with girls enacting their subjectivity as British girls living away from Britain. For instance, Marie Dukoff-Gordon (aged 17 years and 4 months), writing from Allahabad, India, explains that she has "longed" to send a letter to the *Girl's Own Paper*, but has been "prevented from doing so by the thought that perhaps you would not care to insert in your paper anything written by a girl in India, and then a girl who has never seen England, but has been born and brought up in India, without the advantages that girls in England have as regards education" (288). Marie's letter acknowledges an awareness of the narrow confines of the definition of girlhood in regards to class and geography. It alludes to her insecurity about whether her definition of herself as British, despite never having seen England, is compatible with the model of British girlhood being enacted in the magazine. Her letter implies a tension between how girlhood is being defined and the girls who are actually reading the magazine. Like Bertha, yet in a more tentative manner, Marie wants the model of girlhood to expand to include girls of British ancestry who have never lived in Britain. Peters' willingness to print her letter affirms the inclusivity of the magazine while also suggesting that girls raised outside of Britain could still aspire to be (or become) models of British girlhood. Marie's uncertainty, however, suggests that Peters' magazine may not have been as inclusive as he wished. Its publication on a page of other amateur contributions highlights its suitability, and editors—here and elsewhere—explicitly commend these foreign correspondents for their interest in the magazine.

ESSAY COMPETITIONS

In the *Girl's Own Paper*'s ongoing feature of essay competitions, Peters provided another opportunity for girls to frame themselves as educated and articulate female subjects. These essay competitions encouraged girls to contribute to the magazine by rewarding them through prizes and results' lists. Each competition had a particular theme and a deadline intended to allow foreign contributors enough time to submit. With a maximum of four pages, each essay—like the amateur contributions—had to be certified by a parent, minister, or teacher to be the sole work and in the handwriting of the competitor, whose age and address were accurately stated. Each submission was judged, and girls were awarded prizes and certificates based on their results. Peters did not typically publish the winning essays, but he did publish the names of writers, along with their ages and locations. In the essay competition on "Adversity," for example, Peters is "glad to be able to report that the average merit of the competitors' efforts in English Composition has been found

to be of the same high standard as previous examinations, and our girls are to be congratulated on having achieved so much success" ("Results" 84).

These results' lists helped to make the girls visible and identifiable, which facilitated their development and identification as talented and capable girls within the magazine. These girls were not making direct contributions to the magazine since the winning essays were not published, but were instead engaging with the magazine's framing of girlhood through these competitions. They were hoping to win a prize, with one guinea awarded to each age group between the ages of 13 and 23, or to receive a First, Second or Third Class mention. They presumably also hoped to see their names in print since this not only signified their embodiment of the magazine's definition of female subjectivity within a culture of reading and writing, but also their (potential) achievement when they won or received a certificate. The results reflect the numbers, ages, and locations of girl contributors and provide direct evidence of the demographic of those girls interested in participating in the prize competitions. Since prizes were awarded only to girls between the ages of 13 and 23, it seems few girls under the age of 13 were interested in the "Adversity" essay competition, with only 8 girls listed. Twenty-one thirteen-year-old girls submitted essays, with the highest submission rate among girls between the ages of 16 and 19. Although the majority of submissions came from girls under the age of 22, girls up to the age of 27 received results. Thus the female subject defined within the magazine ranged widely in age, in part because of the commercial necessity of attracting as many readers as possible, but also because of the ambiguity surrounding the idea of the girl in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

These prize competitions helped to foster a community within the pages of the *Girl's Own Paper*. Girls saw others like them submitting to essay competitions as well as a variety of other types of competitions for such activities as needlepoint, painting, and later photography—skills that girls were presumed to have and/or wished to develop. The results lists made these communities explicit, allowing a reader to name, envision and perhaps even meet (since addresses were included) other girls working diligently for the same prizes. As Beth Rodgers explains, "modern girlhood was often specifically identified [within the magazine] in terms of communal peer identity" (279). These communities were both local and global, and girls from the next street over or from across the world could envision themselves as part of a shared girlhood enabled by their agency as white, British female subjects.

CORRESPONDENCE

The correspondence section of the *Girl's Own Paper* provided another important form of girls' engagement. Each issue included an "Answers to Correspondents" section, where girls could write in with any questions they wished. No fee was

charged for answering questions, but the editor reserved the right to decline to answer. At most, two questions could be asked in any one letter, answers only appeared in the magazine and would not be sent through the post ("Answers" 144). Writers had to include either initials or pseudonyms, and although the original letters were never published in the "Answers to Correspondents" section, the editorial responses provide some evidence of the kinds of questions that girls submitted to the magazine. The answers were divided into categories based on the type of questions, with typical categories including work, education, health, music, art, cookery, and miscellaneous. These categories changed over time, reflecting girls' shifting interests during this period. Emigration queries, for instance, were increasingly popular in the 1880s, but rapidly declined in the 1890s, and girls' employment was a strong focus in the last decade of the century. The "Answers to Correspondents" section was important not only for the ways it encouraged readership, but also for providing girls with opportunities to obtain information about a variety of issues of interest to them, especially their health. This correspondence was filtered and framed by the editor of the magazine, since he chose which letters to address and only printed the responses. Nonetheless, the correspondence section offers a wealth of insight into the concerns of late nineteenth-century British girls.

The correspondence section also reveals how the magazine's readers positioned themselves within a larger community of girl readers. In 1897, the editor encouraged girls to submit requests for international correspondents. The girls' responses, extending across multiple years and into the twentieth century, demonstrated their particular interest in the broader *Girl's Own Paper* readers' community. Girls frequently sought correspondents speaking other languages or from different cultures. For example, Miss M.H. Coupland of Ripon, a teacher who is "fond of literature and music," seeks "a German correspondent, each writing in the language of the other" ("Answers" 112). An Italian girl, Valentine Massari of Venice, "would like to correspond with an English girl of good family of about her own age (16) or a little older; both to write in English" ("Answers" 112). These types of queries show how the magazine produced and reproduced the notion of a global community of girls. Girls could submit their requests to the magazine and expect to find an appropriate correspondent. The community of readers was sufficiently broad to include girls of a wide range of ages and interests from Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Hungary, the United States, India, and South Africa. The *Girl's Own Paper* opened up opportunities for girls to establish their own connections within the readership of the magazine, across transnational spaces. This community also makes intriguing references to class, such as Valentine's request for a girl "of good family" and Marguerite Rahier's ("sister of a recent prize-winner" Cecily Rahier of the doll competition) desire for a "well-educated" ("Answers" 144) English correspondent, which speaks to issues of literacy and English fluency. These class

references imply a concern from potential correspondents that the magazine's readership includes girls with whom they would not normally associate.

CONCLUSION

The *Girl's Own Paper* was part of a broader discourse during the Victorian era that articulated new modes of female subjectivity by catering to girls. It gave girls status and a place of being as it legitimized girls' subjectivity by moving it into a visible public space through a publication aimed specifically at them. Anyone could buy the magazine and see stories, illustrations, and correspondence that featured girls in central roles. Under Peters' direction, the magazine created spaces for girls to actively engage in this process of legitimization. The readers who sent in their contributions, either as amateur contributions, essay submissions, or letters, had agency and were invested in the discursive framings of girl subjectivity. It is clear that the readers, in reading what other girls wrote, saw themselves as part of a broader community of girlhood, at both the local level and also as part of a broader community of British and non-British girlhood that transcended national borders. While girls' contributions were limited by the constraints of how the Victorian periodical press operated and how widely read girls' magazines were, girls still actively engaged in the production of the discursive formations of Victorian female subjectivity.

Peters' call for girls to write down their "thoughts and experiences" for "the benefit of their sisters" ("The Girl's Own" 52), as outlined above, foreshadows later twentieth-century girls' periodicals. He encouraged girls to contribute their reflections on any suitable topic for the benefit of a wider community of girls, a community to which the reader then also belonged. That girls saw themselves as part of this print community is reinforced by Pansy's feeling that the magazine was "suitable for us girls". The themes of participation and community were established by Peters and adopted by readers of the magazine. Of course, the magazine's participatory orientation contributed to its success. Girls' contributions would have provided Peters and his team with clearer insight into the magazine readership, functioning as an early version of market research.

The *Girl's Own Paper* illustrates how girls' media cultures extend back into the late nineteenth century. Yet this British magazine is just one of many in the 1880s and 1890s that targeted girl readers. In the *Girl's Own Paper* and elsewhere, girls actively participated in the construction of their own subjectivities. By examining this history within the framework of girls' media, we can gain a much broader understanding of the history of girls' media cultures and the ways in which girls' participation in those cultures is a function of opportunity, engagement, and technology.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank Alison Withers for her assistance on this chapter.
2. The magazine continued under various titles until eventually ceasing publication in 1956.
3. See Gonnick et al.'s "Rethinking Agency and Resistance: What Comes After Girl Power?" (2009).
4. See also Kearney's "Historicize This! Contextualism in Youth Media Studies" in *Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media* (2014).
5. Initially, American girls were told to order the magazine directly from the publishing office. As "Cloverport" was informed on 10 July 1880, the magazine will be sent directly to the girl located in America upon receipt of a postal order for seven shillings and eight pence ("Answers" 447). By 1883, however, "M.M." was informed that the magazine "may be ordered through any bookseller or newsagent, either in England, America, or the colonies" ("Answers" 302). This response likely reflects the editor's desire to inform his readers of the magazine's availability in the main English-speaking markets. The Religious Tract Society's distribution network was more robust, and girls no longer had to make their purchases through the London office. By 1884, the editor's confidence had grown: "A Constant Reader" was told that she should "have no difficulty in obtaining The Girl's Own Paper in Texas, or in any part of America" ("Answers" 223). Alongside this evidence of girls querying the availability of the magazine in the United States, two newspaper items also suggest that American booksellers and libraries were also carrying the magazine. In 1884 the foreign book importer Scribner and Welford advertised the *Girl's Own Annual* for $3.75 in the *New York Tribune* ("New" 6). The *Salt Lake Herald* included an article in 16 May 1909 on "New Books in Library" that listed the *Girl's Own Annual* as a new addition (5).
6. Examples include *The Monthly Packet* (1851–1899), *The English Girls' Journal and Ladies' Magazine* (1863–1865), *The Young Englishwoman* (1864–1869, continuing as *Beeton's Young Englishwoman* (1870–1877) and then as *Sylvia's Home Journal* (1878–1891), *Aunt Judy's Magazine* (1866–1885), and *Every Girl's Magazine* (1878–1888).

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