**Woke Girls: From the *Girl's Realm* to *Teen Vogue***

On December 10, 2016 *Teen Vogue*'s star writer Lauren Duca called out Donald Trump for "gaslighting" America during the 2016 election campaign. While Duca was not the first journalist to make such a claim,[1] the editorial went viral and had received over 30 000 retweets from Teen Vogue's account and 1.3 million hits by February 2017 (Ruby Warrington 2017). Duca's article has been shared by many, including journalist Dan Rather (Sophie Gilbert 2016), and *The New York Times* called it a "scorched earth opinion piece" (Rachel Dodes 2017).

Many of those who shared the article admired Duca's critical political reflection but simultaneously stated their surprise that such a perspective could come from a teen-oriented magazine. Their surprise was often based on the usual tired assumptions that young women's interest in clothing, fashion and beauty renders them incapable of broader political and social critique. These assumptions of girls' magazines are not new. There is a long history of young women's print media engaging with political issues dating back to the late nineteenth century when British girls' magazines, such as the *Girl's Realm* (1898-1914), for example, were engaging with questions about women's rights and responsibilities. Yet, this legacy is not only overlooked by people like Rather, it is also forgotten in the histories of girls' media.

*Teen Vogue* editor Elaine Welteroth described the gaslighting article as a "watershed moment" on the "gradual yet radical evolution" of magazine (Warrington 2017). Since Welteroth became its editor in 2016, *Teen Vogue* has published first-hand accounts by Muslim American girls, Standing Rock Protesters, and victims of police violence, prompting Dan Rather to post on

---

[1] One of the first to make this statement was Nicole Hemmer, who on March 15 2016, wrote an editorial piece for USA News and World Report entitled, "Trump is Gaslighting America". This is widely considered the first article to make such an argument. Hemmer's perspective gained traction when Melissa Jeltsen of the *Huffington Post* cited Hemmer and expanded her argument. (http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/donald-trump-lies-gaslighting_us_56e95d21e4b065e2e3d7ee82)

Facebook that "*Teen Vogue* continues to churn out quality stories, really establishing itself as a beacon for issues impacting young women's lives" (Chantal Fernandez 2017). It is easy to get caught up in the excitement of Rather's acclaim for *Teen Vogue* as a "beacon" and see the magazine as a renegade moment in the girls' magazine industry, but doing so fails to situate *Teen Vogue* within the longer history of the girls' periodical press as radical spaces for girls' politics, in which girls' active engagement with key issues of the day was expected and manifest in the pages of their magazines.

The purpose of this article is to place *Teen Vogue* within this broader history of girls' print culture in which girls are defined and redefined as political agents. To do this we will focus on two specific moments in the history of girls' magazines. The first moment occurs in the late nineteen and early twentieth centuries, at a time when the girls' periodical press was flourishing and when girl readers were engaging with questions of education, employment, and suffrage, with publications such as the British periodical *Girl's Realm* (1898-1914). The second moment is a bookend to the vibrant print culture of the twentieth century as print magazines in the twenty-first century struggle to survive as material objects, exemplified by *Teen Vogue* (2003-2017). *Teen Vogue* demonstrates girls' agency as deeply personal, orientated to a broader community, and enfranchising girls by giving them a voice. Within these two moments of girls' print culture, the periodical press makes and remakes the ideal girl through the redefinition and contestation of narrow models of girlhood to reimagine the implied girl reader as invested with political agency.

The parallels in the construction of girls' political agency, separated by over one hundred years, manifest in the spaces for a politicized girls' culture created in both the *Girl's Realm* and *Teen Vogue*. Addressing the political legacies of these magazines opens up new possibilities for scholars of girls' media studies to rethink the historical trajectories of "thriving feminist girls' cultures" (Jessalynn Keller 2015, 9). These two magazines articulate a type of political agency and feminist politics that gives girls a voice. While girlhood tropes are pervasive throughout both magazines, they nonetheless offer up the pleasures of stereotypical feminine activities without simultaneously rendering girls as apolitical. Girls are reimagined as activists who are engaged

with political issues alongside traditional ideals of femininity. Pamela Bettis and Natalie Adams have argued that "girlhood is a construction made and remade through the material realities and discursive practices of the society" through which "ideal girlhood…is constantly being rewritten" (2005, 9). The purpose of this article is to contextualize the remaking of ideal girlhood by *Teen Vogue* within the history of the periodical press industry, and in doing so explore the points of continuity and disjuncture in the rewriting of girlhood at two moments in the history of the press: the *Girl's Realm*, published during the beginning stages of girls' print culture; and *Teen Vogue,* published at a moment that seems to be heralding the end stages of girls' print culture.

The article aims to avoid the presentist approach that can befall youth media research and media studies as a whole. Mary Celeste Kearney (2014) has suggested media culture scholars have a tendency to focus on the contemporary moments of media culture, often overlooking historical developments in media. Such a perspective, she suggests, results in the "lack of critical reflection on the present as a temporal location different from, yet always in an articulated relationship with, both the past and the future" (Kearney 2014, 53). In relation to the field of girls' media production, she argues that we need to understand this contemporary field in the context of "the larger history of girls' cultural practices and various social factors that have both influenced its formation as well as complicated its development" (Kearney 2006, 21). The modern adolescence of girls "is not, as it is sometimes constructed, a clear break from Victorian discourses on girlhood but, rather, a way of mapping shifts across a range of discourses" (Catherine Driscoll 2002, 6-7). The definitions of girlhood that first emerged in the nineteenth century through discursive practices in print culture are still relevant to the discourses of girlhood in twenty-first-century America. While there is a growing body of scholarship on Victorian girls' magazines, such scholarship is rarely read in the context of contemporary girls' culture, and the field of girls' media studies has largely overlooked the Victorian era as period of an active girls' media

culture.[2] Instead the field often demarcates beginnings of girls' media culture as 1944 with the launching of *Seventeen* magazine, ignoring the wide range of periodicals aimed at girl readers in the Victorian period such as the *Girl's Own Paper*, *Atalanta*, and the *Girl's Realm*.

In situating *Teen Vogue* within the histories of girls' media and print culture, we are interested in the similarities and points of difference of *Teen Vogue* in relation to the broader trajectory of girls' magazines and their definitions of girls as agents of change and resistance. To accomplish this, we take the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century example of the British *Girl's Realm* as a "temporal location" (Kearney 2014, 53) to compare to *Teen Vogue* in the present moment. This comparison resists a trajectory of progress and instead elicits both points of convergence and divergence in the rewriting of ideal girlhood. It is part of a broader project to "position the Victorian press as a critical moment in the history of girls' media culture" (Kristine Moruzi and Natalie Coulter 2017, 89) and to expand the field of girls' media studies to include a broader historical focus.

**Moments of Inception**

*Teen Vogue* was launched February 2003 as an offshoot of the women's fashion magazine *Vogue*. Owned by Condé Nast, the magazine has, like other magazines in the twenty-first century, struggled to compete with the vast amount of digital content available to young women. Many of its rival publications folded much earlier including *Elle Girl* (2001-2006), *CosmoGirl!* (1999-2008), *Teen People* (1998-2006), and *Teen* (1954-2009). The magazine shifted directions in May 2016, when Condé Nast hired 29-year-old Elaine Welteroth as senior editor, along with Phillip Picard as a digital editor and director, "to cover politics and activism" (Gilbert 2016). The move to the political in 2016 has been touted as the reason the magazine held on longer than its rivals, although their print readership continued to decline. On November 2, 2017, Condé Nast

---

[2] See, for example, Kristine Moruzi, 2012. *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850-1914*. Aldershot: Ashgate; Michelle J. Smith, 2011. *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls, 1880-1915*. Houndmills: Palgrave; Beth Rodgers, 2016. *Adolescent Girlhood and Literary Culture at the Fin de Siècle: Daughters of Today*. Houndmills: Palgrave.

announced that it was shuttering *Teen Vogue*'s print edition. *Teen Vogue* still lives on as a digital publisher and as brand. It now focuses on digital content, special themed print issues, and what they call "consumer experiences". It has a large following on social media: 6 million Facebook likes; over 3.5 million followers on Twitter; as well as on SnapChat and Instagram. It also continues to offer teen girls new consumer opportunities, like the Teen Vogue Summits[3] and an upcoming brand line at Urban Outfitters.

Despite the cancellation of the magazine's print issues and the limited span of print issues engaging with political activism, *Teen Vogue* is an important moment in the history of girls' periodicals. In the volatile history of girl's magazines, some titles often had quite short runs. The British *Girl's Empire*, for instance, was only in print from 1902 to 1904. This article focuses mainly upon the print issues of *Teen Vogue* starting with May 2016, when Welteroth become editor and the magazine consciously shifted to a more political agenda, to its last print issue, Volume IV, published at the end of 2017. These issues engage specifically with political activism for girls and also represent one of the last significant American mass market girls' periodicals in print. Accordingly, the focus of this article is almost exclusively on the print issues of *Teen Vogue*. While the digital publication incorporates many of the same politics and uses many similar editorial tactics, its online medium presents opportunities and pitfalls that differ significantly from the history of girls' print culture under consideration here. Analysing *Teen Vogue* as a form of material print culture allows us to compare the magazine to a much earlier example of girls' magazines such as the *Girl's Realm* to find similarities and disjunctures, as Kearney asks, in the articulation of girlhood.

Like *Teen Vogue* under Welteroth, which was eager to engage readers through activism and engagement, the *Girl's Realm* was launched at a time when demonstrating its modernity and currency was vital to its success. Launched in 1898, the magazine was considerably less

---

[3] At the time of writing this article, the company has held two Teen Vogue Summits, one in December 2017 in Los Angeles and another in May 2018 in New York City. Tickets to the two-day summit cost $549 USD.

constrained by nineteenth-century ideas of femininity than other contemporary girls' magazines. Instead, it used current events to fashion girlhood as modern and heroic (Moruzi 2012, 163). Despite the attempts by editor Alice Corkran to remain apolitical and her avowal that the magazine was "not a political publication" ("Chat" 1904, 692), readers insisted on discussing enfranchisement, education, and employment opportunities at a time when these topics were the subjects of vigorous debate.

**History of Girls' Periodicals**

The rise in girls' periodicals in the second half of the nineteenth century reflects the changing economics of the periodical press as the price of paper dropped alongside the newly emerging, gendered market for children's books and magazines. The last decades of the century were characterised by a rapid increase in the number of magazines for children. Diana Dixon observes more than five hundred periodicals for children and young people were published between 1866 and 1914, indicating that publishers saw the juvenile market as "ripe for exploitation" (1986, 133). The market changed rapidly, from five magazines published for young people in 1824 to 160 magazines in 1900. Readership numbers varied substantially and a lengthy print run was no guarantee of commercial success since religious periodicals in particular typically received additional financial support. This highly variable market was strongly influenced by prevailing notions about children and, in particular, the gendered nature of print culture that emerged in the nineteenth century and continues in some form today.

Girls' periodicals highlight the changing nature of girlhood. They have had, and continue to have, wide-ranging implications for definitions of femininity. Angela McRobbie explains that girls' and women's periodicals help to "define and shape the woman's world, spanning every stage from early childhood to old age [where] the exact nature of the woman's role is spelt out in detail, according to her age and status" (1991, 83). Dawn Currie similarly writes that "the everyday practices of femininity are played out on women's bodies, and thus are central to theorizing about identity" (1999, 5). The intended readership of girls' and women's magazines contributes to a progression "from adolescent romance where there are no explicitly sexual

encounters, to the more sexual world…, which in turn [gives] way to marriage, childbirth, home-making, [and] child-care" (McRobbie 1991, 83). Importantly, no male equivalents to these magazines exist. Apparently, only girls and women need to be guided into models of femininity that define their identities based on love, marriage, and maternity. Massoni's cultural history of the influential American teen magazine, *Seventeen*, concludes that the story of its origins

> helps understand the magazine as a cultural product within a sociohistorical context, as the result of the labor of people working in a hierarchy, and as the battleground for competing discourses. It fleshes out and gives human form to the inequalities of gender, race, and social class that underlie the structure and relations of the magazine industry. (2010, 191)

The discourses in girls' magazines shift over time, but Massoni's comments are equally applicable to the *Girl's Realm* and *Teen Vogue.* These girls' magazines reflect the historically specific concerns related to gender, race, and class while also gesturing to some of the similarities in definitions of girlhood in relation to political agency, girls' voices, and futurity.

**Girls' agencies**

In scholarly examinations of girls' periodicals, more attention has been paid to the models of femininity appearing in these magazines. The idea of girls as political agents has received less attention as examples of this agency can be limited and require scholars to consider agency in historically contingent ways. Yet, as Susan Miller has recently argued, children's agency rests on a "continuum from opposition to assent" (2016, 49). While resistance is perhaps the more obvious agential activity, agreement with adult perspectives can nonetheless represent agency. By thinking through girls' agency along this continuum, *Teen Vogue* becomes part of a legacy of magazines that have pushed girlhood as a political subjectivity and have challenged hegemonic notions of girls as apolitical. Earlier girls' magazines such as the *Girl's Realm* also provide opportunities to explore girls as political subjects.

In the *Girl's Realm*, the correspondence section provides the most visibility into girls as political agents. At the turn of the twentieth century in England, agitation for women's suffrage was increasing. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies was formed in 1897 and aimed to improve conditions for women through constitutional change. In 1903, a group of women led by suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst split from the National Union to form the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and embarked on an increasingly militant campaign to attract publicity and agitate for the transformation of the political system. The readers of the *Girl's Realm* rejected Corkran's attempts to keep the magazine apolitical, frequently writing to the magazine about female suffrage. In 1908, Corkran finally agreed to discuss "the great, the burning, question of the franchise for women" after receiving so many letters that "I must depart from my general rule of ignoring political questions" ("Chat" 525). "Utopia" writes that she has been reading other girls' letters from an earlier issue "on the subject of Women's Franchise. These letters are very representative, and, after their perusal, I am led to write to you on the same subject." She goes on to explain that "We may not like the methods used by the 'Suffragettes,' but we must admit that [they] have roused the country from a state of quiet to one of burning zeal" ("Chat" 1908, 685).

The correspondence section of the magazine inspires Utopia's letter and not only facilitates her thinking but also prompts her political engagement. She is sufficiently impassioned to write to the magazine and explain that "Women have been in subjection too long, and now that they demand bare justice, they are not answered except with promises" ("Chat" 1908, 686). In letters like Utopia's, girls argued passionately and articulately both for and against female suffrage.

Corkran positioned these letters amidst other correspondence on the value of letter writing, becoming a missionary, and suitable reading for girls. In *Teen Vogue*, Welteroth similarly incorporates fashion, beauty and popular culture components of the magazine while also integrating politics into its contents. She explains the shift in the magazine under her leadership: "I felt like there was an opportunity to go a little deeper and to feature a different type of girl: someone who actually used their platform to be a role model to be a thought leader" (Jazmine Hughes 2017) in response to a comment from Fox News' Tucker Carlson, who suggested that *Teen Vogue* writers like Lauren Duca should "stick to the thigh-high boots" – a comment that is degrading, sexualizing, and clearly in the vein of assuming girls to be vacuous and apolitical. Welteroth quipped that one can love "Ariana Grande and her thigh-high boots, and still discuss politics. Those things are not mutually exclusive" (Roy, 2017).

Under the guidance of Welteroth, *Teen Vogue* explicitly labels the political consciousness of its audience as "woke". The magazine editors describe how this consciousness is woven into the branding of their magazine: "It's more about a sensibility. This is somebody who is sophisticated, conscious. We say 'woke' here. We're a woke brand, and our readers are woke too" (Warrington 2017). While Welteroth and her editorial team use the notion of wokeness, they fail to clearly define what they mean by woke, and instead leave the *Teen Vogue* reader to frame it for themselves. The term "woke" or "wokeness", or "staying woke" has its recent legacy tied to the Black Lives Matter movement which popularized it as a call to action (Charles Pulliam-Moore, 2016). It often implies a "critical consciousness of intersecting systems of oppression" that acknowledges the "oppression that exists in individual and collective experiences" (Aerial A. Ashlee, Bianca Zamora and Shamika Karikari, 2017, 90). While the term has shifted and taken

on different meanings as it moves across the internet, Welteroth's use of "woke" implies an awareness of social issues and the ways that systematic oppressions intersect.

*Teen Vogue* has pushed back against the seemingly tired framings of postfeminist girlhood as an "aspirational fantasy, open to anyone, in denial of systemic inequalities" (Morgan Blue 2013, 75) that is a standard trope in girls' print culture in the early twenty-first century. Instead the magazine informs its readers of the systemic inequalities and offers possibilities of change. In seeing its readers as "woke", *Teen Vogue* acknowledges girls' political agency and presents girls with a venue to acknowledge it. *Teen Vogue* covers traditional politics from non-traditional perspectives (Keller as quoted in Bell 2017). At the core of this shift is that the magazine has recognized the intersectional subjectivities of its readership.[4] One example of this in the 2017 issue subtitled "An Ode to Our Icons." The issue includes articles on Marvel Comics with new female heroines that are "more diverse and inclusive than ever," LQBTQ youth in "NYC's underground ballroom community," trailblazer Naomi Campbell, and a three-page conversation piece between Amandal Stenberg and Janelle Monáe - both artists of colour. This issue also contains a photospread entitled "We the People" with images of Muslim girls protesting Trump, an Indigenous Water Protector at Standing Rock, and a young black activist calling out the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. There is also a fashion spread with ten different young people representing a diverse array of body types and races and a letter to police shooting victim Jordan Edwards written by Black Lives Matter activist DeRay McKessen. Even many of the advertisements in the issue attempt to embrace diversity and "wokeness": the ads for L'Oréal have diverse models; Maybelline's ad for foundation highlights the 40 diverse shades of skin tones; and Secret deodorant's tagline "invisible for all" has four models, three of whom present as women of colour.

It would be easy to dismiss the tensions of being political and finding pleasure in consumer culture, as a form of commodified girl power in which the imagined feminine subject's political

---

[4] This observation was also noted by Jessalynn Keller in an interview she gave with CBC Calgary, October 2, 2017. http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/teen-vogue-shift-1.4316888

agency is valued only when it can be harnessed by the marketplace (Sarah Banet-Weiser 2015, Becker et. al. 2016). However, *Teen Vogue* is more complex than these neoliberal logics of postfeminism suggest. In fact, in volume iii of 2017, Duca wrote a piece addressing Carlson's comments and arguing that women's expression in fashion "is often weaponized as a means of denying us access to political conversations – as if these were mutually exclusive" (Duca 2017, 114). Duca references the feminist critiques of empty social messaging by companies that have co-opted wokeness as a form of "social currency" without changing their own racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative corporate structures.

Duca's piece highlights the danger in dismissing *Teen Vogue* as an example of postfeminist discourse, as it fails to address these complex ways that girl's agency can be entangled with girl's pleasures. Marnina Gonick, Emma Renold, Jessica Ringrose and Lisa Weems suggest that in the post-girl power era, while girls are both "expected/demanded to be fully actualized neoliberal subjects" there are also opportune moments for resistance and agency (2009, 2). *Teen Vogue*'s wokeness provides these opportune moments by pushing back against postfeminist femininity and acknowledging the complexity of intersectional feminism in consumer capitalism. Tying the two together, Duca writes "Bottom line: The only requirement for expressing our politics is being informed; this applies to future shopping sprees and the next time a middle-aged man tries to tell you what you can and cannot talk about" (Duca 2017, 114). *Teen Vogue* readers are expected to be well informed about the issues of the day and to use their voice to insist upon their agency as activists.

The entanglements of neoliberal subjectivity and political agency are perhaps most visible in the fact that *Teen Vogue*, despite its progressive politics, is still part of the Condé Nast empire and is beholden to the institutional structures and capitalist logics of the company. *Teen Vogue* still needs to sell advertising space. The magazine can only remake an ideal girl within the political economic structures of the magazine industry. A 2017 *New York Times* article on *Teen Vogue* reminds us that the magazine can only be as "rebellious as it can be without risking advertising revenue, outspoken about issues that already have been widely agreed upon" (Hughes 2017).

The article reveals the delicate balance between providing socially conscious content that readers want and catering to potential advertisers' desires to place their brand alongside this content. *Teen Vogue* is tied to remaking the ideal girl within the constraints of the political and economic realities of the magazine industry.

The constraints of the magazine industry applied equally to girls' magazines in the nineteenth century. The publisher of the *Girl's Realm*, Hutchison & Co, started life as a magazine and book publisher in 1887 and was a significant commercial publisher by the turn of the century, publishing Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, HG Wells and early English translations of Nabokov. Given the highly volatile nature of the magazine industry during this period, girls' magazines had to "define a specific model of femininity that would be sufficiently unique to differentiate it from its competitors while also appealing to a broad audience" (Kristine Moruzi 2012, 2). This meant the *Girl's Realm* tried to define a modern girl who was interested and engaged with contemporary issues, but who nonetheless retained many traditional attributes in terms of femininity and domesticity.

For *Teen Vogue*, the traditional attributes of femininity are more closely connected to the role of the girl in the consumer marketplace. The double entanglements of political agency and consumer subjectivities are most visible in the promotional material of the magazine. *Teen Vogue* describes itself as "the destination for the next generation of influencers. We educate, enlighten, and empower young women, arming them with all they need to lead stylish and informed lives" (Condé Nast 2016). The agential impulses of educating, enlightening and empowering, are framed by the commercial impulses of influence and style.

There are many other examples of the entanglement of these two competing impulses of agency and commerce in the magazine. Picard articulates this explicitly, "I don't like the idea that you can't cover the news and cover the Kardashians, the idea that girls can't be smart and also care about fashion is, frankly, damaging" (Advertising Age 2016). Political agency and empowerment are framed by Picard as smart. This discourse appears frequently within the magazine. The

December 2016 Smart Girls issue, for example, includes an article entitled "Great Minds: five girls that prove being brainy is cool". The piece consists of a picture and a small write-up of each "girl" (aged 18 to 26) on their professional achievements. The accompanying pictures of each girl are fashion photo shoots with labels of which designer they are wearing. The double entanglements celebrate girls for their intellect and agentic subjectivity while also encouraging their interest in fashion. In these double entanglements, *Teen Vogue* makes girls' activism and agency visible beyond the pages of the magazine. Print and digital publishers such as the *Atlantic*, the *Guardian* and *Jezebel* all wrote articles on the political journalism in *Teen Vogue*, expanding the narrative of girls as political subjects.

**Girls' Voices**

Political agency is made possible by creating spaces for girls' voices in the pages of their magazines. The magazines are published for an implied girl readership, and girls' actual voices are sometimes included within their pages, which enables them to speak to and with girls. Historically, girls' magazines have depended upon reader contributions and engagement, which was crucial to the successful run of the magazine. In the highly competitive magazine industry, girl readers wanted to see stories about girls like themselves or whom they aspired to be. Many – indeed most – girls' magazines in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided a correspondence section through which readers could write to and receive a response from their magazine. Keller (2011) has likewise found that editors of teen magazines from the early twenty-first century were similarly interested in hearing from readers. Their comments and concerns (via social media, email or letters) were taken seriously and impacted future stories.

Reader engagement has always been important to developing and maintaining readership numbers. In the nineteenth century, girls' magazines were keen to encourage engagement through contributions, although amateur submissions of prose or poetry were generally discouraged. More welcome in *Girl's Realm* were girls' voices that articulated a definition of girlhood grounded in the magazine's *fin-de-siècle* ethos of modernity, bravery, and adventure.

These unpaid contributions were generally limited to the correspondence section of the magazine, which promoted reader engagement in specific discursive spaces enabled through letters from readers. One contributor, Susie, writes that

> I am a modern girl…I can't imagine anything more awful than being a girl in the time of Jane Austen's novels, who is always fainting or crying, and not able to do anything jolly. Yet I don't think I only want to have a 'good time.' …My great ambition is to do something really useful in my life. ("Chat" 1899, 432)

In asserting her modernity, Susie aligns with the implied readership of the magazine as well as positioning herself within its ideal. This modernity is part of her agency, especially since the discourses pertaining to girlhood often revolve around nostalgic reinventions of girls of the past. The modernity that the girls define and enact through their participation in the magazine enables their voices to be heard, and not only in relation to political topics such as suffrage and education. The voices in the *Girl's Realm* are constrained by expectations about girlhood and femininity. Only certain kinds of contributions – and predominantly through correspondence – are genuinely welcome.

In contrast, a much wider variety of girls' voices are present in *Teen Vogue*, which encourages young women to create content for the magazine as guest journalists, guest editors or photographers. For example, in the September 2016 issue Yara Shahidi, the 16-year-old star of the ABC comedy *Blackish*, interviews US Attorney General Loretta Lynch on her activism on police brutality and her fight against the restriction of trans rights in North Carolina. Instead of including a straightforward interview article written by a journalist, the feature is a question-and-answer style interview, weaving the girl's perspective into the development of the piece. Shahidi asks, for example, "how can my peers and I help transgender youth or others who are being discriminated against" (52)? Interviewers like Shahidi demonstrate awareness of and engagement with contemporary political issues pertaining to gender and sexuality equality as well as broader civil rights issues.

Yet the magazine is not only interested in girls' perspectives on domestic concerns. Global political stories are told through the first-person voices and perspectives of girls. For example, the Syrian war is investigated through the narrative of 18-year-old Syrian refugee Maya Joy, who relates the beginning of the civil war in 2011 and her harrowing journey with her sister as they fled to Sweden. These examples reflect the magazine's desire to incorporate girls' voices into discussions that have direct political implications. In fact, the entire September 2016 issue – called the Girl Gaze issue – is photographed by young female photographers, based on the editorial statement that "the female point of view is marginalized not only in film and writing but also in photography, and … nobody [is] talking about a dire problem in an important medium" (Marsh 2016, 44). The significance of having girls as photographers, working on the visual aspects of a print magazine like *Teen Vogue*, is highlighted by Ariana Marsh when she insists that girls must have an opportunity to frame and capture the images that appear in its pages.

This focus on girls' voices can be viewed with scepticism. In *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2004), Anita Harris discusses how girls are made more visible in late modernity as a vehicle for celebrating, but also regulating, their actions. Many of the story ideas in *Teen Vogue* are generated by following *Teen Vogue* readers on social media (Advertising Age 2016). The magazine thus become a means through which girls can be the "active producers of their own cultural artifacts" (Sharon Mazzarella 1999, 75) but, as feminist media scholars, we need to ask at what point this becomes co-option or even exploitation. Girls' perspectives and viewpoints are incorporated, but they are also mined, without any credit or compensation for their work.

**Girls' futurity**

The girls' voices appearing in these two girls' magazines are produced within feminist frameworks that have distinctly different orientations. During the period in which the *Girl's Realm* was being published, girlhood was seen almost exclusively as a precursor to womanhood.

The magazines produced at the turn of the twentieth century situated girlhood within a historical trajectory that focused on women of the past and made connections between girls, their mothers, and their grandmothers while also positioning them in terms of their futurity. In Susie's correspondence in the *Girl's Realm*, for instance, she compares herself favourably to models of girlhood from Jane Austen's era. Her letter is part of a longer, ongoing feature entitled "Chat with the Girl of the Period." In the first volume, editor Alice Corkran attempts to define "the ideal girl of the twentieth century" since this girl will become "the woman of the twentieth century" ("Chat" 1898, 432). In the *Girl's Realm*, the politics of girlhood are invested in and through girls' futurity. The girl at the *fin de siècle* will become a woman and is defined by her seemingly inevitable future roles as a wife and mother. As a consequence, competing positions appear in the magazine in which strongly political correspondence about suffrage and education is set alongside conservative fiction that depicts women foregoing outside interests in favour of marriage and eventually maternity.

The political activism of the girls in the *Girl's Realm* is produced in relation to the past and always with a view towards her future roles. Corkran defines the girl of today as someone who is capable of taking on employment and activities from which they had been barred in the past. This *fin-de-siècle* "can do" (Anita Harris 2004) girl can become a doctor, journalist, gardener, post-office girl, or telegraph girl. Yet much of the justification for the girl of today is based on the value she will bring to her future roles:

> She claims she has as much right to a good education as her brothers. She insists that she will be as good a housekeeper, and better, for having her judgment and her taste cultivated; that she will be as good a wife and better, for being her husband's comrade and chum. That she will be a better mother for understanding the laws of health and having some notions of her own about methods of education. ("Chat" 1898, 216)

Her potentiality as a housekeeper, wife, and mother are used to justify her current demands for education and employment. The cultural and social gender norms of the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries mean that girls are defined by this future potential rather than by their inherent identities as girls of today.

In contrast, in the twenty-first century, girls are increasingly defined by their activities and agency as girls, rather than by their future roles. Sarah Projansky relates two central ideas emerging out of girls' studies: girls have a "'different voice,' based in relationships rather than individuality" and that the girl's voice "faces the threat of loss as girls enter adulthood and are socialized as women" (2014, 13). *Teen Vogue* capitalizes on the value and uniqueness of the girls' voice when it encourages them to develop magazine content. Yet it also simultaneously insists that these girls position themselves as political activists who are engaged with key questions of the twenty-first century. The girl then becomes a contemporary political agent because of who she is now, rather than who she might become in the future.

Yet a tension exists between these two girls – the woman of the future and the girl of the present – that is played out in the pages of the magazine when the former American presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton guest edits a special issue of *Teen Vogue.* This volume is the last regular issue to appear in print form. Entitled "Nevertheless, We Resist" (Clinton 2017), it indicates not only the extent to which *Teen Vogue* sees itself as a magazine of political activism, but also the importance of including the voices of girl activists themselves. Organised into "chapters" about Clinton's life, the issue discusses her history of political activism at Wellesley College as well as her experiences of running for President. The title of the issue reminds readers of Senator Elizabeth Warren's attempts to read a letter by Coretta Scott King – activist, civil rights leader, and wife of Martin Luther King, Jr – on the US Senate floor against the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions to become Attorney General. She was silenced by Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell, who explained that Warren "was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted."[5] Persistence and resistance are operating in this volume in sympathetic registers that demand both attributes from girl readers.

---

[5] *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 115th Congress, First Session*. February 6, 2017, p. S855.

These attributes are embodied by Clinton and encouraged in the readers and contributors to the magazine. She remarks in her editorial on the surprise that people seem to feel "whenever a teenage girl takes a stand on an important issue" (2017, 12). *Teen Vogue*, she explains, "takes teen girls seriously and understands that style and substance aren't mutually exclusive…Teen girls are a powerful force for good in the world, and it's refreshing to see that reflected in these pages" (2017, 12). She articulates the value of girls for themselves, rather than for their future potentiality. Once again echoing the theme of the volume, she reminds her young self to "be grateful for your persistence" (2017, 79) when facing an uphill battle. The ability to persist in the face of challenging odds is echoed by Welteroth's accompanying editorial, in which she explains that in the months after Clinton's defeat to Trump, "girls and young people sprang into action, speaking out and marching – many for the first time" (2017, 12). In *Teen Vogue,* girls – not future women – will take action. They will speak out; they will produce change.

**Conclusion**

In both *Teen Vogue* and the *Girl's Realm*, the patriarchal norms pertaining to girlhood are disrupted, but in ways that are contingent upon the cultural, social and economic constraints of the moment. *Teen Vogue* created new spaces within postfeminist media culture for a thriving feminist girls' culture, and *Girl's Realm* made space for a politicized girls' culture within the Victorian press. Both magazines, over 100 years apart, reimagined a politically activist female reader engaged with the social and cultural politics of their respective eras. These magazines articulated new models of girlhood subjectivity in two different eras of print culture: at the beginnings of the press, and at what may be the final stages of print as it seemingly fades away, to be replaced by digital content.

Girls' magazines have often been criticized for "their dearth of information about issues of broad importance, such as political, social and environmental activities" (Alexandra Smith and Denise Sevick Bortree 2012, 520-1). This is part of a legacy of dismissing girls' voices and not

considering girls as political agents. Girls voices and activism has been invisible historically since they are often marginalized from traditional spaces of activism such as the voting booth, town hall, and the public street (Keller 2015).[6] As we have demonstrated in this article, girls have a history of engaging with critical questions of their time. This engagement has been enabled by and through their magazines. Not only do magazines offer girl readers the opportunities to see images of themselves, they also provide a vehicle through which – to varying degrees – girls can debate key issues, position themselves as political activists, and demonstrate their solidarity with others.

By building a history of girls' political subjectivities and agencies through two distinct moments in girls' print culture in the *Girl's Realm* and *Teen Vogue*, the trajectory of girls' culture is made more visible. Much more work still needs to be done to overcome the presentist approach that Kearney has identified as characterising much of girls' media studies. But hopefully this article will have the same outcome that Welteroth saw in the gaslighting article by Lauren Duca, in that it "stirred up a larger conversation around how we think about young girls" (Warrington 2017).

References

Advertising Age, 2016. "Teen Vogue's New Strategy: Trump News and Makeup Tips | Media." *Advertising Age*. Accessed May 24, 2018, https://adage.com/article/media/teen-vogue-s-strategy-trump-news-makeup-tips/307228/.

Ashlee, Aerial A., Bianca Zamora, Shamika N. Karikari. 2017. "We Are Woke: A Collaborative Critical Autoethnography of Three "Womxn" of Color Graduate Students in Higher Education." *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 19 (1): 89-104

---

[6] Keller makes this claim in reference to girls' blogging, suggesting that much of girl's activism had gone unnoticed by feminist scholarship which at the time of her writing had not considered blogs as sites of activism. Keller's original observation that girl's activism is not as visible can be extended to other historical moments.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2018. “Postfeminism and Popular Feminism.” *Feminist Media Histories* 4 (2): 152-156. DOI: 10.1525/fmh.2018.4.2.152

Becker, Sarah, Danielle Thomas, and Michael R. Cope. 2016. “Post-Feminism for Children: Feminism ‘Re-packaged' in the Bratz Films.” *Media, Culture & Society* 38 (8): 1218-1235.

Bell, David. 2017. “Nevertheless she persisted:  Teen Vogue upping its politics game, says U of C researcher.” *CBC News* October 2 2017.  http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/teen-vogue-shift-1.4316888

Bettis, Pamela J and Natalie G. Adams. 2005. “Landscapes of Girlhood.” In *Geographies of Girlhood: Identities In-Between*, edited by Pamela Bettis and Natalie Adams, 1-16. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Association.

Blue, Morgan G, 2013. “D-Signed for Girls: Disney Channel and Tween Fashion.” *Film, Fashion & Consumption* 2 (1): 55-75.

“Chat with the Girl of the Period.” 1898. *Girl’s Realm* 1: 216, 432.

---. 1904. *Girl’s Realm* 6: 692.

---. 1908. *Girl’s Realm* 10: 525, 685-6.

Clinton, Hillary Rodham. 2017. “Editors’ Letters.” *Teen Vogue,* 4,

Condé Nast. 2016. “Condé Nast Reimagines Teen Vogue as Digital, Video and Socially-Led Brand and Introduces Larger Collectible Quarterly Print Issues Pegged to Key Audience Moments.” *Condé Nast,* November 7.  http://www.condenast.com/press/conde-nast-reimagines-teen-vogue-as-digital-video-and-socially-led-brand-and-introduces-larger-collectible-quarterly-print-issues-pegged-to-key-audience-moments/

Congressional Record and Debates of the 115th Congress 1st Session, 163 (20): p. S855. 6 February 2017.

Currie, Dawn. 1999. *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. DOI: 10.3138/9781442675346

Dixon, Diana. 1986. “Children and the Press, 1866-1914.” *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries,* edited by Michael Harris and Alan Lee, 133-148. London: Associated University Presses.

Dodes, Rachel. 2017. “Even the Teen Vogue Writer Who Took on Trump Gets Stage Fright.” *The New York Times*, January 27.

Driscoll, Catherine. 2002. *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Drotner, Kirsten. 1988. *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Duca, Lauren. 2017. "Fashion is Political. Period." *Teen Vogue* 3: 112-113.

Duffy, Margaret, and J. Micheal Gotcher.1996. "Crucial Advice on How to Get the Guy: The Rhetorical Vision of Power and Seduction in the Teen Magazine *YM*." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 20: 32-48.

Fernandez, Chantal. 2017. "How did Teen Vogue become a cultural hit driving blockbuster traffic. "*Business of Fashion,* September 28. Accessed 28 September 2018. https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/transforming-conde-nasts-problem-child

Fernandez, Chantal. 2017. "Transforming Condé Nast's Problem Child." *Business of Fashion*, September 28. Accessed 22 January 2018. https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/transforming-conde-nasts-problem-child

Gerl, Ellen J. 2016. "Survivors and Dreamers: A Rhetorical Vision of *Teen Voices* Magazine." *Journal of Magazine and New Media Research* 17 (1): 1-26.

Gilbert, Sophie. 2016. "Teen Vogue's Political Coverage Isn't Surprising." *The Atlantic,* December 12. Accessed 06 June 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/12/teen-vogue-politics/510374/

Gill, Rosalind. 2007. "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (2): 147–166.

Gonick, Marnina, Emma Renold, Jessica Ringrose, and Lisa Weems. 2009. "Rethinking Agency and Resistance: What Comes After Girl Power?" *Girlhood Studies* 2 (2): 1-9.

Harris, Anita. 2004. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Routledge.

Hughes, Jazmine. 2017. "Elaine Welteroth, Teen Vogue's Refashionista." *The New York Times Magazine*, August 31. Accessed 01 December 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/31/magazine/elaine-welteroth-teen-vogues-refashionista.html?_r=0

Joy, Maya. 2017. "Beyond Borders." *Teen Vogue* 1: 28-29.

Kearney, Mary Celeste. 2006. *Girls Made Media*. New York: Routledge.

Kearney, Mary Celeste. 2014. "Historicize This! Contextualism in Youth Media Studies." In *Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media,* edited by David Buckingham, Sara Bragg and Mary Jane Kehily, 53-68. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Kearney, Mary Celeste. 2011. "Introduction: Girls' Media Studies 2.0." *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls' Media Culture,* edited by Mary Celeste Kearney, 1-17. New York: Peter Lang.

Keller, Jessalynn. 2011. "Feminist Editors and the New Girl Glossies: Fashionable Feminism or Just Another Sexist Rag?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 34 (1): 1-12.

Keller, Jessalynn. 2015. *Girls' Feminist Blogging in a Postfeminist Age*. New York: Routledge.

Keller, Jessalyn, Morgan Blue, Mary Celeste Kearney, Kirsten Pike and Sarah Projansky. 2011. "Mapping New Methodological Approaches to Girls' Media Studies: Reflections from the Field." *Journal of Children and Media* 9 (4): 528-535.

Kruckemeyer, Kate. 2002. "Making Room for Teen Voices: Feminist Discourse in Magazines by and for Girls." *Iris: A Journal About Women* 44: 46-52.

Marsh, Ariana. 2016 "Contributors: #GirlGaze Came to me in a Moment of Inspiration." *Teen Vogue* September, 38.

Massoni, K. 2010. *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Mazzarella, Sharon R. 1999. "The 'Superbowl of All Dates': Teenage Girl Magazines and the Commodification of the Perfect Prom." *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity,* edited by Sharon R. Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora, 97-112. New York: Peter Lang.

McRobbie, Angela. 1991. *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'*. Houndmills: Macmillan.

Miller, Susan. 2016."Assent as Agency in the Early Years of the Children of the American Revolution." *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9 (1): 48-65.

Moruzi, Kristine. 2012. *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850-1915*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Moruzi, Kristine and Natalie Coulter. 2018. "'Suitable for Us Girls': Subjectivity and Community in the Victorian Periodical Press." *Mediated Girlhoods,* 2nd edition, edited by Mary Celeste Kearney and Morgan Blue, 87-103. Peter Lang: New York.

Peirce, Kate. 1990. "A Feminist Theoretical Perspective on the Socialization of Teenage Girls through *Seventeen Magazine*." *Sex Roles* 23 (9-10): 491-500.

Pike, Kirsten. 2011. "'The New Activists': Girls and Discourses of Citizenship, Liberation, and Femininity in *Seventeen*, 1968-1977." In *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls' Media Culture*, edited by Mary Celeste Kearney, 55-73. New York: Peter Lang.

Projanksy, Sarah. 2014. *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination and Celebrity Culture*. New York: NYU Press.

Pulliam-Moore, Charles. 2016. "How 'woke' went from black activist watchword to teen internet slang." *Splinter,* August 01. Accessed 11 July 2018.

Rather, Dan. 2017. Facebook post. January 8, 2017. https://www.facebook.com/theDanRather/

Rodgers, Beth. 2016. *Adolescent Girlhood and Literary Culture at the Fin de Siècle: Daughters of Today*. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Roy, Nilanjan. 2017. "How Teen Vogue Got Political." *The Financial Times* January 24.

Shadiqui, Yara. 2016. "Social Studies: Yara in Conversation with Loretta." *Teen Vogue* September: 50-52.

Smith, Alexandra Nutter and Denise Sevick Bortree. 2012. "Buying Green or Being Green: Environmental Consciousness Frames in English Language Teen Girl Magazines." *Journal of Children and Media* 6 (4): 520-540.

Stoneley, Peter. 2003. *Consumerism and American Girls' Literature, 1860-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Tinkler, Penny.1995. *Constructing Girlhood: Popular Magazines for Girls Growing Up in England, 1920-1950*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Warrington, Ruby. 2017. "Inside Teen Vogue: 'Our Readers Consider Themselves Activists.'" *The Guardian*, February 25. Accessed 26 June 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/feb/25/teen-vogue-readers-consider-themselves-activists

Welteroth, Elaine. 2016. "Letter from the Editor: What a Time." *Teen Vogue* September: 48.

---. 2017. “Editors’ Letters.” *Teen Vogue* 4: 12.