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## **Standing out from the crowd**

**A study of *frankie* magazine, niche branding, and alternative  
femininities**

by

**Rosanna Hunt**

**Bachelor of Arts (Hons)**

**School of Social Sciences**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts**

**University of Tasmania**

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## Abstract

In the digital age, print media is said to be in decline. At the same time, the genre of women's magazines has been subject to escalating critique for its practices of production and representation. In this context, an Australian 'indie' niche magazine for young women has achieved remarkable success. Launched in 2004 by an independent publisher, *frankie* magazine now has circulation figures that outdo established glossy women's titles such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue Australia*. The magazine has received multiple industry accolades, and in 2014 its publisher was sold for a reported \$10 million figure.

This thesis employs a combination of industry study and textual analysis in order to examine *frankie* magazine's success, which is notable when compared with other niche titles. The thesis is concerned in particular with the gendered dimensions of the magazine, given the focus in lifestyle magazine scholarship on gender as the central 'problem' of magazine texts. To this end, the thesis explores ways in which *frankie* magazine and its production are discursively constructed in opposition to mainstream women's magazines, and identifies potentially subversive "gender manoeuvres" (Schippers 2002) in the text. However, the analysis also highlights ways in which *frankie* and its production can be thought of as distinctly 'mainstream'.

The thesis argues that *frankie* has been successful because it balances an appealing textual subversiveness with conventional production practices, thereby allowing it to both signify an 'alternative' identity and occupy a lucrative position within the mainstream market. This is significant because it suggests there is room for subversiveness within a genre that has typically been thought of as inherently conservative, and indicates that alternative representations of femininity can have mainstream appeal. At the same time, this thesis demonstrates continuities between *frankie* and the conventional women's magazine industry, both in terms of production practices and the pervasiveness of gendered representations in which white, middle-class femininities are most visible. This thesis contributes an analysis of a contemporary magazine and its production to the field of women's magazine studies, in which studies of the industry contexts and dynamics informing magazine texts have previously been underrepresented.

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

Rosanna Hunt

04/11/16

Earlier versions of sections of the analysis in this thesis have appeared in the following papers:

Hunt, R 2015, 'The shifting 'indie' femininities of *Frankie* magazine', in P Mountford (ed), *Peer reviewed proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand*, POPCAANZ, Wellington, New Zealand, pp. 63-73, <<http://popcaanz.com/conference-proceedings-2015/>>.

Hunt, R and Phillipov, M 2014, "'Nanna style": The countercultural politics of retro femininities', *M/C Journal*, vol. 17, no. 6, <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/901>>.

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The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

The research associated with this thesis was approved by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

S ometime around 2008, I became aware of a new magazine for young women. It looked a little different to the usual glossy suspects, and its contents seemed much more off-centre than any Australian women’s magazine I had read before. Having grown up with girls’ glossy *Barbie Magazine*, sought advice from *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* magazines in the early teenage years, and then moved on to *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, this new magazine felt like a revelation. *frankie* referenced Australian ‘indie’ culture and featured art, craft, indie music, and retro homewares. Gone were the pages devoted to how to improve your appearance and the headlines advertising sex tips that made me embarrassed to read *Cosmo* in public. *frankie*’s opinion writers seemed celebrate flaws and uncertainty, and the articles spent more time sharing strange facts or heart-warming stories than pointing out problems with my life that needed fixing. It was a magazine I could share with older female family members and even my brother, and I wasn’t embarrassed to be seen reading it on the plane. In fact, many a plane ride has been spent interrupting my travel companion’s own reading to tell them about something odd, funny, heartbreaking or stylish in *frankie*. Like a new friend, *frankie* wove its way into so many parts of my life and became a source of both comfort and inspiration. I started to use “frankie” as an adjective when describing why I liked something, I decorated my bedroom walls with clippings from past issues, and it always provided a treat after my undergraduate exams. Occasionally I would revisit my old magazine pals *Cleo* and *Cosmo*, but I found them much less enjoyable once I’d found *frankie*.

It wasn’t just me that was excited about this magazine. The industry noticed too – especially after *frankie*’s circulation rose by 30 per cent in the second half of 2009, making it “the fastest growing magazine in Australia” (Wells 2010). This led to stories about its success in the news media, including a feature on the ABC’s *The 7.30 Report* (*Frankie Magazine beats the odds* 2010). The magazine then experienced four and a half consecutive years of circulation growth, which was at odds with the trajectory of women’s magazines more generally and also put it well ahead of comparable niche titles. In 2012, it began to outsell established fashion titles such as *Vogue Australia* and *Harper’s Bazaar* (Wells 2012), while in the first half of 2013, *frankie*’s circulation grew by

over ten per cent at the same time as Australian women's glossies *Cosmopolitan*<sup>1</sup> and *Cleo* each saw a circulation decline of approximately 17 per cent (Blight 2013). In this six-month period, the magazine market circulation as a whole fell by 6.23 per cent (Blight 2013). During *frankie's* rise, weekly titles for a female demographic were also selling fewer and fewer copies: in the second half of 2013, for example, women's titles *OK!*, *NW*, *Who* and *Woman's Day* all posted circulation declines (Ward 2014b). In the first half of 2014, *frankie's* circulation reached a peak of 67,782 copies (Ward 2014a). *frankie* magazine was awarded various industry accolades, including Magazine of the Year at the Australian Magazine Awards in 2012 and 2013, Australian Fashion Magazine of the Year in 2012, 2013, and 2014, and Magazine Brand of the Year at the 2015 Australian Magazine Awards. *frankie's* achievements felt personal to me: a sign that it was okay not to be the perfect 'Cosmo Girl'. I wondered if others felt the same, and why exactly this magazine had been able to not only survive – but thrive – in an industry whose days were thought to be numbered.

The Australian magazine market is highly fragmented (Bonner 2014: 199). This is in keeping with a broader trend in magazine markets around the Western world, where markets are defined by fragmentation into many niche titles (Abrahamson 2009; Doyle 2011; Forde 2001). This means any magazine is likely to have several competitors, and this is now compounded by a multitude of online content. Australian women's magazines, for example, now compete not only with each other but with websites such as *Mamamia* as well as blogs and social media content. Falling circulations for many magazine titles have been complemented by a stark decline in advertising revenue: in 2014, the total advertising spend for print magazines had decreased from the previous year by over 16 per cent (Clark 2014), and in September 2016 it had dropped nearly 15 per cent from the previous year (Hayes 2016). For women's magazines in particular, competition from amateur online content such as YouTube beauty tutorials is thought to have affected their advertising revenue (Jackson 2014: 23). More recently, the closure of the once-iconic Australian women's magazine *Cleo* in January 2016 reinforces the

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, references to *Cosmopolitan* are to the Australian iteration of the magazine, except where otherwise stated.

significance of *frankie's* rise. *Cleo's* demise followed a number of other Australian magazine closures in the years prior, including glossy women's titles *Grazia* and *Madison* (Burrowes 2013; Kellow 2013), and men's titles *FHM* and *Zoo* (Hicks 2012; Jones 2015). This is consistent with international experiences: in 2015, the closure of the UK versions of *FHM* and *Zoo* led the *Guardian* to proclaim the "end of the lads' mags era" (Jackson 2015). Of course, there have also been new glossy titles launched in Australia during this time, such as the Australian version of *Elle*, launched by Bauer in 2013 (B&T Magazine 2013). Overall, though, glossy women's and men's magazines in particular have faced a number of challenges in recent years.

As Bonner (2014: 207) notes, there are three main companies that dominate the Australian magazine industry which each have "wider media interests". In other words, the major producers of magazines in Australia are part of large media conglomerates. In 2016, these are: Bauer Media, owned by the European parent company Bauer Media Group; Pacific Magazines, owned by Seven West Media; and NewsLifeMedia, a division of the international News Corporation. The fact that *frankie* is not produced by one of these three companies further demonstrates the significance of its success, relative to titles from other smaller publishers. The sale of Nine Entertainment's ACP magazines to Bauer in 2012 – the decreasing earnings of ACP were noted at the time (Kruger 2012) – suggests the challenges faced by mainstream publishers. As will be explored further in Chapter 4 of this thesis, the current state of the print magazine industry has led major publishers to rebrand as multi-media based companies: in 2015, the Australian magazine industry body Magazine Publishers Australia released its first 'Magazine Media 360° Report', which lists not just circulation and traditional readership figures but web users and social media followers (Homewood 2015). Ultimately, *frankie's* success is worthy of examination because it came at a time at which there were few positive stories about the broader print magazine industry.

### **Introducing *frankie* magazine**

*frankie* magazine is a bi-monthly publication of approximately 150 pages per issue. As its website description notes, *frankie* features "design, art, photography, fashion, travel, music, craft, interiors and real-life stories" (*frankie* magazine 2016). Regular content

includes opinion pieces, photo essays, fashion spreads, craft instructions, and reviews that cover topics as diverse as toilet paper brands and dog breeds. The magazine also features interviews with various ‘creatives’, such as artists, musicians, and professional artisans, and has a regular feature called ‘Homebodies’ which profiles the homes of creative people across the world. Its aesthetic is defined by lots of blank space, small black type, nostalgic or ‘retro’ photography, and illustrations. *frankie* has a small editorial team and most of its content is contributed on a freelance basis, but there are a number of long-term contributors who have become associated with the magazine, such as writers Benjamin Law and Eleanor Robertson and craft blogger Pip Lincolne. As a magazine for young women, *frankie* is distinctive in a number of ways. The magazine is printed on thick, matte paper, as opposed to the typical ‘glossy’ form of women’s magazines. As will be explored further in Chapter 4, in 2012 the magazine began featuring illustrated covers, and models have only occasionally featured in its fashion spreads since the change. *frankie* is also notable for its lack of ‘how-to’ content relating to sex and relationships, which has been a defining feature of the contemporary women’s magazine. The magazine also features a lower proportion of advertising than is standard (its 2016 media kit states its makeup is 70 per cent editorial to 30 per cent advertising), and its cover price is slightly higher at \$10.50 per issue (\$9.95 until March/April 2015, and compared to \$7.95 for *Cosmopolitan*). Its advertisements are for a mixture of niche brands such as Australian fashion label Leonard St. and larger brands such as Marc Jacobs and Converse. These differences and their implications will be explored further in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

*frankie* was launched in 2004 by Morrison Media, an independent publisher. The magazine was the brainchild of Louise Bannister and Lara Burke, who were in their twenties at the time and felt that no magazine was suited to their particular interests. As Bannister put it, “we felt a planet away from the mainstream magazines” (*Frankie Magazine: How to launch a successful mag* 2010). The pair pitched an idea for a new magazine to their boss at Morrison Media, and that idea became *frankie*. Bannister and Burke later established an imprint of Morrison Media named Frankie Press, which now publishes quarterly men’s publication *Smith Journal* and lifestyle magazine *Slow Living*, as well as range of *frankie* extensions including cookbooks and an annual calendar and diary. In 2014, the magazine’s founders left Morrison Media (Reynolds 2014). Later that year, the company was sold to a sports radio network for a reported \$10 million figure (Lee 2014). The magazine includes no evidence of this sale, still

stating inside its cover that it is published by Frankie Press, an imprint of Morrison Media. The publisher continues to operate as a standalone division (this was confirmed with editor Jo Walker in an interview for this thesis). *frankie* has become a well-established publication, in many ways surpassing its original 'indie' or 'niche' status. The magazine also has a large following online and social media, which has been suggested by industry commentators as a reason for its success (Wells 2012). *frankie* is active in particular on Facebook, where its page has over 340,000 'likes', Twitter, where it has over 78,000 followers, and Instagram, where it has at least 159,000 followers.<sup>2</sup> Its Facebook and Twitter pages share links to its daily blog posts, which include music interviews, film features, recipes, and profiles on artists or craft products. iPad or Android versions of the magazine and its ancillary books are also available.

## Definitions

Before outlining the aims and argument of this thesis, I wish to clarify some terms I will be using throughout. First, I wish to offer a qualifier in regards to *frankie's* 'success'. In using the term 'success', I refer to a notable rise in circulation figures at a time when many glossy titles were experiencing the opposite, its move from a niche, independently produced title to one with a mainstream audience, and its industry recognition. Its success is particularly notable when considered as relative to that of other niche or independent magazines in Australia, such as *Yen*, a niche women's publication whose 2014 media kit listed its circulation as 27,000 copies (Next Media 2014a). As well, while circulation figures provide an average of actual sales, broader audience survey data collected by Enhanced Media Metrics Australia (emma), which allows for multiple readers of the same magazine copy, showed in April 2014 that *frankie's* average issue readership had surpassed *Cleo* magazine by over 100,000 readers, and was within reach of that of *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue Australia* (emma

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<sup>2</sup> Correct as of 18 October 2016 – see <https://www.facebook.com/frankiemagazine>; <https://twitter.com/frankiemagazine>; <https://www.instagram.com/frankiemagazine>.

2014).<sup>3</sup> To come within reach of the broader readership of these established titles can in itself be thought of a sign of success when compared to other comparable niche titles – such as when comparing *frankie's* readership of 402,000 in 2014 to *Yen's* readership of 150,000 in the same year (Next Media 2014a).

Throughout this thesis I primarily describe *frankie* as a 'women's magazine'. The magazine is not explicitly described in this way in public promotional material: its website describes it as for "women (and men!)" (*frankie* magazine 2016a) and its media kit describes it as "a unique publication" (Frankie Press 2016a). *frankie* could also be categorised as a 'niche magazine', an 'indie magazine', a 'fashion magazine' or an "arts and craft magazine" (Lee 2014). However, I consider *frankie* as a 'women's magazine' in this thesis for a number of reasons. The magazine's media kit lists its readership as "70% female" (Frankie Press 2016b), suggesting its primary target audience is women. More importantly, I consider *frankie* as a women's magazine because this is the way it has been framed in commentary about the magazine and its success. For example, *Sydney Morning Herald* stories have described it as "an independent *women's magazine*" (Wells 2010; 2012, emphasis added). Stories such of these have compared *frankie's* circulation figures to those of magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* (Blight 2013; Wells 2012), thereby positioning the magazine as a direct counterpart of these women's magazines. As will become clear in Chapter 4 of the thesis, the magazine's producers also draw upon the notion of *frankie* as a women's magazine in discussing their own production practices. I suggest *frankie's* ability to occupy the mainstream women's magazine market is important to its success, and so refer to it as such throughout the chapters that follow. Equally, however, I also suggest that *frankie's* discursive opposition to 'glossy' women's magazines is important to its brand: throughout this thesis, 'glossy' refers not only to the texture of the paper on which these magazines have traditionally been printed, but to a particular format and traditionally glamorous, 'Photoshopped' aesthetic favoured in mainstream publishing.

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<sup>3</sup> *frankie's* average issue readership was 402,000, while *Cosmopolitan's* was 484,000 and *Vogue Australia's* was 463,000 (emma 2014).

This thesis also employs the term 'indie' when discussing *frankie*, because the magazine has often been characterised as an 'indie' magazine (see for example Kermond 2015; Zhao 2013). This is due not only to the economic independence of its original publisher, but also its content and style, which reflect Australian 'indie' culture. This is clear particularly in its focus on indie craft and music, its retro aesthetic, and its celebration of vintage clothing and home-wares. The term 'indie' originally referred to independent production of culture, such as film and music. As Newman (2009: 16) explains the difference between "indie" and "mainstream" production, the former is thought to be "small-scale, personal, artistic, and creative", while the latter is on a larger scale and more interested in profit than creativity. However, 'indie' now has much broader meanings. As Newman (2009: 16) notes, it can stand in for "alternative, hip, edgy, [and] uncompromising", and can be applied to other cultural forms, fashions and social groups. This diversity of meanings, as well the mainstream adoption and commodification of indie tastes (Oakes 2009: 195), means that 'indie' is now much more subjective and harder to define than when it simply meant a cultural product produced outside of the mainstream media conglomerates (e.g. by independent record labels or film production companies). However, *frankie's* association with indie culture is important for an explanation for how the magazine has come to be regarded as 'alternative'. In particular, in the version of 'indie' seen in *frankie*, retro and vintage style are often paired with a liberal social politics and an implicit environmental concern and sustainability. This is perhaps due to the youthful demographic, and also the fact that both sustainability and an inclusive approach to gender and sexuality align with a rejection of the 'mainstream' (i.e. conservatism and consumerism). Thus *frankie's* 'indie' status connotes not just craft and retro fashion and a different approach to production, but a potentially 'alternative' world view. Having established what is meant by key terms used in this thesis, I will now explain my central research aims.

## **Research Aims and Scope**

This thesis investigates the success and cultural significance of *frankie* magazine by considering its brand, its production and the text itself. By combining industry study with textual analysis, the thesis addresses the following research aims:

- Investigate the industry strategies of *frankie* magazine.
- Analyse the magazine text and its politics, with particular attention to its representations of gender.
- Consider the relationship between industry dynamics and the magazine text.

These aims are informed by two main factors: first, the context outlined above, in which *frankie's* success can be thought of as unusual or unexpected relative to comparative titles and the broader industry trajectory, and second, the focus on gender in existing scholarship on magazines. There are many potential reasons for *frankie's* success – and its rise is most likely due to a combination of factors – however this thesis will focus specifically on the gendered dimensions of the magazine and how these aspects might have contributed to this success. Studies of lifestyle magazines have historically focused upon gender as the central ‘problem’ or issue within the texts (see Gill 2007a and Chapter 2 of this thesis). As will be demonstrated later in the thesis, there has also been escalating critique of women’s magazines in particular outside of the academy. A focus on how *frankie* might offer an alternative model of gender within the genre of women’s magazines, then, will contribute to the existing body of scholarship and broader conversations about the texts.

As will become clear later in this thesis, scholars and commentators have often characterised women’s magazines as inherently conservative in their ideologies, even where they have been suggested to offer pleasure. This thesis reads *frankie* as potentially subversive, because it offers access to an ‘alternative’ femininity not consistent with mainstream media representations of women and in so doing, addresses increasingly mainstream concerns about women’s magazines. This ‘alternative’ identity also offers “distinction” (Bourdieu 1984) from the ‘mainstream’. Considering this, the thesis highlights ways in which *frankie* may in fact reinforce certain mainstream values, as well as the magazine’s use of production practices that are typical of the industry. Ultimately, this thesis argues that *frankie* has been successful because it balances an appealing textual subversiveness with conventional production practices, thereby allowing it to both signify an ‘alternative’ identity and occupy a lucrative position within the mainstream market. In this way, it offers pleasurable ways to resist certain norms of femininity, without compromising its commercial function. This is significant because it suggests there is room for

subversiveness within a genre that has typically been thought of as inherently conservative, and indicates that alternative representations of femininity can have mainstream appeal. However, it also suggests continuities between the magazine and mainstream women's magazines both at a textual level and when considering industry practice. In these ways, this study is of significance to both the magazine industry and scholarly studies of lifestyle magazines.

## **Thesis Outline**

In the chapters that follow, I expand on this argument with reference to relevant scholarship and my own analysis. In Chapter 2 I provide a review of literature on magazines, with a particular focus on critiques of representations of gender in lifestyle magazines. Methodological debates within this scholarship are also explained. Recent scholarship on 'indie' as a genre within mediums such as film and music is discussed, and the chapter demonstrates the contribution a study of *frankie* will make to magazine scholarship and studies of 'indie' media. Chapter 3 outlines the theory and methods employed in this thesis, namely a combination of industry interviews with textual analysis that identifies "gender manoeuvres" (Schippers 2002) in the magazine.

In Chapter 4, the results of applying this theory and method are discussed and analysed. I provide an analysis of the construction of *frankie's* brand as an 'alternative' magazine, both by its publisher and in external media coverage. The production practices that underpin the magazine, as discursively constructed by the magazine's staff, are also examined. The analysis then identifies particular textual examples of difference and suggests ways in which these examples might be read as offering an 'alternative' femininity. Having demonstrated how the magazine's brand and text can be thought of as alternative, the chapter then complicates this difference, and concludes by suggesting that the magazine's success is in its ability to occupy an 'alternative' position *within* mainstream publishing and popular culture. Chapter 5 further explores this conclusion and its significance to understandings of magazines and gender, as well as making suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review provides a survey of existing scholarship concerned with magazines and gender. Academic interest in lifestyle magazines has largely been driven by concern with representations of gender in the texts. Scholarship on women's and men's magazines explores these representations as well as the relationships readers have with the texts, and to a lesser extent, the industry dynamics and practices that inform the magazines. The literature to date has mainly considered glossy texts designed for a mainstream audience or explicitly feminist publications, each launched in the twentieth century. Newer niche publications steeped in 'indie' cultures, such as *frankie*, have not been considered to the same extent. This review will highlight the ways in which a study of *frankie* can provide new insights into magazines, their representations of gender, and their industry contexts.

The second section of this review surveys recent literature that examines 'indie' media. This scholarship has primarily considered the 'indie' genre and trend as it manifests in film and music, and has been largely concerned with issues of class and cultural capital. The review below will demonstrate that examining a women's magazine associated with 'indie' styles and values can contribute to studies of indie culture and its development over time. It will also be shown that a focus on *frankie's* 'indie' femininities will add depth to existing work on indie and gender.

### Women's magazines

Critiques of women's magazines have a long history in feminist and academic scholarship. Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* is a key foundational text in this area. Writing about post-war America, Friedan (1963: 43-44) describes an ideal of femininity defined by satisfaction derived from the home and family alone. She suggests this ideal contributes to the unhappiness of women (Friedan 1963: 32). Importantly, Friedan (1963: 34) highlights women's magazines as a key site for the formation of this mystique. In a text published decades later, feminist writer Naomi Wolf (1992) argues in *The Beauty Myth* that women's magazines are a central actor in

perpetuating a focus on female appearance that weakens the position of women in society, undercutting feminist progress. Despite their different time periods, both Friedan and Wolf identify conservative, and indeed regressive, representations of women in the magazines. They also share an assumption that these representations are hugely powerful in shaping broader societal notions of femininity and the lives of women.

Such complaints about women's magazines are reflected in a large body of academic critiques of the texts. McRobbie's (1982) analysis of the teenage girls' publication *Jackie* is a formative work of this nature. She argues that the magazine's "ideology of adolescent femininity" outlines the concerns of teenage girls as strictly within the sphere of the personal, such as romance, domesticity, pop music and beauty (McRobbie 1982: 281- 282). She highlights the magazine's individualistic ideologies, suggesting young women are encouraged to eschew female company in favour of finding a male partner, at which time they will give up their independence (McRobbie 1982: 282). McRobbie also suggests that "*Jackie* asserts the absolute and natural separation of sex roles" (1982: 281). McRobbie describes *Jackie's* ideology as "immensely powerful", though she does acknowledge the one-sidedness of this reading (1982: 282). Ultimately, she suggests *Jackie* magazine presents an individualistic and narrow ideology of femininity that has the power to affect female readers. These criticisms have been echoed in scholarship which identifies normative ideologies of gender in women's magazines, such as the construction of women and men as natural opposites and an emphasis on heterosexual romance and the female appearance (Ballaster et al. 1991; Ferguson 1983; Gill 2007a; Gill 2009a). For example, Ferguson (1983) describes the production and readership of women's magazines as a "cult of femininity", likening her findings about the genre to Durkheim's studies of religious cults. Ferguson argues this cult separates the genders, not only in magazine content, but also in the treatment of female readers as a singular, unified demographic with specific interests. She suggests magazine editors are akin to "high priestesses", and the texts function as the cult's "oracles" for its "adherents", or readers (Ferguson 1983: 5). The implication of much of the magazines' content, Ferguson (1983: 2) suggests, is that women require instruction in living as female, whereas men do not require the same level of guidance. While the men's and lad's magazines genres that later emerged mean her suggestion that only women are thought to require instruction is perhaps less applicable now than it once was, Ferguson's work is a key example of

the studies which share an assumption of the power of the women's magazine text over its readers. However, this power would later be questioned, as will be discussed shortly.

Critiques of women's magazines have suggested the texts outline strict rules and regulations of femininity. As Gill (2007a: 217) puts it, in women's magazines "femininity is presented as contingent – something that requires constant vigilance, attention and self-surveillance". In other words, the imagined women of glossy magazines are responsible for their own adherence to preferred norms, lest they sacrifice their own feminine identity. It is this emphasis on the work of femininity that leads Ballaster et al. (1991: 167) to describe achieving femininity in the magazines as "women's Sisyphean labour": they argue that the work of domestic labour, beauty, personal relationships or sexuality are sites through which femininity can be realised, yet it is also assumed that this ideal femininity is naturally possessed. Scholars have also noted that the representation of femininity as something to be worked for by individual women fails to acknowledge structural inequalities of gender, race, class and sexuality (Winship 1987). In particular, Winship (1987: 114-115) argues British *Cosmopolitan* magazine presents heterosexual relationship problems as issues that can be addressed by the individual female reader, rather than as symptoms of systemic gender inequality. Again, the conservative nature of these magazines and their ideologies is emphasised.

As commercial texts, women's magazines have also been critiqued for the way in which they present consumption as central to femininity. For example, McCracken (1993: 2) suggests glossy women's magazines are united by the way their messages "conflate desire with consumerism". In other words, the magazines offer commodities as solutions to problems or aspirations. She argues that editorial and advertising are closely linked in the genre, and that the magazine cover, "covert advertisements" within editorial, and direct advertising work together to encourage women to buy products (McCracken 1993: 4). In a similar vein, Talbot (1992: 193) argues *Jackie* magazine constructs a sense of intimacy between the author and intended reader built upon a shared love of consumption. In her analysis, she suggests the magazine constructs femininity as an experience universal to all women, and one that is heavily grounded in the act and enjoyment of consumption.

Some scholars have suggested other, more positive, cultural functions that women's magazines might perform. Though she does critique specific aspects of the texts, Winship (1987: 6-7) describes the genre as "sadly maligned and grossly misunderstood", arguing it constructs a rare "world" in which women are central rather than secondary. She suggests the genre can be a source of both "survival skills", in the form of everyday guidance, and "daydreams" or fantasies (Winship 1987: 14). Here, Winship suggests the magazines can offer women something empowering. In a more recent study, Ytre-Arne (2011a) suggests that while women's magazines are not necessarily useful sources of formal political information, the texts can still play a part in the "public sphere" by engaging their readers and creating a "community". Thus, the function of women's magazines in fostering a sense of belonging and creating a context in which women are offered relevancy has been suggested as a redeeming feature of the magazines. The fact that women's magazines do not necessarily imply that they represent reality has also been noted: Machin and Thornborrow (2003: 468) argue that the discourse that surrounds the global *Cosmopolitan* brand locates women's agency in their sexuality, but that its contradictory messages are "presented as playful fantasies". Nevertheless, the commercial function of the magazines remains: they suggest these fantasies can be enacted only through consumerism (Machin and Thornborrow 2003: 468).

The pleasure of the magazines, for some scholars, reinforces their ideological power (Ballaster et al. 1991; McCracken 1993). As McCracken (1993: 3) writes, "women's magazines exert a cultural leadership to shape consensus in which highly pleasurable codes work to naturalise social relations of power". Here, McCracken connects the fact that reading women's magazines can be a positive experience to their influence in sustaining conservative ideologies of gender. How the magazines might be enjoyable despite their ideologies has been explained thus: Eggins and Iedema (1997: 193) argue the magazines each have unique "coding orientations" that obscure their ideological consistency in the representation of femininity. In other words, different versions of the same messages mean those messages are less overt, and readers are offered the illusion of varied identities within an overarching framework of conservatism. As they write, "What women's magazines offer, ultimately, is difference without diversity" (Eggins and Iedema 1997: 193). The pleasures of women's magazines have not been denied in the scholarship, but have instead been explained as key to the genre's ideological function.

In contemporary scholarship, women's magazines continue to be an object of analysis for scholars such as Duffy (2013a), Gill (2009a), and Gill and Elias (2014). Duffy (2013a) identifies an emerging theme of "authenticity" in US women's publications such as *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan*, within a broader emphasis upon "the real" in advertising and consumer culture. She identifies three "tropes of authenticity" in the magazines, including: the framing of beauty products in terms of their "natural" and environmentally responsible characteristics, the depiction of "real women" as opposed to models, and the focus in the texts upon becoming one's "authentic" self (Duffy 2013a: 134). She argues these tropes operate successfully as contradictions within the texts that construct an idea of authenticity while maintaining the central purpose of the magazines as consumer products (Duffy 2013a: 149-150). As she writes, "both internal and external contradictions ensure the same type of consumer engagement that has long been at the heart of women's magazine culture" (Duffy 2013a: 150), suggesting the central function of the magazines remains unchanged. Ultimately, Duffy (2013a: 150-151) suggests these tropes of authenticity might be a response to critiques of women's magazines as unrealistic, and a strategy for addressing an "increasingly savvy, reflexive consumer". In other words, the tropes account for the increased media literacy of readers who are critical of 'inauthentic' representations. In a similar vein, Gill and Elias (2014: 180) describe 'Love Your Body' discourses found in contemporary women's magazines as "positive, affirmative, seemingly feminist-inflected media messages" that might actually represent "more pernicious forms of power that engender shift from bodily to psychic regulation". Here, they suggest the discourses might be empowering on a surface level, but the underlying function remains one that encourages self-surveillance and adherence to particular societal standards. As they write about the trend, "Women must makeover not simply their bodies but now – thanks to LYB discourse – their subjectivity as well" (Gill and Elias 2014: 185). They argue these discourses are evidence of "the capacity of media discourses to change and mutate in response to critique", and suggest these themes in women's magazines are responses to criticisms of the genre (Gill and Elias 2014: 180; 182). Thus scholars continue to identify conservative and consumerist messages in women's magazines, and it is argued that the presentation of those messages is changed and updated for a contemporary reader.

## Feminism in women's magazines

While mainstream women's magazines have been subject to much critique from feminist scholars, there have also been suggestions that the texts can engage with feminist principles in a positive way. In an analysis of women's and girls' magazines in the 1990s, McRobbie (1997: 200) suggests the genre has a relationship of "productive tension" with feminism and does not deserve to be unequivocally dismissed. She argues the texts contain "new sexualities" which construct a femininity that is much more open and confident in its sexuality (McRobbie 1997: 195-196). For McRobbie (1997: 200), this development could be partly explained by the influence of feminism. In a similar vein, Stuart (1990: 30-33) considers *Elle* magazine in the 1980s as an exemplar of "popular feminism", suggesting the magazine perhaps engaged with a more positive and diverse view of female empowerment than "professional feminism". She argues the text acknowledged the opportunities for consumption to be not necessarily a source of oppression for women, but an avenue for self-expression. In these studies, women's magazines have been reimagined as a site of potential progression for feminism in scholarly critiques of the genre.

More recent scholarship, however, adopts a less optimistic view of the role of mainstream women's magazines in articulating feminism. This has been set in the context of "postfeminism": Gill (2007b: 148) suggests postfeminism should be understood as a "sensibility" that can be analysed in media texts. She suggests this sensibility is characterised by:

the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline, a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (Gill 2007b: 149).

What many of these features share is the underlying premise that individual women are responsible for their own empowerment through self-regulation, and that they are able to 'choose' to participate in objectifying or sexualised culture. As Gill (2007b: 163) explains, postfeminism is a "response to feminism" that simultaneously appropriates and rejects feminist thinking. She highlights the similarities between postfeminism and neoliberalism, which both emphasise the individual and obscure structural impediments to advancement (Gill 2007b: 162-163). In relation to magazines

specifically, Gill (2009a) argues that glossy magazines such as *Glamour* employ “postfeminist discourses” in discussions of sex and relationships. She suggests these discourses follow the construction of femininity in women’s magazines as something that must be worked for, but encourage a greater intensity and extensiveness of self-surveillance, even extending to the psychological (Gill 2009a: 365). This surveillance is, of course, presented as a choice (Gill 2009a: 366). In other words, conservative ideologies about women are now presented as part of a worldview that seemingly offers women choices, but fails to acknowledge the lack of alternatives. Acknowledging her earlier suggestion of a potentially positive relationship between feminism and women’s magazines, McRobbie (2009: 4-5) revises this and suggests she did not acknowledge the need for content to constantly evolve (meaning feminist content was only a brief trend), while also failing to critique continuities of the genre such an assumption of heterosexuality and the importance of appearance. In fact, she argues there is now a distinct absence of feminism in the magazines, with content instead reflecting “aggressive individualism...[and] obsession with consumer culture which...I see as playing a vital role in the undoing of feminism” (McRobbie 2009: 5). In other words, McRobbie came to see women’s magazines as exemplary in the postfeminist culture she analyses. As such, studies of women’s magazines and feminism have been highly critical of the ways in which the texts have negotiated and to some extent undermined the gains of second-wave feminism. These critiques, again, have been focused upon the ‘glossy’ format of women’s magazines.

### **Conceptualising the audience**

In studies of women’s magazines reliant upon textual analysis, there was sometimes an implicit assumption of the power of the texts over their readers and cultural notions of femininity. However, a key question in the study of women’s magazines is whether textual analysis can truly reveal meaning. Many scholars argue readers should be central to analyses of the genre, as ideological meanings are not necessarily all powerful (Currie 1999; Frazer 1987; Hermes 1995; McRobbie 1991). For example, Hermes (1995: 147) laments the “horrifyingly stereotypical views” of readers in studies which employ textual analysis. After interviewing readers, Hermes found they ascribed little importance to the texts: women’s magazines were preferred for their

convenience as a format that is “easy to put down” (Hermes 1995: 143). Clearly, this argument contrasts with Ferguson’s (1983) idea of a “cult of femininity”; in the view of Hermes, the cult does not necessarily have dedicated followers.

In a similar vein, Frazer (1987) presents a study of teenage readers of *Jackie* magazine, arguing for a move away from the focus upon “ideology” in women’s magazine studies. She found that the girls took a “self-conscious and reflexive approach” to reading *Jackie*, suggesting they were not simply accepting of the messages in texts. Taking this and similar studies into account, McRobbie (1991) criticises the assumptions of her own earlier work on *Jackie*. She reflects, “It created an image of *Jackie* as a massive ideological block in which readers were implicitly imprisoned” (McRobbie 1991: 141). As such, the importance of considering audiences and their own interpretations of magazine texts has now become accepted within the field of magazine studies. While textual analysis has not been abandoned as a method (see Duffy 2013a; Gill 2009a), scholars are now more careful to acknowledge the agency of audiences.

These debates continue to resonate with scholars interested in women’s magazine texts and their readers. For example, Ytre-Arne (2011b: 226) proposes “reader-guided textual analysis”, in which textual analysis is used to complement audience study. Through applying this method, Ytre-Arne (2011b: 226) found a relationship between the “reading practices” of women’s magazine readers and the “textual structures” of the magazines themselves. In McDonnell’s (2014: 127) study of celebrity gossip magazines, she found that audiences took pleasure in decoding the messages about femininity in the texts. She suggests women readers are able to “challenge mass-mediated representations of femininity and female life” through reading these magazines (McDonnell 2014: 129). While McDonnell also analyses editorial strategies in the genre, her major focus is its audience. Approaches such as these are valuable, however, there are also significant insights to be gained from studying the industry context of magazines, which has been comparatively underrepresented in the scholarship.

## The industry of women's magazines

In the extensive scholarship on women's magazines, studies that include an industry perspective have been less common than those focused on the texts and their audiences. In her aforementioned study of the "cult of femininity", Ferguson (1983) provides an analysis of the editor's role in the women's magazine sector. She argues the editors are "high priestesses" of the cult perpetuated by the magazines (Ferguson 1983: 5). She suggests editors have a role of "social significance" in deciding "the current definitions of the cult of femininity" (Ferguson 1983: 119). In other words, Ferguson placed a high degree of importance on the role of the women's magazine editor in setting the bounds of desirable femininity as outlined in the magazines. Studies have also considered broader industry dynamics: for example, Barrell and Braithwaite (1988) provide a historical account of magazine launches in Britain from the 1600s to the 1980s, charting various social and economic factors that have influenced their fate. They note the profound impact of the British *Cosmopolitan* launch in the 1970s upon other the success and design of other women's magazines (Barrell and Braithwaite 1988: 55-59). An analysis of the relationships between industry and textual cultures can be found in the study conducted by Gough-Yates (2003), who examines the dynamics of British women's magazine production in the 1980s and 1990s by analysing trade journals. In doing so, she charts the development industry discourses about a market segment targeted at the "New Woman" (Gough-Yates 2003: 3). As she puts it,

the magazine industry's depictions of femininity are attempts to unify the perceived complexities of young women's lives around coherent, commercially viable, configurations of 'woman' that will appeal to advertisers and readers alike (2003: 154).

In other words, the models of femininity available in these magazines are a negotiation between what will be relevant to a reader and what will satisfy an advertiser. In terms of her contribution to women's magazine studies, Gough-Yates (2003: 155) argues "the women's magazine industry places a much greater emphasis upon 'understanding' the lifestyles, lives and aspirations of some groups of women than previous media scholars have acknowledged". This provides depth to the traditional focus on restrictive 'ideologies' of femininity in magazine texts, which does not always fully explore the specific production contexts that have influenced a particular magazine's representation of femininity.

Fashion magazine production has also been examined. Moeran (2006; 2008) examines the processes of production for magazines such as *Vogue*. Through industry interviews, Moeran (2006: 727) explores the ways in which these magazines are defined by their “multiple audience” nature. In particular, he demonstrates that fashion magazine producers are obliged to make their magazines speak not only to readers and advertisers, but also to members of the fashion world (2006: 734). He suggests this is evident in the proliferation of content focused upon the lives of fashion professionals (Moeran 2008: 735). Further, Moeran (2008: 279) suggests the “field” of magazine production “is structured by the overt clash, recognised by all participants, of economic and cultural interests”. In other words, he suggests the conflict between commercial and editorial interests is a key structural feature of the genre that figures in a number of ways: for example, he notes that in American fashion magazines, editorial content usually appears on the left-hand page, while advertisements are on the more instantly noticeable right-hand page (Moeran 2008: 276). He suggests this reflects the reliance of American fashion magazines upon advertising revenue, in contrast to Japanese fashion magazines which place greater visual emphasis on editorial due to their reliance on in-store sales (Moeran 2008: 276-277). Here, the relationship between industry imperatives and magazine texts has been explored.

The most contemporary work on women’s magazines from an industry perspective is Duffy’s (2013b) study of glossy women’s magazine production in the United States. In her book, Duffy presents the results of interviews with editorial, publishing and digital staff from magazines such as *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen*. She considers three forms of identity that are affected by the increased pressure to incorporate digital formats into a magazine publishing endeavour: organisational, professional and gender (2013b: 6). In particular, she suggests the status of women’s magazine production as an industry in which women dominate is threatened by the assumption that men have greater proficiency in dealing with technology (2013b: 139- 40). Duffy (2013b: 115) also identifies an “apparent disjuncture between the rhetoric and reality” in the US women’s magazine market when it comes to convergence. She notes that “magazine producers steadily drew upon medium-specific approaches to content” (2013b: 118). In this way, her work offers a counter to discourses about the pervasiveness of convergence. This work is concerned with magazines produced by major international publishers such as Conde Nast, and provides insight into the professional cultures and production practices of these organisations.

These studies have shown the industry context of magazine texts to be worthy as a subject of analysis. The chapters that follow will contribute to the field of women's magazine studies in which consideration of the industry context has often been somewhat neglected. At this time of significant change for the industry, the production context of magazines becomes even more essential to understanding the text itself. Ultimately, the critiques of women's magazines outlined thus far have been largely concerned with 'glossy' publications designed for a mainstream audience, which share conventions and production models established within a bygone media landscape. The debates centre around the ideologies in and production of a particular kind of women's magazine: the consumerist magazine concerned with topics such as beauty, fashion and relationships, such as *Jackie*, *Vogue*, and the international *Cosmopolitan* brand. In the context of magazine industry turmoil and change, which has had a profound impact on the popularity and viability of these types of women's magazines, a study of a contemporary Australian niche publication designed for a female audience can provide new insights.

### **Feminist magazines**

While mainstream magazines have been the major focus of magazine literature, scholars have also analysed publications with an explicitly feminist politics. These texts, such as the American magazine *Ms. magazine*, founded in the 1970s, and the third-wave<sup>4</sup> feminist publication *BUST*, are produced for a female demographic and declare a commitment to feminist principles. The representations of femininity and limitations of feminism in these texts have been interrogated by several scholars (D'Enbeau 2009; 2011; Groeneveld 2009; Phillips 1978). For example, Phillips (1978) provides a comparative analysis of *Ms.* and *Family Circle*, arguing that while *Ms.* presented "heroines" from the public sphere rather than the traditional realm of the

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<sup>4</sup> As Garrison (2000: 142) explains third wave feminism's difference from the second wave, the former "can be defined by a different set of historical events and ideological movements, especially the...backlash that emerged in response to the women's movement in the 1970s and so-called postfeminist feminism".

domestic, these heroines were still valued for traditionally “feminine” characteristics such as the ways in which they cared for other people. As such, Phillips (1978: 128) argues “Ultimately, *Ms.* heroines are liberal, but not liberated”. In other words, Phillips found limitations in the extent to which the content of *Ms.* challenged conventional gender norms found in mainstream publications. In a similar vein, Ferguson et al. (1990) argue the advertising in *Ms.* did not adhere to the publication’s policy of avoiding “sexist” or “harmful” advertising; instead, they suggest their content analysis reveals a rise in advertising that fit such criteria over time. Ultimately, these textual analyses have found that the publications have not necessarily adhered to their feminist principles in practice, which is largely attributed to industry pressures.

More recent feminist publications have also been analysed in this scholarship. D’Enbeau (2009) examines *BUST* magazine and its representations of femininity using the feminist theories of Mary Daly. She argues the magazine presents a challenge to traditional definitions of femininity through the use of humour and alternative language (D’Enbeau 2009: 30-31). However, she suggests this humour can also function to regulate *within* feminism (D’Enbeau 2009: 31). In other words, the humour can be used to assert *BUST*’s particular version of feminism as definitive. Groeneveld (2009) also analyses feminism in *BUST*. She argues the magazine’s “lifestyle feminism” fails to critique structural inequalities and only allows for activism within the realm of consumption (Groeneveld 2009: 189). She suggests that in constructing this version of feminism, historical contexts and social differences are discounted and the movement is reduced to an issue of “gender difference” (Groeneveld 2009: 184-185). In this way, Groeneveld suggests that a rather superficial version of feminism is present in *BUST*. Thus, contemporary feminist publications have been subject to critique, with mixed conclusions.

Literature on feminist magazines has a stronger focus upon industry dynamics in comparison to that on mainstream magazines, perhaps because of the more overt conflict between a commitment to feminist politics and the commercial imperatives of publishing (see Cunningham and Haley 2000; D’Enbeau and Buzzanell 2011; Farrell 1998; 2011; Ferguson et al. 1990). For example, Farrell (1998) charts the challenges faced by the publishers of *Ms.* in producing a magazine that contained a “popular feminism”. Farrell (1998: 193) suggests the imperative of advertising meant the magazine began to focus on “a politics of individual advancement and success” as

opposed to a more collective feminism. She also suggests the need to provide a demographic that would please advertisers meant articles about disadvantaged female groups were either abandoned or buried (Farrell 2011: 399). In other words, the producers had to divert from their original intention due to industry pressures, and the magazine seemingly moved away from its feminist purpose. However, Farrell (2011: 403) has related these challenges to a wider media trend, rather than simply an incompatibility between feminism and advertising. She suggests that despite the best efforts of the magazine's producers to maintain editorial integrity, "*Ms. Magazine* was the first in the line of casualties of any kind of media that promised serious journalism" (Farrell 2011: 403). In other words, Farrell argues that the demands of advertisers mean it is no longer possible to successfully publish content which might clash with commercial interests. Nevertheless, her study of *Ms.* illustrates the ways in which an examination of industry pressures is essential to understanding the content of magazines and potential disconnects between a publication's stated ethos and its material content. The operation of *Ms.* as an advertising-free magazine has also been examined. Cunningham and Haley (2000: 26-28) argue that without ads, the producers of *Ms.* magazine felt they were able to cater to their readers and their ideological "mission". Yet advertising retained its impact on the magazine, as the lack of advertising revenue affected its layout, cover price and funding (Cunningham and Haley 2000: 21-26). In other words, commercial imperatives still impacted the text even where efforts were made to reduce their influence. Ultimately, the literature on feminist publications reveals an important tension of magazine publishing in the challenge of reconciling a publication's ethos with commercial imperatives. This shows the ways in which industry contexts can be usefully examined to interrogate the meaning of media texts, including those with a less explicit political commitment.

### **Men's magazines**

Scholarship on women's magazines is mirrored by a substantial academic literature that analyses the constructions of masculinity in men's magazines. This scholarship began with studies of men's style magazines and popular culture in the 1980s (Edwards 1997; Mort 1988; Nixon 1993). These magazines were thought to address the 'New Man': an idea of masculinity in popular culture that constructed a sexualised

male and embraced the sphere of consumption (Mort 1988). Benwell (2007: 539) notes that the New Man “internalised and endorsed the principles of feminism”. However, Edwards (1997: 88-85) attributed the emergence of “new men’s magazines” to demographic shifts such as the greater number of “young, single men with high incomes”. In other words, these magazines addressed a new target consumer, and Edwards argued that the magazines had “very little to do with sexual politics” (1997: 82). However, a larger body of work is concerned with British magazines that gained success in 1990s, which are understood as a key site for the development and articulation of discourses around the “New Lad” (Benwell 2002; 2003; 2005; 2007; Crewe 2003a; 2003b; Jackson et al. 2001). The ‘New Lad’ model of masculinity has been understood in these studies as an alternative, or indeed the opposite, to the ‘New Man’. Benwell (2007: 539) provides a useful definition:

‘New Lad’...marked a return to traditional masculine values of sexism, exclusive male friendship and homophobia. Its key distinction from traditional masculinity was an unrelenting gloss of knowingness and irony: a reflexivity about its own condition which arguably rendered it more immune from criticism.

The ‘New Lad’, then, was a model of masculinity that drew heavily upon normative gender relations, but was able to skirt accusations of sexism through use of humour and appropriation of gender politics. The men’s lifestyle magazine *Loaded* was seen to best represent this New Lad discourse, but other publications such as *Maxim* and *FHM* are also regarded as part of same category (Benwell 2007: 539). This literature, then, shares with the literature on women’s magazines a focus upon glossy texts designed for a mainstream audience and are critiqued for ideologically conservative constructions of gender.

Analyses of ‘New Lad’ publications interrogate the use of ‘irony’ in the construction of gender in the magazines. For example, Benwell (2002: 169-170) suggests irony is one of several features that allow men’s magazines to balance a commitment to a traditional, “hegemonic” construction of masculinity with the need to present new and marketable notions of gender in the context of changing social expectations. Jackson et al. (2001) also emphasise the significance of irony to the texts and their functions. They argue the popularity of these magazines as consumer texts is due to their ability to negotiate the “ambiguities” of modern masculinity, by presenting their readers with a “constructed certitude”, achieved through irony (2001: 157). By this, they mean that assumptions about particular certainties of men and masculinity, framed in an ironic

tone, provide solace from the questions around gender relations in modern society. However, Mooney (2008: 258) argues irony is simply used as a justification for the content of these magazines, and is necessarily a present feature. She writes that the “alleged irony in these magazines is clearly irony with a victim; the victim is usually a woman” (2008: 258). In other words, she argues this is not harmless humour, but another way of reinforcing male dominance over women. The ideologies of masculinity present in men’s magazines, then, have been subject to a similar style of critique as those of femininity in women’s magazines.

As with scholarship on women’s magazines, studies of men’s magazines scholarship have been punctuated by debates about the relationships between industry, text and audience. Questions are raised about audience responses as opposed to textual interpretations of magazines (Benwell 2005; 2007; Jackson et al. 2001). For example, Benwell (2007) investigates whether readers of men’s magazines actually understand the texts as ironic in their depictions of gender relations. She concludes that, in fact, the readers do not interrogate the humour in these texts: they acknowledge that humour is used, but they do not use this as a defence against potential accusations of sexism (Benwell 2007: 549). In other words, readers were not interpreting the meanings of the magazines in the same manner as the scholarship. Thus men’s magazine scholarship provides further evidence of that audience readings of a text may not always be the same as academic analyses.

Several scholars of men’s magazines adopt the “circuit of culture” approach (Benwell 2003; Crewe 2003b; Jackson et al. 2001). This approach considers each moment of the circulation of a media text, acknowledging the inextricable links between each of these moments (Johnson 1986 cited Benwell 2005: 148). As part of this approach, scholarship on men’s magazines has considered the industry contexts of publications. For example, Crewe (2003a; 2003b) suggests the personalities of the two founding editors of *Loaded* had a great influence upon the publication’s editorial philosophy, which in turn shaped the broader men’s magazine market. Specifically, Crewe (2003b: 123) highlights the importance of the particular class and gender identity shared by *Loaded* magazine’s founding editorial team to understanding the nature of the publication itself. Crewe (2003b) also explores the impact of broader market dynamics. He suggests the lack of intense “commercial pressures” in that particular time period was an important context in giving the *Loaded* editors such a strong influence (2003b: 148),

further demonstrating the influence of industry. The men's magazine scholarship further demonstrates the usefulness of industry study, which remains underrepresented in studies of lifestyle magazines.

### **The magazine industry**

Along with the cultures of women's and men's magazines, media scholars are interested in the economics of magazine publishing more broadly. In recent years, such work has highlighted the increasing fragmentation of the market. Scholars have noted that, in line with broader media trends, magazines audiences have fragmented: niche media products are thus designed for defined social groups, as opposed to more generalised products for mass audiences (Abrahamson 2009; Doyle 2011; Forde 2001; McKay 2006). For example, Forde (2001) argues that increased fragmentation in the British music magazine market led publishers to focus on building distinguishable brands for different magazines, rather than featuring distinctive writers, in order to occupy a particular niche. In Forde's study, the effects of these industry developments upon the nature of particular magazines have been considered. Abrahamson (2009: 2) predicts this "narrow-casting" in the magazine industry will further develop in coming years, with broad interest magazines ceasing to be produced. While Abrahamson was writing about America in particular, the Australian industry is also marked by a high degree of fragmentation (Bonner 2014: 199) and so this has relevance to the local market. An examination of *frankie* magazine can provide a case study in the context of these developments, perhaps examining Abrahamson's prediction.

In the context of industry fragmentation, niche magazines and production practices are a pertinent topic for academia. Existing literature on such magazines is less developed than studies of mainstream magazines; however, there are some useful examples. Lynge-Jorlén (2009; 2012) describes the genre of "niche fashion magazines", encompassing titles such as the Scandinavian *DANSK* and French *Purple Fashion*. Through a study of industry, text and audience, she finds that in the case of niche fashion magazines, "production and consumption are interrelated practices" (Lynge-Jorlén 2009: 186). By this, she means these magazines are produced for readers with a professional connection to fashion, and the magazine producers themselves consume fashion in order to contribute to their role. The magazines are largely produced under

the umbrella of another fashion business: *DANSK*, for example, is owned by the image production agency Style Counsel (Lynge-Jorlen 2009: 184). Thus the production and circulation of niche fashion magazines in a fashion industry context has been examined. Laing (2014: 273) has identified one such magazine in a British context: independent fashion magazine *Lula*. Laing (2014: 288-289) argues the *Lula* girl offers a nostalgic fantasy identity in which the commercial realities of the fashion industry are obscured and contradictory demands placed upon femininity, still defined by the “virgin/whore dichotomy”, are rendered irrelevant. In other words, the fantastical elements of the *Lula* girls mean they are not subject to the same judgments as women in contemporary society. Laing (2014: 298) concludes that as “the fiction of Romantic innocence” remains uninterrogated, the *Lula* girls naturalise their “white, middle-class, ‘pure’ version of femininity”. Here, femininities in contemporary niche fashion magazines have also been explored. Such publications share similarities with magazines such as *frankie*, in terms of their interest in culture and niche design, however their European context, focus upon fashion, and in the case of Lynge-Jorlén’s study, their more overt links to the fashion industry, distinguish them from the magazine selected for this particular study.

The production of magazines outside of a professional, commercial context has also been considered. Scholars have examined the production of amateur ‘zines’. Duncombe (1997: 6) describes zines as “non-commercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves”. For Duncombe, zines have political potential, because they provide an alternative (albeit one with limitations) to the values and structures of mainstream capitalism (1997: 6). In another approach, Poletti (2005: 183) examines zine culture as a space for a subculture of “life writing”. She suggests that through zine culture, youth are able to engage in production, rather than being relegated solely to the sphere of consumption (Poletti 2005: 186). Zines have also been examined as a key part of third-wave feminist culture (see Garrison 2000; Piepmeier 2009). In particular, Piepmeier (2009: 88-89) suggests third-wave feminist zines are used by their creators to “generate gendered subjectivities” which challenge typical meanings around femininity. For example, she cites zines that celebrate female body shapes that do not conform to mainstream media ideals (Piepmeier 2009: 95). In sum, zines have been examined as forms of political activity and as a site of activism. Although studies such as Piepmeier’s explore themes that are relevant to *frankie*, the magazine’s place within

commercial production, and the way it has been received as a 'women's magazine' (see Chapter 1), makes women's magazine scholarship the most relevant body of magazine literature to draw upon in this analysis.

Magazine scholarship has also examined independent magazine publishing. Le Masurier (2012) charts the rise of independent, non-commercial print magazine production at a time when digital technology has made online magazine production readily available. The producers of these magazines, Le Masurier (2012: 394) suggests, are interested in asking "what can the printed object offer that digital screens cannot?". Here, she suggests their emergence is linked to the particular qualities of the print medium. Le Masurier (2012: 385) situates these "Indies" on a "spectrum", where they sit in between more rudimentary DIY "zines" and niche consumer magazines. An account of independent publishing cultures in the United States is provided by Oakes (2009). Williamson (2014) has examined another kind of magazine: "special-interest" Australian titles such as quilters' magazines. She finds that the magazines increasingly invoke the use of technology as part of a creative identity, but notes that they are still mainly reliant upon the print medium (Williamson 2014: 127). These studies provide insight in magazine production outside of the major publishing companies.

However, there has been little written about *frankie*, an 'indie' magazine in its inception and style but a niche consumer magazine in its success and publishing model – one that now sits firmly within the 'niche consumer' space on Le Masurier's spectrum. Bonner (2014: 203) mentions *frankie* in her overview of the Australian women's magazine market, while Zhao (2013) has examined *frankie's* commodification of 'indie' through an analysis of its editorial product promotion pages. In exploring the magazine's appeal, Zhao (2013: 156-157) highlights the "discursive style of indie culture" through which *frankie* can be distinguished from mainstream publications. She also argues the magazine is able to "commodify indie culture without appearing to promote any ostentatious consumption" through the use of discursive strategies that invite other readings of the text (Zhao 2013: 156-157). In other words, the magazine is able to perform its commercial function while also offering other pleasures to the reader, thus ensuring the commercial function is less overt and maintaining its 'indie' credibility. Finally, Zhao also suggests the magazine appeals because it addresses an 'indie' taste culture while still catering to readers of mainstream magazines, particularly with its "familiar macro-generic structure" (Zhao 2013: 156- 157). My own

analysis further explores *frankie's* appeal, and its relationship to the mainstream, incorporating empirical industry research and with a particular focus on gender and femininity. This can build upon Zhao's analysis and provide additional insights into the magazine's success in the Australian market.

The literature on magazines is wide-ranging, however the major focus is around gender representations in mainstream magazines. These studies have identified consistent and conservative ideologies of masculinity and femininity in the texts. A study of an indie-style niche publication for women will contribute new insights to the knowledge of gender constructions in magazines. This will also add to scholarship that considers magazines from the perspective of industry, an approach that has thus far been underrepresented in the field.

### **Indie media**

The remainder of this literature review will examine recent scholarship on 'indie' media. This is relevant because an independent publisher launched and produced *frankie* until 2014, and the magazine's style and content remain recognisably 'indie' despite the publisher's sale to a mainstream company. The term 'indie' originally denoted independent production of culture; however, it can now be used in reference to aesthetic and narrative codes across a range of popular texts, including film, music, fashion, and video games (see Dolan 2010; Hibbett 2005; Lipkin 2012; Newman 2009). Much of the literature on indie utilises the work of Pierre Bourdieu to analyse its relationship to mainstream consumer culture and the social 'distinction' that is afforded to those with knowledge of the culture (Hibbett 2005; King 2009; Newman 2009). Bourdieu (1984) argues that "taste" is not an inherently held set of preferences, but is instead a function of class "habitus" that acts as a socialising force distinguishing certain groups from others. For Bourdieu (1984: 1-2), "To the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts... corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class'". Distinction, then, works as a force of social organisation that appears to be a natural consequence of personal dispositions, but is actually made possible by the accumulation of cultural capital. Drawing upon these ideas, Newman (2009: 17) describes indie as a "source of distinction". This function is a key focus of literature considering indie media,

particularly film and music. Newman also highlights problems with accusations that indie is cynically appropriated by corporations for commercial purposes, by noting that indie is not in fact divorced from consumer culture (2009: 33). The relationship between indie and the mainstream is a key focus of the scholarship.

Recent studies of indie film, in particular, have examined textual qualities as well as industry contexts (King 2009; 2014; King, Molloy and Tzioumakis 2013; Staiger 2013). King (2009: 1) employs the “Indiewood” term to refer to a section of the American film industry “in which Hollywood and the independent sector merge or overlap”. He argues that links can be drawn between the production context of the films, which are produced or distributed by small operations owned by major companies, and the nature of the texts themselves (King 2009: 4). He suggests the films merge “features associated with dominant, mainstream convention and markers of ‘distinction’ designed to appeal to more particular, niche audience constituencies” (King 2009: 2). In other words, the films are conventional yet include select departures from the Hollywood norm, and these departures invite viewers to perceive the films as of a distinct, and implicitly higher, place in the cultural hierarchy. Elsewhere, King (2013: 45) argues that the twin discourses of “crisis” and “renewal” that surround indie film are “parts of the same discursive regime surrounding indie cinema”. He suggests the notion of crisis is in fact a key feature of indie itself, a central requirement of being credible or “truly indie”. More recently, King (2014) examines “Indie 2.0”, or indie films produced after 2000. He highlights textual and industrial continuities across the lifetime of indie film, and notes that ‘mainstream’ producers of indie film have not entirely replaced more traditionally ‘independent’ film production (King 2014: 26). In other words, he asserts that indie film remains recognisable both as a genre and segment of the industry. Janet Staiger (2013) offers a different way of conceptualising ‘indie’ film. She proposes using ‘independent’ as a reference to independent financial and distribution arrangements, but employing ‘indie’ to denote a particular “conception of quality” distinct from conventional approaches. These studies of indie film have considered the relationship between industry structures and textual features, as well as the tensions surrounding what constitutes ‘indie’.

As a culture and style, ‘indie’ has perhaps been most commonly associated with music. Studies of indie music have explored the relationship between the genre and the mainstream, with mixed conclusions (Bannister 2006; Dolan 2010; Fonarow 2006;

Hesmondhalgh 1999; Hibbett 2005). For example, Hesmondhalgh (1999) charts the development of indie from “post-punk” beginnings in which ‘indie’ literally meant the music was produced by independent labels, to the mainstream success of “Britpop” acts such as Oasis. He describes the history of indie as “one of a move towards conformism and conservatism” (Hesmondhalgh 1999: 55). However, he argues this development is not necessarily a direct result of associating with major labels, instead blaming the “prevailing nostalgic classicism” of the genre (1999: 55). In other words, the genre might in fact be inherently conformist. Hibbett (2005: 57) likens the logic of indie rock music to “high art”, in that it is constructed as superior to mainstream music and necessitates particular cultural capital. He writes, “for all its proclaimed edginess, indie rock would appear to satisfy more than it challenges pre-existing social and economic structures” (Hibbett 2005: 75). As Hibbett himself acknowledges (2005: 59), his notion of indie differs from that of Hesmondhalgh, and understandings of what constitutes this genre are often “problematically subjective”. However, both scholars seek to understand ‘indie’ as a culture notionally defined by opposition, but not necessarily always opposed to the mainstream in practice. Furthermore, Bannister (2006: 92) argues indie music in the 1980s was “not simply a space of freedom from hegemony”, but was in fact “defined in relation to hegemonic practices”. He highlights the prevalence of canonism, which stratifies culture. He also suggests that within this canonism, African American music was marginalised, reinforcing the privilege of white, middle-class males (Bannister 2006: 92). Thus studies have highlighted the conservatism of indie music both in terms of its generic qualities and its social function.

Another major study of indie music is Fonarow’s examination of cultures of concert-going. Fonarow (2006: 27-28) argues that indie’s philosophy replicates the structures of Protestant Puritanism, with the goal of authenticity in music akin to the aim of divinity in experience. She writes: “Within indie, we find a Puritan distrust of authority, a preference for non-corporate, independently owned commercial operations...” (Fonarow 2006: 28). She argues that Romanticism is also evident in a “preference for the natural” (Fonarow 2006: 29). The significance of Fonarow’s work is that it identifies ideologies in indie that are far from unique. Indeed, King (2013: 49) suggests that the “broader cultural resonance” of these discourses may explain indie’s broader attractiveness: indie is once again found to be limited in its alternativeness.

Debates about 'indie' have also been explored in fashion studies. Lifter (2013: 176) utilises Bourdieu's concepts of "field" and "consecration" to examine the trajectory through which indie fashion in the UK became part of the field of mainstream fashion culture. She suggests this was made possible by a discourse of "style" that entered popular usage in both alternative and mainstream fashion media, idealising the personally cultivated outfit as opposed to fashions decided by the cultural elite of the fashion industry (Lifter 2013: 176- 180). Lifter (2013: 180-184) identifies "stylish femininities" now celebrated in mainstream fashion magazines as well as the "style press". My own study will extend studies of 'indie' femininities, with particular attention to the iterations found in an Australian niche magazine.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review has outlined key academic debates surrounding magazines, particularly in relation to gender, and indie media. These areas of scholarship will be drawn upon throughout the remainder of the thesis. While studies of mainstream magazines have provided extensive analysis of the representations of gender in the texts, a niche magazine such as *frankie* provides a different subject of analysis. The context of the current state of the magazine industry, as outlined in the first of chapter of this thesis, makes analysis of this magazine particularly pertinent, and considering the links between this industry context and the representations of gender in the magazines will further contribute to scholarship on magazines that incorporates industry research.

The other key element of this literature review has been the study of 'indie' culture and media forms. Existing literature on 'indie' film and music in particular has explored the relationship of this culture to the mainstream and the cultural capital afforded to its members; a study of a contemporary 'indie' niche magazine will further explore this relationship as well as provide insights into the gendered dynamics of the culture. Drawing upon these areas of scholarship will allow an analysis of *frankie* that situates the magazine in the context of critiques of women's magazines as well as indie media, thereby exploring its ability to strike a balance between alternativeness and the mainstream, which I argue is key to its success.

## Chapter 3: Theory & Methods

This research combined industry study with textual analysis in order to investigate the success and cultural politics of *frankie* magazine. The research examined *frankie* magazine's production, its textual features, and the relationship between industry context and the text itself. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to access 'behind-the-scenes' dynamics, and close reading of the magazine examined specific textual features in their cultural context. In particular, the textual analysis identified potentially subversive "gender manoeuvres" (Schippers 2002) performed or invited by the magazine. This chapter explains these methods and theories as they were applied in this project.

### Industry and text

The combination of empirical industry study and textual analysis allowed exploration of the connections between industry and text at a time of significant change for magazine publishing. As discussed in the literature review, studies of magazines have tended to focus more on texts and their audiences than on industry contexts. This is in part because, as Gough-Yates (2003: 21-25) found, exploring the production context of women's magazines via direct contact with or observation of the producers themselves is not always an easily available method. Nevertheless, studies such as Gough-Yates (2003) and Duffy (2013b) provide in-depth analyses of particular markets within the magazine industry. The combination of industry research with textual analysis, in particular, is also underrepresented. Studies such as Ferguson's (1983) study combining interviews with magazine editors with content analysis, McDonnell's (2014) study of celebrity magazines, and Jackson et al.'s (2001) study of men's magazines are relatively exceptional within the field of lifestyle magazines studies for combining in-depth text analysis and industry research. This research will further contribute to studies that adopt that approach. As Gough-Yates (2003: 157) writes:

Studies of the magazine texts themselves, for example, have focused upon the structures of textual meaning in women's magazines. They have not, however, explored the ways in which that meaning is structured through processes of magazine production.

Utilising both industry study and textual analysis, then, provides valuable insights into the ways “textual meaning” and industry dynamics interact. For this thesis, industry research and textual analysis had a reciprocal relationship: the interview findings informed the textual analysis, and vice versa. Acknowledging the overarching approach of mixed methods that address both industry and text, this chapter will now outline the approach employed in the industry study.

This project’s industry study is influenced by Havens et al.’s (2009) proposed “critical media industry studies” approach, which they situate in the field of cultural studies. As they describe the function of “culture” within this approach (Havens et al. 2009: 237):

critical media industry studies examines the business culture of the media industries; how knowledge about texts, audiences, and the industry form, circulate, and change; and how they influence textual and industrial practices. Second, in an aesthetic sense, critical media industry studies seeks to understand how particular media texts arise from and reshape midlevel industrial practices.

In other words, this approach is interested in industry discourses and day-to-day operations, and the ways in which these factors interact with and are influenced by texts. This approach is useful for assessing strategies for success employed by the producers of a niche magazine and the ways in which these strategies affect the magazine itself, as well as considering the ways in which the text and its success might have influenced industry practice. Havens et al. (2009: 235-236) suggest that while political economy research of media production is concerned with the “macrolevel”, critical media industry studies takes “microlevel industrial practices” as its focus. They suggest their approach addresses the shortcomings of political economy approaches to studying popular culture, which assume entertainment media is beholden only to “the interests of capital”, providing “little room to consider the moments of creativity and struggles over representational practices” (Havens et al. 2009: 236). As this research is interested in the microlevel practices of *frankie*’s producers, and acknowledges that there is power within this microlevel to reshape practices of representation, I wish to situate this study within this tradition.

## **Interviews**

Although industry research has been relatively underrepresented in magazine scholarship, other areas of media studies provide examples of potential methods.

Studies of news, for example, have utilised both interviews and participant observation in research that aimed to interrogate the ways in which the “reality” of news is produced (Schlesinger 1978; Tuchman 1972; 1978). These methods have been used more recently to investigate the changing nature of news production as a result of digital technologies (Cottle and Ashton 1999; Harrison 2010; Williams et al. 2011). They have also been used to study the production of popular texts including soap operas (Tulloch and Moran 1986) and police dramas (D’Acci 1994; Moran 1992). A particularly useful example is D’Acci’s (1994) study of US television program *Cagney and Lacey*. Combining textual analysis with industry and audience research, D’Acci (1994: 8-9) analysed a range of sources including the program itself, media coverage of the program, press releases, and audience letters. She also spent a three-month period observing the program’s production, during which time she conducted interviews with members of the production team (see D’Acci 1994: 211-212). Through employing these methods, D’Acci analysed the program as a site of contention for understandings of femininity and feminism, demonstrating the ways in which industry dynamics and pressures affected the text itself. For example, she argues that by making demands about the program’s scripts and depictions, network staff “achieved a certain amount of ‘discursive authority’ ... by delimiting the dimensions of class, ‘femininity’ and feminism” (1994: 59-61). This study, cited by Havens et al. (2009: 242-243) as an example within the “critical media industries” approach, demonstrates the ways in which industry research can be useful in examining the functions of social representations such as gender in media texts.

My own research utilised in-depth, semi-structured interviews to investigate the industry practices that are ‘behind-the-scenes’ of *frankie* magazine’s production. The interviews provided insight into the industry strategies informing the content of the magazines. Semi-structured interviewing “generates richer data” as respondents are free to answer in their own way, rather than within strict “response structures” (Deacon et al. 2007: 72). For example, while a survey approach might result in an editor being unable to share a particular experience because it is not a suggested answer, semi-structured interviewing allows that editor to utilise their own professional discourses, which was important for this particular research. Qualitative interviewing is sometimes described as “in-depth”; such interviews allow the researcher to employ “probes” in order to elicit more detailed and nuanced responses, exploring the thoughts of participants beyond their first answer (Legard et al. 2003: 141). This

method also allows for the pursuit of unexpected responses given (Deacon et al. 2007: 73). This ensures any surprising points made in interviews can be followed up by the researcher, which is essential to properly researching industry practices that may be previously unknown or newly developed.

Interviews were more practical for this study than participant observation. Lindlof (1995: 169) notes that as an alternative to observation, interviews can “achieve efficiency in collecting data”. This efficiency was particularly valuable for a project that studied a magazine based in a city other than my own. As well, given the difficulties that other scholars such as Gough-Yates (2003) have had in accessing ‘behind-the-scenes’ of magazine production, interviews were thought to be advantageous because they provided a relatively non-intrusive method of gaining insight into professional discourses and practices. For this study, I interviewed Jo Walker, Editor of *frankie*,<sup>5</sup> and Brendan McKnight, Brand and Marketing Manager for Frankie Press. These interviewees were chosen for what Lindlof (1995: 178) describes as “appropriate experience in the cultural scene”. This represents a “purposive sample”, which is chosen for its ability to produce results relevant to a particular topic, rather than as a sample that is “representative” of a broader phenomenon (Weerakkody 2009: 173). Interviewees were contacted via publicly available email addresses and provided with an Information Sheet and Consent Form, approved by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. An interview guide was designed for use in the research. In qualitative interviewing, such a guide acts as “menu of topics” (Lindlof 1995: 185). Topics covered included magazines and gender, magazine branding, advertising, and publication ethos. In a qualitative interview, the interview guide does not need to be followed like a “script” (Weerakkody 2009: 168). This allowed for flexibility in following interviewee responses, and also allowed for questions to be tailored to the interviewee’s particular expertise.

The process of interviewing required reflection upon the role of the interviewer. Rapley (2004: 19) cites the two most common considerations: “rapport and neutrality”.

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<sup>5</sup> Walker was editor of *frankie* at the time of the interview (July 2015), having held the position since 2008. In May 2016 she moved to Editor-In-Chief of Frankie Press.

In terms of the former, he writes: "Put simply, if the interviewee feels comfortable, they will find it easier to talk to you" (Rapley 2004: 19). Of course, this is not an exact science; however, it was important to be conscious as a researcher of making an effort to create a comfortable sense of rapport between interviewer and interviewee. In terms of neutrality, Legard et al. (2003: 159- 161) provide a useful guide. They suggest that giving thought to possible difficulties in remaining neutral in interviews is "essential" for researchers (Legard et al. 2003: 160). In preparing for my own interviews, I had to consider my position as a dedicated reader of the text that formed the basis of my study. As Legard et al. (2003: 160) suggest, "complete objectivity and neutrality may be a chimera"; however, the guiding principle of objectivity was important. In the literature, views are varied as to whether researchers should share their own thoughts and opinions in interviews. Rapley (2004: 20) suggests it is fine to do so if the researcher believes it is "relevant", but by contrast, Legard et al. (2003: 160) suggest refraining from expressing personal opinions on the answers given, instead encouraging further discussion of the opinions shared by the interviewee. Given the purpose of my interviews as a way to access 'behind-the-scenes' knowledge and discourses, I avoided sharing my own opinions as much as possible.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and qualitatively analysed. The analysis was informed by Glaser and Strauss' (1967: 105) "grounded theory", which employs a "constant comparative method" in coding data. Weerakkody (2009: 281-287) provides a practical guide to applying grounded theory. She describes "open coding", through which themes or "patterns" in the data are detected and categorised (Weerakkody 2009: 282-283). The process of "axial coding" is then used to 'frame' the data within each category that was determined via open coding (Weerakkody 2009: 283). These coding processes were used to analyse the interview transcripts.

The interview findings were treated as a text produced within the particular context of interviewing. In discussing interviews, Lindlof (1995: 165) notes that their results represent "the rhetoric of socially situated speakers, *not* an objective report of thoughts, feelings or things out in the world" (emphasis in original). The interviews were not treated as a source of unbiased facts about the processes of magazine publishing, but a way of accessing professional discourses about the production process. Indeed, Lindlof (1995: 168) also notes that interviews can be a way of accessing "the distinctive language...used by social actors in their natural settings". As well,

Rapley (2004: 20) advises analysing “what actually happened” in the interview, acknowledging the effects of interactions between the researcher and interviewee upon the results of the interview. This was also important to the analysis.

The industry study also involved analysis of relevant textual sources such as media kits and website text produced by the magazine publisher. Bertrand and Hughes (2005: 133) suggest the value of analysing institutional documents lies partly in the fact that the documents are “written in the institution’s professional language”. This demonstrates the value of analysing media kits, as it allowed analysis of the discourses surrounding the magazine brands that were constructed by the publishers’ staff. In addition, as media kits are designed primarily for advertisers, it demonstrated the ways in which the publishers intend their magazine brands to be received within the industry. External coverage of the magazine by media outlets including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Mumbrella*, and *The 7.30 Report* was also analysed. This coverage was monitored via Google Alerts, subscriptions to industry newsletters, and personal monitoring of relevant sites. These articles provided insight into the way the magazine is described in popular discussion and by ‘insiders’ in the media.

### **Textual analysis**

The field of magazine studies has a strong history of textual analysis, with scholars such as McRobbie (1982; 1997), Ferguson (1983) and Gill (2009a) using various textual approaches to analyse gendered cultures in women’s magazines. Continuing in this tradition, but combining textual analysis with industry study, meant the research could be situated within long-term debates about gender and magazines while also contributing to understandings of industry. Scholars interested in the agency of audiences have questioned the usefulness of textual analysis for studies of popular culture (Ang 1985; 1996; Frazer 1987; Hermes 1995); however, the method does provide valuable insights into media phenomenon, as long as its inability to definitively capture audience responses is acknowledged. In recent years, the validity of textual analysis as a method for media and popular culture studies has been defended (Creeber 2006; Fürsich 2009; Phillipov 2013). For example, Fürsich (2009: 247) suggests textual analysis is not in fact limited to the texts themselves, as it can “explain which cultural sensibilities prevail that allow for such a text at this specific point in

time". A close reading of a text such as *frankie* provides an opportunity to situate the magazine within such broader cultural trends.

In this research, textual analysis was performed on a three-year sample of the magazine selected for study. The sample period spanned from December 2011 to December 2014, and all issues that were current within this timeframe were included - comprising twenty issues in total. Choosing a recent period meant easier access to relevant editions of the magazines, and could also reveal current practices. A three-year timeframe was chosen because the bi-monthly basis on which the magazine is released meant a substantial period was needed in order to provide enough material for examining long-term trends, similarities, changes and recurring themes in the magazines. Deacon et al. (2007: 122) suggest "distortion" can occur with shorter time periods in content analysis; a three-year timeframe avoided any similar pitfalls for qualitative analysis.

A qualitative 'close-reading' of the sample was performed. This analysis was based upon post-structuralist approaches to textual analysis. As Bertrand and Hughes (2005: 192) suggest, "the post-structuralist seeks to understand how the meaning of a text is constructed within a cultural context". The aim of my textual analysis was to examine the *frankie* text's meanings within the context of contemporary media and culture, with particular attention to femininity and gender. This qualitative approach allowed a holistic analysis of the texts, considering both language and images. This meant a wide range of textual features of the magazines could be considered, including covers, opinion pieces, and craft content. Concepts such as discourse and 'intertextuality' (Fairclough 1995) and semiotic analysis (see Bertrand and Hughes 2005: 185) informed the analysis. In analysing the sample, I was looking in particular for how the magazine represented ideal femininity and its relationship to masculinity, and what sort of feminine identities were on offer in the text. This was informed by themes in existing literature on lifestyle magazines. I was also especially interested in textual examples of the opposition to mainstream women's magazines set up in public discussions of the magazine.

## Theory

With respect to gender, the textual analysis was informed by Mimi Schippers' (2002; 2007) model of gender hegemony and opportunities for its subversion. Schippers (2007: 90) is concerned primarily with the "quality content" of gender – she explains this as "qualities members of each gender category should and are assumed to possess". She distinguishes between masculinity and femininity as "contextually and culturally specific sets of meanings for what women and men are and should be" and social practice, through which "those meanings come to shape, influence, and transform social structure" (Schippers 2007: 92). Schippers thus suggests that femininity and masculinity be thought of as "symbolic constructions", which are "produced, contested and transformed through discursive processes" (2007: 93- 94). My analysis takes *frankie* magazine as one such discursive process, and examines the symbolic construction of femininity, and its relationship with masculinity, as a set of 'ideal' qualities. Importantly, femininity and masculinity are treated as concepts to be analysed in the text, while acknowledging that these concepts and the 'categories' of 'women' and 'men' are socially constructed and do not necessarily reflect the gender identities of individuals in practice. I chose Schippers' model for my analysis because its focus on the discursive dimensions of gender is suited to textual analysis, and, as will be highlighted below, it allows for the possibility that ideal models of gender can be subverted, particularly in 'subcultural' contexts. In this way, the model might help explain *frankie's* success.

Importantly, Schippers' model allows for multiple masculinities *and* femininities (2007: 94). She argues that the hierarchy of gender is sustained not only by masculine dominance over femininity, but also a hierarchy of femininities (2007: 94). This is in contrast to Connell (2005), who conceived of a hegemonic masculinity that subordinated other masculinities and all femininities. For Schippers, hierarchies of gender are organised according to what she describes as "the *idealised relationship* between masculinity and femininity" (2007: 94, emphasis in original). Here, she is influenced by Judith Butler's theory of the 'heterosexual matrix', and conceives of heterosexual desire as the defining feature of the ideal, binary relationship between masculinity and femininity (Schippers 2007: 89-90). For Schippers (2007: 94-95), "hegemonic femininity" is a gender configuration that can exist in a relationship with masculinity as opposites defined by desire and masculine dominance. Femininities

that depart from this ideal are described as “pariah femininities” (Schippers 2007: 95). The concept of a multiplicity of femininities operating as part of a hierarchy is particularly helpful for theorising *frankie*, because the magazine’s ‘indie’ femininities may be understood to exist in a hierarchical relationship to ‘mainstream’ configurations.

In particular, Schippers’ model is useful for this study because it allows for understanding of the ways in which gender configurations that reinforce hegemonic relations can be “intentionally replaced” in particular contexts (2007: 97). This is what Schippers (2002: 37) has called “gender manoeuvring”, which she explains as “a process of negotiation in which the meanings and rules for gender get pushed, pulled, transformed and reestablished”. This negotiation is “active” and can occur across a variety of everyday settings (Schippers 2002: 37). Idealised models of femininity, masculinity and their relationship can be actively challenged via gender manoeuvring, with alternative models established in individual settings, such as the alternative hard rock scene that formed the subject of Schippers’ (2002) original study. Gender manoeuvres are not only a challenge to the mainstream: they are also a way to “establish or reinforce subcultural norms” (Schippers 2002: 90). My analysis, then, identifies gender manoeuvres in *frankie* that challenge mainstream media notions of gender while also establishing the ‘norms’ of a particular version of indie culture. This analysis of *frankie* extends use of Schippers’ theory not only by considering a different cultural context, but also by applying it to a media text.

Schippers argues that gender manoeuvring is always “contextually specific”, meaning the given “gender order” must be ascertained before gender manoeuvring can be performed or examined (2002: 38). In her original study, the context was that of mainstream rock, and she argues alternative hard rockers gender manoeuvre to “redefine the rules for doing rock music culture” (Schippers 2002: 38). In other words, the manoeuvres were subversive in the context of mainstream rock because they represented a rejection or refusal of that particular culture’s normative gender scripts. In order to identify and analyse *frankie*’s gender manoeuvres, then, it is important to outline the precise context in which the magazine circulates. In my analysis, I wish to read *frankie* against the ‘gender order’ of the women’s magazines genre and mainstream media culture. Critiques of this context as a site for the regulation,

objectification and 'unrealistic' representation of women offer ways of reading *frankie* as containing a potentially subversive politics.

As explored in the literature review, women's magazines have been criticised for containing restrictive ideologies of femininity that emphasise physical appearance and heterosexual romance, constructing femininity as something that must be carefully maintained by women (Ferguson 1983; Gill 2007; 2009a; McRobbie 1982). More broadly, Western culture is understood as increasingly 'sexualised' (see Attwood 2009). Concerns about this sexualisation relate to the media's representation of women, in particular. Examinations of what has been described by Walter (2010: 8) as "hypersexual culture" and Levy (2005) as "raunch culture" identify and critique the conflation of overt sexuality with 'empowerment' in contemporary Western media and society. Walter (2010: 3-4), for instance, suggests the mainstreaming of the sex industry has seen various popular media forms adopting what she describes as "the aesthetic values of soft pornography". She argues that rather than representing female liberation, the "hypersexual culture" reduces the idea of female advancement to one of sexual desirability (Walter 2010: 10). Gill (2003; 2007b) describes this phenomenon as the change from sexual "objectification" of women to "subjectification" in a postfeminist context: in other words, women are invited to 'choose' to participate in their own objectification. She suggests that this is "objectification in a new and even more pernicious guise" (Gill 2003: 105). Even feminist publications such as *BUST* have been critiqued for the ways content intended as a rejection of the policing of sexuality failed to critique "raunch culture", and began to resemble this culture in the process (Munford 2009: 193-194). In sum, contemporary media representations of women have been criticised for hyper-sexuality and a focus on the female body disguised as female empowerment. As will be explored below, countering this phenomenon can have potentially problematic ramifications, but it is an important context in which to understand how *frankie* might be read as textually subversive, which I suggest is important to understanding its success.

Academic and popular discussions about women in media are also punctuated by concerns about the potential harms of 'unrealistic' representations of the body. Reaves et al. (2004: 57) describe the media's "thin ideal", which they suggest does not reflect reality, while Wykes and Gunter (2005: 95) describe the representation of femininity in print media as "deeply-body conscious". Such concerns can also be seen in calls for

guidelines pertaining to use of digital altering in advertising and media (Freedman 2009; Zubcevic-Basic 2012). They are evident in petitions calling for magazines such as *Cleo* and *Seventeen* to reduce their use of Photoshop in altering images of women (Mumbrella 2012; vanden Heuvel 2012), with particular covers attracting outrage if seen to be obviously 'Photoshopped' (Davies 2012; Hartman 2011; Stevens 2013). Women's magazine covers and the fashion industry more broadly have also been criticised for their lack of racial diversity (Freeman 2014; Forbes 2014). These critiques are an important feature of the media culture in which *frankie* circulates, and understanding this context is important to my analysis of *frankie*.

A combination of industry study and textual analysis enabled an investigation of the industry strategies and textual practices that have allowed *frankie* to survive a changing industry. By applying the theory of gender manoeuvring to my textual analysis, I was able to situate the magazine within the broader context of debates about gender and femininity in contemporary society. In the following chapters, the results of applying these methods and theoretical concepts will be discussed.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

Having outlined this project's theory and methods, this chapter presents an analysis of its results. The chapter begins with an examination of *frankie's* public brand, as constructed by the magazine publisher itself and in media coverage. It also considers how the magazine's producers discursively construct the magazine and their own production practices. The analysis then turns to the text itself, identifying distinctive features of the text that offer potentially subversive "gender manoeuvres" (Schippers 2002). The magazine's brand and textual politics are further interrogated, and *frankie's* 'difference' is complicated. The chapter concludes by suggesting reasons for *frankie's* notable success. The chapter argues *frankie* has been successful because it balances an appealing textual subversiveness with conventional production practices, thereby allowing it to signify an 'alternative' identity and occupy a lucrative position within the mainstream market. This is significant because it reveals that a magazine whose success has been framed as a result of its break from convention is in many ways quite conventional, suggesting continuities within magazine publishing, at the same time as it suggests there is room for subversiveness within the women's magazine genre.

### **Constructing *frankie*: Its public brand and production discourses**

The public brand of *frankie* magazine has been constructed with an emphasis on the magazine's singularity. Its 2015 media kit, for example, describes the magazine as "always individual" and "a unique publication" (Frankie Press 2015). The magazine's publisher Morrison Media also describes itself as "unique" (isubscribe 2016), and an earlier version of the *frankie* media kit urged potential advertisers to "Have a look at the wilds of the magazine landscape – there's no one else quite like us" (Frankie Press 2014). These types of claims should be understood in the context of the contemporary magazine industry, which is both increasingly fragmented (Abrahamson 2009) and competing with a multitude of online content. For these reasons, emphasising a magazine's difference has become particularly important. In *frankie's* case, this emphasis on uniqueness also helps to confirm its status as an alternative or 'indie'

women's magazine. This alternativeness is constructed by both the publisher itself and in external discourses, as will be demonstrated below.

*frankie* maintains its status as 'alternative' despite its mainstream success. This is made possible by what Thornton (1995: 10-11) defines as "subcultural capital". A modification of Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital, this concept suggests that in a sub-cultural context, "hipness" is a type of capital (Thornton 1995: 10-11). Although indie is more style than subculture (Oakes 2009: 195), the concept of "subcultural capital" is relevant because of indie's currency of "hipness", which is based upon a separation from – and superiority to – the mainstream (Newman 2009). *frankie*'s position within commercial publishing might mean it does not fit into traditional ideas of what constitutes a 'subculture' – indeed, this term is contested in various ways (see Blackman 2005). However, a discursive claim to a position of 'subcultural capital' is frequently employed by the magazine's publisher and staff, and this is what makes the concept useful to this analysis. The importance of this currency of hipness is evident in a short explanation of the magazine's history provided on its website. Titled "The *frankie* story", the blurb begins by noting, "Back when it all began, *frankie* magazine founders Louise Bannister and Lara Burke could think of nothing better than spending their days op-shopping and drinking cups of tea" (*frankie* magazine 2016b). The blurb then explains that they felt no magazine "could relate to them" and so they started *frankie*, which has now grown into Frankie Press. However, the blurb finishes by stating, "We still dig vintage stuff and a nice cuppa, though" (*frankie* magazine 2016b). Here, the magazine's 'indie' subcultural capital is reasserted with reference to signifiers of indie authenticity (vintage clothing and cups of tea). As Thornton (1995: 5) explains the function of subcultural capital in relation to club cultures:

The mainstream is the entity against which the *majority* of clubbers define themselves... To some degree, the mainstream stands in for the masses – the discursive distance from which is a measure of a clubber's cultural worth (emphasis in original).

Such "discursive distance" is further established in *frankie*'s promotional material, such as on its publisher's website, which describes Frankie Press as a producer of titles that are "a little outside the mainstream" (Morrison Media 2016). It can also be seen in *frankie*'s 2015 media kit, which describes the magazine as "niche in style with wide appeal" (Frankie Press 2015). Here, the magazine discursively reaffirms its uniqueness

and difference from mainstream magazines, negotiating any potential conflict between its success and its credibility as 'alternative'.

The status of *frankie* as outside the mainstream is also asserted by individual producers. *frankie's* editor Jo Walker explained this description of the magazine as a way of saying:

[H]ey, just because we have what you might consider mainstream numbers, we don't consider ourselves to be a mainstream publication so much, in the kind of content that we have (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, Walker is able to separate *frankie* from the mainstream by conceiving of 'mainstream' as a particular style of content, which *frankie* does not contain. Staiger's (2013: 22) separation of "independent" financing and distribution of film content and "indie" as a particular "conception of quality" distinct from conventional approaches is relevant here. In describing *frankie* as 'not mainstream' because of its content, Walker reveals a belief that their conception of quality is different from that of the 'mainstream'. Thus she describes *frankie* in a way designed to maintain its subcultural capital despite its commercial success.

In media coverage of *frankie* and its success, the magazine has often been framed in terms of the 'alternative' to mainstream women's magazines that it is thought to offer. As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, in 2010 its rising circulation was the focus of several media stories. A *7.30 Report* story described the magazine as "an anti-glossy woman's magazine" (*Frankie Magazine beats the odds* 2010), while a *Sydney Morning Herald* story about the magazine's success was headlined 'Forget celebrity goss, this mag plays it smart and cool' (Wells 2010). Here, the magazine is constructed to represent the antithesis of what might be thought of as two central characteristics of mainstream women's magazines: 'gloss' and the inclusion of "celebrity goss". The latter story featured a quote in which media commentator Erica Bartle attributed *frankie's* success to its departure from the "standard glossy formula" (Wells 2010), again conceiving of the magazine as a break from mainstream convention. Comparisons between *frankie* and mainstream women's magazines have continued in industry and media reports: a 2013 piece described a "changing of the guard in the women's lifestyle mag category" in reference to *frankie's* success (Blight 2013), and a 2015 piece on the thriving niche publishing sector described the magazine's

“refreshing absence of celebrity gossip, dating tips, diets and sexed-up images” (Kermond 2015). In both examples, the magazine is conceptualised in terms of how it differs from typical women’s magazines. Perhaps unexpectedly, such comparisons are not made explicitly in *frankie*’s own marketing material – unlike its competitor *Yen*, whose description on its publisher’s website states they have “taken the best bits of a women’s lifestyle magazine... and thrown out all the baloney (diet tips, advice, sex stories)” (Next Media 2014b). Neither *frankie*’s media kit nor website makes a direct reference other ‘women’s magazines’. Nevertheless, this description has been important to the magazine’s public brand, and as will be explored further throughout this analysis, it is key to understanding its success.

While direct comparisons are not present in public promotional material, the magazine’s producers draw upon descriptions of *frankie* in opposition to mainstream women’s magazines in their professional discourses. When asked whether she agreed with the ‘alternative women’s magazine’ description, editor Jo Walker explained that despite being involved with the magazine for over a decade, she still lacked a “little one sentence explanation of what it is”, but the comparison with mainstream magazines provides a reference point:

It is easier to define it in terms of what it isn’t. Because when you say women’s magazine, people conjure up an image of *Cosmo*, *Cleo*, sex tips, celebrity, cellulite, dieting, blah blah blah. So it is easier to go, ‘okay, it’s a women’s magazine that doesn’t have any of that in it’. So in a way, that’s a ... when people have absolutely no idea what you do, that’s a convenient way of explaining it (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Walker’s suggestion that it is simpler to define *frankie* by what “it isn’t” is another example of the way subcultural capital is deployed in the construction of the magazine’s brand. Thornton (1995: 105) suggests “the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn’t”. In other words, difference from the ‘mainstream’ is the most important measure of subcultural capital. Here, *frankie*’s identity is established based upon its lack of “sex tips, celebrity, cellulite, [and] dieting”, all of which connote a particular ‘mainstream’ model of women’s magazine. While Walker suggests this does not fully describe the magazine, she continued to draw upon comparisons between *frankie* and other magazines throughout the interview, as will be demonstrated by further discussion in this chapter.

*frankie's* editor also constructs the magazine in opposition to mainstream publications by invoking common critiques of the genre. As discussed in the literature review, central to feminist critiques of women's magazines has been the suggestion that the texts emphasise the 'work' required to achieve ideal femininity. For Marjorie Ferguson (1983: 2), the very existence of the genre suggested that women required instruction in being female, something not required for men. While the men's and lad's magazine genres that have since emerged (see Chapter 2) mean instructional content is no longer exclusively reserved for women, it has remained a feature of the women's genre that is subject to critique. For example, Gill (2009a: 365) argues women readers of *Glamour* magazine are encouraged in relationship advice to "regulate every aspect of their conduct", while also presenting their actions as freely made choices. Gill (2009a: 346) suggests the magazine encourages women to self-regulate their relationships, their bodies, their sexualities and their minds. In other words, she suggests advice in women's magazines acts as an agent in the regulation of women and femininity. Walker invoked such critiques in her discussion of the decision not to include instructional content relating to sex ("sex tips") in the magazine. While she noted that "there is some sex talk, sometimes", she explained the lack of "tips" as an assumption of reader knowledge:

I think we decided very early on, and I do actually remember having this discussion right before even that first launch issue – [it] was we assume that our reader can already orgasm on their own. We're just going to ahead and assume a certain level of knowledge, and that they are capable of dealing with their own bedroom issues, without being told anything or instructed or made to feel bad about something (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, Walker explains a rejection of specific aspects of women's magazines that have been critiqued, such as their instructional mode of address, and suggests a more equal relationship between *frankie* and its ideal reader.

Walker also emphasised that the magazine eschews such a tone in describing products:

I'm always very, very cautious of how I phrase things. We would never ever say 'must have' or 'essential for summer' or anything like that. Every single thing we have that's written about [...] is literally, 'here is a thing, we are presenting it you, you can decide whether you're into it or not, we're not judging, please take this as some information that we are nicely passing along and we're never going to tell you that you should like it or instruct you to do anything'. Because I always hated that kind of tone, I find it really patronising actually, in a lot of magazines that are sort of like ... it kind of assumes that their readers need constant guidance in every aspect of their life (Interview, 22 July 2015).

In discussing her caution in phrasing, Walker further reveals an effort to avoid the conventional women's magazine mode of address, and constructs *frankie* as alternative. Ballaster et al. (1991: 124-125) describe women's magazines as a "friend, advisor and instructor in the difficult task of being a woman". In other words, the magazines set themselves up as a how-to guide for femininity. Walker, however, specifically configures *frankie* as *not* an 'advisor' or 'instructor' to its readers. In this way, Walker suggests that the magazine does not provide what Ferguson (1983: 185) describes as "recipes of femininity", instead inviting readers to pick and choose what they take away from the magazine – albeit within the frame of consumption.

A second critique of women's magazines drawn upon by Walker relates to stories about the female body and body image. As mentioned in the literature review, Gill and Elias (2014) critique 'Love Your Body' discourses in media such as women's magazines. Among other criticisms, they suggest such content reinforces the assumption that women's bodies are inherently problematic, while also admonishing readers for failing to 'love' themselves (Gill and Elias 2014: 184-185). In other words, by emphasising the need to work on loving one's body, they accept the premise that it is not easy to do so, and at the same time lay the blame for this upon individual women rather than society. In discussing the relative absence of professional models in *frankie*, Walker drew upon such critiques:

[I]t's funny because in a way I've realised that we deal with [body image] by not dealing with it. And I know that that sounds like a cop out, but again, I feel like, even if you have the story about like, 'beautiful at any size', or 'love your body', or 'curvy girls are awesome' or whatever it might be, it's still just talking about women's bodies. That is ... I just – I think it's boring [laughs]. Even when you do see those sort of like positive, well, supposedly positive, kind of stories, it's still putting so much emphasis on appearance and how all the different lumps on your body are aligned (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, Walker again echoes feminist critiques of glossy women's magazines in explaining *frankie*'s production practices, bemoaning the focus on female bodies and describing 'Love Your Body' articles as "supposedly positive". This sets the magazine apart from mainstream offerings, while also making a claim to an 'alternative' politics – though this is one that is not fully articulated by Walker, as by referring to the articles as 'boring', she stops short of explicitly critiquing their underlying messages. As will become clear later in the thesis, a politics that is present but not overt is a defining feature of *frankie* and, potentially, a key contributor to its success.

Brendan McKnight, Brand and Marketing Manager for Frankie Press, also drew upon comparisons between *frankie* and mainstream women's magazines in explaining their own approach to production. In these statements, the potential politics of *frankie's* discursive opposition to women's magazines becomes more clear. For example, he suggested the magazine's success was in the fact that they had not "sold out", and explained, as a hypothetical example, that if there was a problem with an ad, such as a model being "a bit too sexy or a bit too skinny", the staff would raise that with the advertiser:

We don't want anything negative associated with the brand, or anything that might make the readers feel shit about themselves. Because there's a lot of other magazines that will do that for them. Namely the – you know, like mass glossies (Interview, 24 September 2015).

McKnight employs a common criticism of mainstream women's magazines – that they encourage readers to feel badly about themselves – and differentiates *frankie* from this genre. He also drew a broader distinction between 'mass' magazines and magazines like *frankie*:

I think for too long the mass magazines ran the show, and people are now looking for something that's a bit more specific to their interests or that doesn't scream too much. People always like to find – be the one that's found a new magazine or a new thing, and I think just having something that's niche, that's really special or a bit more targeted. I guess that's what *frankie* did, it found a niche that hadn't really been explored too much and their success is because of that (Interview, 24 September 2015).

Here, McKnight implicitly invokes a discourse of 'subcultural capital' in the suggestion of opposition between 'mass' magazines and something that is 'special', like *frankie*. It is useful here to turn to Bourdieu's (1993: 54-55) notion of the "field of cultural production", which is characterised by two "subfields": the "field of large-scale production" and the "field of restricted production". For Bourdieu, large-scale production is understood as mass production, while restricted production is the field of art, which is uncompromised by commercialism or the desire for profit. Lyng-Jorlén (2012: 9) applies these concepts to niche fashion magazines. As she writes, their commercial structure places them inside the mainstream, or large-scale production, "but the values of the editors and readers of niche fashion magazines, and the way that they understand their world, is outside the mainstream" (Lyng-Jorlén 2012: 15). In other words, the logic of restricted production structures the production of these

magazines despite being economically situated within what Bourdieu would deem 'large-scale' production. In *frankie's* case, a *discourse* of 'restricted production' is similarly employed, in constructing the magazine's brand as unique and in discursive opposition to the commercial 'mainstream' or 'mass'. This is not necessarily reflective of the reality of the magazine's production, but is rather a discourse that is mobilised by its producers when explaining *frankie's* success.

The *frankie* brand and its production practices are also constructed with an emphasis on quality. This is another way in which the discursive opposition between the publication and an imagined 'mainstream' is set up. The Frankie Press online store describes its magazines as "top-notch, quality publications" (Frankie Press 2016b). While high-end fashion titles such as *Vogue* also make quality claims, when asked about comparisons between *frankie* and other women's magazines, editor Jo Walker turned specifically to comparisons with celebrity-focused glossy magazines. She described *frankie's* opposition in terms of its physical form and its lack of celebrity-focused content:

Because I think the perception of magazines is they're so trashy and disposable, do you know what I mean? So yeah, I think we do sit in opposition to that kind of magazine. The cheap, paparazzi shots, flimsy paper, churning out you know once a week or once a month kind of thing (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, *frankie's* difference from a particular type of mainstream women's magazine is about "distinction" (Bourdieu 1984) – a sense of not only opposition, but also natural superiority is implied. *Frankie* is, by implication, not "trashy", "disposable" or "cheap". The mention of a lack of "paparazzi shots" is also important. Many texts with a primarily female target audience – what McDonnell (2014: 26) describes as the "popular feminine" – have traditionally been dismissed as inferior. In her study of celebrity magazines, McDonnell (2014: 43) suggests it is the "gendered nature of the genre" that explains disapproval for enjoyment of celebrity gossip. In other words, it is the association of celebrity gossip with femininity that has ensured the low cultural status of celebrity-related content. In a similar vein, Thornton (1995: 100) argues that when rave culture became codified as "mainstream", it also became feminised. She suggests that in popular youth cultures, the traditional association of "mass culture" with the feminine is reproduced to construct authenticity as either "gender-free or masculine" (Thornton 1995: 104-105). In other words, legitimacy is afforded to culture that is not deemed 'feminine'. As will be further demonstrated below, *frankie's*

uniqueness is constructed in terms of a rejection of a particular model of mediated femininity (in short, the 'popular feminine').

Walker drew upon similar discursive moves when comparing print magazines with online content:

If it's a gossip magazine that has all these paparazzi shots from TMZ, why wouldn't you just go to TMZ.com and look at it yourself and you get it instantaneously? I mean, if that's the kind of shit that you want to read, if you're into that, it's actually much better delivered online (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, the celebrity content that is understood as "trashy" (or the "shit" you want to read) is designated to the online sphere. Thus *frankie* is established in these discourses as different from and superior to both mainstream women's magazines and particular online content for women. Schiermer (2014: 176) argues analogue media are useful in hipster culture's "quest for individualization and uniqueness". In *frankie's* case, perhaps online content becomes associated with the 'popular feminine', while the *frankie* print magazine becomes associated with a more 'unique' femininity. This is one way in which *frankie's* 'distinction' might function.

While glossy women's magazines have typically been thought of as a genre that exclusively addresses young women (Ballaster 1993: 137), *frankie* highlights its appeal to women as well as men. The magazine's website description and media kit state that its intended audience is "women (and men)!" (*frankie* magazine 2016a). An earlier media kit featured an illustration of a woman and a man on the page outlining the magazine's demographic, and highlighted the magazine's "high unisex appeal", noting that "33.4% share *frankie* with their boyfriend" (Frankie Press 2014). Again, Walker described this particular aspect of the magazine in opposition to mainstream approaches:

Speaking on behalf of the ladies [who work at *frankie*], we are not ladies who would be exclusive of men. That's something that I find interesting that comes out sometimes in mainstream magazines, talking about dudes like they're totally an alien race that needs to be decoded and kind of discussed. 'When he says this, what does he mean?' How can he – why can't we just assume that [recording skips] [he says what] he says because he opened his mouth and said it, do you know what I mean? (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, Walker critiques the codes of mainstream women's magazines in order to establish *frankie's* difference from the rest of the genre. In doing so, she constructs not

only the magazine but also its producers as distinct from the mainstream. This is another example of the operation of subcultural capital and distinction in the construction of *frankie*.

Other aspects of *frankie*'s production more broadly are also constructed as different from mainstream approaches by the magazine's producers. These practices are spoken about in ways that emphasise the 'authenticity' of the processes. For example, when asked whether the process of making the magazine had changed as its readership had grown, Walker emphasised the simplicity of the process, distancing these practices from what might be considered 'mainstream' magazine production strategies:

I say this over and over but it's literally true. What goes in the magazine is what we think is cool, and fun and interesting. There is absolutely no more thought put into it than that. We don't do a focus group and think about what section of our demographic is going to be turned on by something (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, the focus group might be standing in for something broader, a 'mainstream' or 'corporate' approach to reaching an audience, which *frankie* does not employ. This might be related to the magazine's 'indie' credibility: Fonarow (2006: 41) notes the dominance of simplicity as a "motif permeating indie musical practices", and Walker invokes simplicity in explaining their choice of magazine content. In discussing *frankie*'s marketing, Jo Walker highlighted that they had "never really advertised *Frankie*", instead noting "word gets around". Similarly, Brendan McKnight emphasised unplanned promotion:

I guess *frankie* and *Smith [Journal]*, also produced by Frankie Press] have been pretty lucky, because a lot of readers find us through word of mouth and through friends, or just stumble upon us somehow. That's been a big benefit to us. Because people generally do have such strong connection to the magazine, it feels like natural word-of-mouth and organic growth has been key to the success of both the titles (Interview, 24 September 2015).

Here, the second philosophy underpinning indie that Fonarow (2006) identifies is evident. As mentioned in the Literature Review, she argues that Romanticism is another philosophical thread of indie, which includes a "preference for the natural" (Fonarow 2006: 29). Fonarow (2006: 29) writes of musicians who describe themselves as "organic" in comparison to mainstream musicians. In their answers, both McKnight and Walker imply that the popularity of *frankie* is a 'natural' or 'organic' occurrence, perhaps strategically emphasising the unplanned aspects of the magazine's

promotion. Again, this discursively distances their production practices from an imagined 'mainstream' approach. In this way, the construction of *frankie* as unique from mainstream magazines extends beyond discussion of the text itself, to its entire operation.

Finally, *frankie's* difference from other magazines is also constructed in reference to its advertising. Walker explained that advertising makes up just under a third of the total magazine, which she suggested was low relative to industry standards (Interview, 22 July 2015). Indeed, advertisements have typically made up around 50 per cent of total content in glossy magazines: for example, Moeran (2006: 276) found the American iteration of *Elle* featured 57.3 per cent advertising on average. *frankie's* lower proportion of advertising is significant because it suggests a lesser reliance on advertising revenue, and the need for advertising in the magazine industry has been thought to provide a challenge to publishing potentially 'political' content (see Farrell 2011). In explaining the reason for the lesser proportion of advertising, she described two kinds of magazines – those that are produced for the reader, and those that are produced for the advertiser. She suggested *frankie* was in the first category, de-emphasising the advertising function, thus suggesting the magazine is more "cultural product" than "commodity", to borrow Moeran's (2006: 727) terms for the two conflicting functions of magazines. Walker also suggested that the role of the advertisements within the text was different:

Even the ads that are in there, they don't assault your senses, quite as much as if you flip through some other magazines it can be really sort of like, rargh, garish and looks like a catalogue and it's got big prices and gross things all over it. We have a little bit less than normal, but the ones also that we do have I think integrate better into the magazine as a whole (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, *frankie* is again separated from other magazines with a discourse of distinction and restricted production, as its commercial function is suggested to be less overt (it does not look "like a catalogue"). Having explained how *frankie's* brand and production practices are constructed as unique and alternative to the mainstream, I will now examine some textual examples of its difference.

## **'How not to be a good girl': Gender manoeuvring in *frankie***

This textual analysis identifies “gender manoeuvres” (Schippers 2002) in *frankie* magazine. As a conceptual tool, gender manoeuvring provides a means of illuminating specific textual moves in the magazine that might offer access to an alternative femininity. Through analysis of the magazine’s opinion pieces, covers, craft instructions and photo essays, I will demonstrate the textual subversiveness of *frankie* magazine, through which it offers distinction from the mainstream.

The magazine’s opinion pieces provide the clearest example of its alternative gender politics. These pieces are typically half a page in length and submitted by freelance contributors, including a stable of regular writers. Focusing on the work of three such writers - Eleanor Robertson, Helen Razer, and Benjamin Law – this analysis will demonstrate ways in which these opinion pieces are a site of gender manoeuvring. The work of these writers appears in many issues in the sample analysed: both Law and Robertson’s articles appear in 19 of 20 issues, while Razer’s appear in 10 issues (these include shorter contributions to collaborative pieces). While their articles cover a range of topics, a number deal explicitly with issues surrounding gender or sexuality. These articles employ various discursive strategies that critique the model of gender and ideal femininity typically associated with mainstream media.

In *frankie*’s opinion pieces, humour, parody and sarcasm are used subversively. In her study, Schippers (2002: 86-87; 130) identifies gender manoeuvres performed through parody of gender stereotypes and mockery of sexism and heterosexism. For example, she describes an interaction between a group of women and a man in which the man approached the women uninvited and asked if they were alone (Schippers 2002: 75). The women did not express overt criticism of his behaviour, instead engaging in mockery – one played the part of the “damsel-in-distress”, asking “Where’s my big, strong man” (Schippers 2002: 75). Because this woman “overplayed” her femininity, Schippers (2002: 86-87) argues the group made “the performative and optional character of femininity explicit and ridiculous” (Schippers 2002: 86-87). Here, humour and exaggeration were used to challenge the configuration of femininity that the women were expected to inhabit, situating the man in a different subject position and undermining his assumed power. Similarly, in Finley’s study of gender manoeuvring in roller derby, she suggests participants’ parodies of traditional femininity are a form

of “retaliation against its culturally privileged position in gender arrangements” (2010: 377). Here, parody and humour become forms of resistance, and a way in which ideal configurations of gender can be reworked and rejected.

These ideas can be applied to Eleanor Robertson’s articles, in particular. For example, in Issue 53’s ‘How not to be a good girl’, Robertson writes about her frustration with the expectation that women should be polite. She begins by stating, “Someone once said that little girls are made of sugar, spice and everything nice”, but this notion is instantly mocked: “Be sweet! Be kind! Be nice! If you’re not, you’re an unmarriageable harpy who probably spends her time grinding up testicles to use as wart salve” (Robertson 2013: 64). Here, her exaggeration or ‘overplaying’ of expectations regarding desirable femininity allows her to occupy a different subject position to that of the ‘polite’ female. Throughout the article, Robertson’s mockery works to destabilise the power of this particular cultural expectation of femininity. Though she ultimately accepts contemporary expectations as “an adolescent period that we’re capable of overcoming...”, her final sentence reaffirms the gender manoeuvre as she threatens to “go seriously bad girl” on men who tell her to “smile more” (Robertson 2013: 64). Here, Robertson’s critiques of gender norms allow negotiation of her own subject position, and she discursively adopts an ‘alternative’ femininity that rejects the position of femininity as polite and accommodating. This resituates idealised masculinity by extension, as its assumed power over a passive femininity is undermined.

Robertson also critiques contemporary ideas about femininity in Issue 58’s ‘All made up’. She again employs exaggeration and mockery, this time in discussing the contradictions inherent in the expectation that women should wear makeup but not appear to be doing so. Robertson (2014: 28) writes:

[I]f some dude’s inbuilt conceal-o-meter scans your eyeliner as a millimetre thicker than the Department of Warpaint’s cat eye regulations, you’re likely to be charged with five counts of Offences Against Natural Beauty and sentenced to eight years’ hard cleansing, toning and moisturising.

By making this particular contradiction explicit, it is constructed as ridiculous and its power is challenged. At the end of the article, Robertson suggests makeup can be used “in rebellious ways”, with colourful makeup that can “make you look fantastic and repel men who expect more subtlety”, or what she describes as “a more direct approach, like writing IT’S NOT FOR YOU across your cheek in green shimmer

eyeliner". Here, Robertson explores ways of intentionally refusing the position of femininity an object of male desire (expressed in the idea of "IT'S NOT FOR YOU"), again engaging in a discursive form of gender manoeuvring.

The opinion pieces also gender manoeuvre by reclaiming 'pariah' femininities as pleasurable and valued identities. In her original study, Schippers (2002: 45) found that the typically negatively coded identity of "slut" was taken on in the alternative rock subculture as a "badge of honour" – this was part of "the way to do alternative hard-rock femininity". In other words, embracing an identity that would usually be undesirable in that particular context allowed access to an alternative femininity. Finley (2010: 372) describes this particular form of gender manoeuvring as "appropriation of the pariah". Helen Razer contemplates adopting a 'pariah' femininity in her article 'Calling all crones'. In the article, Razer (2013a: 48) describes the "crone" – a negative trope that refers to an older, undesirable, unpleasant, and thus 'unfeminine' woman – as her "dream job". The role of the crone, as Razer describes it, is largely based around rejecting social expectations of women and ideal femininity as accommodating and nurturing. She suggests the crone's primary role is "Not Giving A Furrk", but other responsibilities include "Not having children", "Being quietly malevolent" and giving off "Bad smells" (Razer 2013a: 48). Here, she is critiquing expectations of femininity by highlighting ways to defy expectations. She finishes the piece: "I REALLY want this job" (Razer 2013a: 48), reiterating her pleasure in appropriating this 'pariah' identity. While Razer's article is engaging in a fantasy, this fantasy can be a site of resistance. Renold and Ringrose (2012: 469) argue that the fantasies of teen girls are "important ways of acting back" which "offer small ruptures to the everyday gendered power relations". If considering fantasy in this way, a piece that engages with a fantasy of adopting a pariah femininity might be read as a way of 'acting back', and as a subversive gender manoeuvre.

In a second piece by Razer, she espouses the virtues of another pariah femininity: the 'Cat Lady'. This can be read as an intertextual reference to a common trope in popular culture: Barak (2014: 5) describes the "cat lady" as a contemporary "shorthand signifier for non-normative femininity". This is because, as Barak (2014: 6) explains, 'cat ladies' have not fulfilled their most important role as women – to attract a husband and procreate. Yet in her piece entitled 'Being a cat lady', Razer writes about the Cat Lady as an identity in which she finds value. She writes: "These are the thoughts of a Cat

Lady. They go far beyond whimsy and into a territory that non-Cat Ladies consider dark and self-loathing and a sort of sad substitution for a REAL relationship” (Razer 2013b: 143). Here, she acknowledges the typically ‘pariah’ status of the Cat Lady due to her assumed lack of heterosexual romance (a “REAL relationship”). She goes on to say that she has “long since given up the work of convincing people I’m not weird”, but writes: “what I refuse to surrender is the idea of my sanity. The love of cats is not, in fact, insane, but a single lady tradition that fills me not only with love, but with wisdom” (Razer 2013b: 143). In fully embracing the identity of the Cat Lady, Razer defies the social stigma surrounding the identity and subverts the expectation that ideal femininity must be about the pursuit of heterosexual romance and not other forms of love.

*frankie’s* opinion pieces also gender manoeuvre by challenging the binary opposition between femininity and masculinity. This is implicit in the inclusion of articles that assume a shared experience, irrespective of gender. Indeed, male writer Benjamin Law is one of the magazine’s longest standing and most prominent contributors. While Law does regularly write about relationships and sexuality, as will be discussed below, he also writes about many other topics. In the sample collected, his essays included ‘How to work from home’ (2013a: 160), ‘How to start a book club’ (2011: 54), and pieces on ‘Talking with foreigners’ (2013b: 60) and ‘The public transport bigot’ (2013c: 38), as well as contributions to collaborative features on dinner parties, your first share-house and a topic of your mother’s choice (Grant-Frost et al. 2014: 153-155; Law et al. 2013: 117-119; 2012: 157-159). The inclusion of these pieces is significant because it does not conform to the notion that femininity and masculinity are inherently different, and that women and men naturally have a different view of the world. It is also different to how women’s magazine texts have typically operated: Ballaster et al. (1991: 137) suggest that although male contributors sometimes feature in women’s magazines as a source of a “notional ‘male’ point of view” or a way to “expose the male psyche” to female readers, men are “peripheral to the magazine as both producers and consumers”. In other words, the appearance of men in women’s magazines has traditionally reinforced the notion that men are inherently different from women and assistance is required in understanding them. The idea of a gender binary defined by difference is pervasive in broader popular culture. Gill (2007b: 158-159) identifies the “reassertion of sexual difference” in postfeminist media culture. She argues this reassertion functions to “(re-)eroticise power relations between men and women”,

which configures difference as both inescapable and enjoyable, shoring up inequality in the process (Gill 2007b: 159). The implication of a women's magazine such as *frankie* featuring content written by men, by contrast, is that readers might have shared experiences outside of heterosexual romance. This both addresses a broader readership in ways that mainstream women's magazines typically have not, and subverts the dominant (and persistent) model of masculinity and femininity as "complementary opposites" (Schippers 2007: 90). These opinion pieces might be read as an example of gender manoeuvring that implicitly challenges the notion of gender difference, rupturing the strict distinction between masculinity and femininity, often characterised as natural and unquestionable in mainstream popular culture.

A final manoeuvre performed within *frankie's* opinion pieces relates to sexuality as well as gender. Benjamin Law's work explores his sexuality and relationship with his boyfriend in many contributions, including Issue 45's 'When my love is far away' (Law 2012b: 56). In this article, Law writes about the challenges of long-distance relationships, explaining his own experiences. In another article, 'Love you long time', Law writes about long-term relationships, again referencing his own experiences. These articles are offered not in the context of Law's sexuality, but as examinations of relationships in general. Schippers (2002: 152) suggests that the "manoeuvring" concept could be applied to "other systems of inequality" in addition to gender. In *frankie's* case, if we take the dominant model of sexuality in mainstream magazines and media to be that of assumed heterosexuality, then regular representations of same-sex relationships and desire in this context could be thought of as 'sexuality manoeuvring'. Law's articles also employ mockery of negative stereotypes of gay men: for example, in Issue 60's 'The homosexual lifestyle', the article ponders what this oft-referenced lifestyle actually involves. Law (2014b: 130) writes: "As I continued my search, one of my fears was that maybe I'd accidentally been leading a *heterosexual* lifestyle this entire time, even though I'm gay" (emphasis in original). The article then goes on to consider what a heterosexual lifestyle might involve, destabilising the power of the idea of a "homosexual lifestyle". In this way, perhaps these articles 'sexuality manoeuvre', as by mocking stereotypes, the expected model of (hetero)sexuality in magazines is destabilised. *frankie's* approach to depictions of sexuality will be further explored below.

### *frankie's covers*

A magazine's cover is perhaps its most important feature; it is the first thing that potential readers will see, and it sets the tone for the entire magazine. *frankie's* covers have often represented a break from convention, and I will argue here that they are another example of the magazine's gender manoeuvring. As McCracken (1993: 14) describes the various functions of women's magazine's covers, they are at once "windows to the future self" that define "ideal femininity", an indicator of "brand identity", and a magazine's "most important advertisement". The cover, then, is significant for both identifying the future (feminine) self that *frankie* might offer its readers, and for locating the *frankie* brand as an 'alternative' within the women's magazine market. For the majority of its first 49 issues, *frankie* featured young, female models on its cover (one earlier issue featured a musician). The sample selected for this textual analysis included six such covers, spanning Issues 44 to 49. This analysis argues that the 'model covers' offer an alternative femininity, constructed primarily via the clothing worn by the models.

Glossy women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* have typically featured a photographic image of a young woman on their cover. In this sense, *frankie's* first 49 covers did not depart from the norm. However, the *frankie* model covers do depart from what might be thought of as 'mainstream' media culture in several key ways. First, they feature fashion models rather than celebrities or supermodels, which contrasts with the increasing focus on celebrities in women's magazines that Gill (2007a: 184) identifies. Second, the covers have soft, muted background colours such as grey or dusky pink, and minimalist cover lines set in small type, contrasting with bright, glossy covers and 'How To' headlines that reference sex, body shape or fashion. The *frankie* model covers typically have one larger cover line (for example, Issue 49's whimsical 'Oh The Places You'll Go') accompanied by several brief lines that correspond to features inside the magazine (Issue 49's include 'Lacemaking in Antwerp', 'Photography in Texas' and 'Cat Power in Miami'). Finally, and I suggest most importantly, the clothing style of the cover models is noticeably different to the typical attire of women's magazine cover stars. It is in these styles that it is possible to locate a gender manoeuvre.

The clothes worn by *frankie's* cover models are typically signifiers of indie 'retro' and vintage style, and rarely 'revealing' of the model's body - high collars and long sleeves are most common. Issue 45's cover model, for example, wears a distinctly fifties-style dress: a green, white and brown floral and spotted long-sleeved dress with a bow around the waist and a high neckline. Issue 49's model wears a high-collared floral shirt and a grey studded cardigan, and Issue 48's model wears a plain blue jumper with a white 'Peter Pan' collar, revealing only her face and neck. Schippers (2002: 107) argues the traditional relationship between masculinity and femininity can be subverted or challenged "through bodily practice". In other words, gender manoeuvring can be performed with the body, including with clothing. The bodily practice displayed on *frankie's* covers, then, constitutes a gender manoeuvre in that the adoption of retro styles such as these rejects the expected hyper-sexualised images of mainstream women's magazines. Importantly, in a contemporary context these retro fashions are not necessarily just references to the past: Bramall (2013: 131-133) suggests that if retro or "austere" femininities are understood using Freeman's concept of "temporal drag", they can reconfigure the domestic in ways that might reference things such as environmental and feminist politics. In other words, these are not straightforward reproductions of styles from bygone eras, but can instead be examples of play and subversion. In *frankie's* case, in the context of women's magazines its retro femininities are reconfigured as a pleasurable and unique 'alternative' to sexualised media representations of women. By departing from the overt sexualisation or objectification of femininity on magazine covers, the covers offer an alternative femininity and by extension, disrupt the conventional relationship between gender configurations in this context. As I will discuss below, this gender manoeuvre can become problematic, however it is an important example of the way *frankie* might provide access points to alternative femininities.

More recent *frankie* covers offer a different, and potentially much more subversive, gender manoeuvre. The magazine's 50<sup>th</sup> cover features no model, and is instead adorned with artwork that appears to be hand-stitched. This cover depicts items that signify *frankie's* 'indie' style, including a teapot and teacups, a sewing machine, bicycle, flowerpot and retro-framed glasses. The stitching is raised (Walker described it as "embossed" in our interview), meaning the cover offers not only a visual representation of *frankie's* 'handmade' aesthetic, but also a tactile experience of the indie lifestyle. Issue 50's cover had the magazine's regular masthead, but no headlines

advertising particular articles. Since this special issue, every *frankie* cover has featured an illustration rather than a model. The subjects of the illustrations have included people, floral patterns, and quirky scenes of domesticity such as Issue 58's outdoor dinner party where the guests and both human and animal, and Issue 54's illustrated plants and flowers. While the regular cover-lines ('Design/Art/Photography...') remain, the covers rarely feature issue-specific headlines.

If magazine covers are sites of identity-formation, then illustrated covers offer a potentially radical new identity. This is made particularly significant by the context of the women's magazine genre, which as discussed above, has been criticised for its 'objectifying' images of women. As Gill (2009b: 100) writes about contemporary representations of femininity, "Instead of caring or nurturing or motherhood, it is now possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key source of identity". In other words, where women were once expected to locate their sense of self in the domestic sphere, in this century they have been encouraged to find it through maintenance of their body (so as to be attractive to men). By removing focus on the 'sexy body', *frankie's* illustrated covers construct an identity defined in other ways. These covers can be read as inviting a 'gender manoeuvre' that allows the adoption of a femininity not defined by physical appearance or heterosexual desirability. Schippers (2002: 84) writes:

If we take Butler's suggestion that we focus on the matrix or relationship between masculinity and femininity created through gender performance, then it becomes possible that refusing to go along with a call to performance is not simply a rejection of one's own expected gender display. By not going along, or performing an alternative gender display, we can also situate others into gender positions.

The illustrated cover is an example of "not going along": it refuses the expectation of a gender display grounded in glossy images of physical perfection. By inviting adoption of a 'self' that is not reliant on the body or sexual desirability, the covers invite readers to gender manoeuvre into an alternative feminine subject position.

Idealised masculinity is also resituated by extension, because the heterosexual "male gaze" (Mulvey 1989) is not implicated in the covers. Berger's (1972: 47) explanation of this gaze is useful for explaining the norm that *frankie's* illustrated covers might challenge: he writes, "*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." Here, Berger describes a power dynamic, one that is

interrupted by the removal of photographic images of women from a women's magazine cover. As well, the contemporary "internalised" male gaze that Gill (2009b: 107) identifies – meaning that women themselves are encouraged to discipline and objectify their bodies but it is couched in the language of 'choice' – is absent from covers without photographs of women's bodies. The illustrated covers, then, renegotiate the meaning of femininity in the women's magazine genre by undermining the notion that ideal femininity is found in heterosexual attractiveness.

More specifically, the illustrated covers invite gender manoeuvres by idealising what Schippers (2007: 97) describes as "alternative" femininities; that is, femininities which do not conform to the configuration best suited to an 'ideal' relationship to masculinity. *frankie* represents femininities typically devalued in the glossy women's magazine genre – or, as with the opinion pieces, 'pariah femininities'. As Finley (2010: 372 – 373) notes about the appropriation of identities such as "the sexually assertive seductress" and "the sassy, uncontrolled misfit" in roller derby, "these attributes become the honoured femininity in this setting". In other words, the very attributes that are typically associated with 'undesirable' femininities become access points to an alternative femininity that, in the given context, is 'honoured'. In *frankie's* case, femininities that are honoured include the 'nanna' and the 'cat lady'. Here, signifiers of grandmothers and the home are recoded to represent hip, youthful femininities constructed in opposition to mainstream commercialised identities (Hunt & Phillipov 2014). For example, Issue 52's cover is an illustration of a woman wearing a long-sleeved dress, with her hair in a bun and a teacup on her lap as she sits in an armchair in front of floral wallpaper. With her high-heeled boots, the image hints that this 'nanna-like' identity is a hybrid of youthful and older feminine identities. Importantly, her illustrated body is not necessarily 'realistic' in terms of its shape or proportions. While the same can be said of 'Photo-shopped' glossy covers, in this case the illustrated nature of the cover might mean that the 'body' on display is not presented as something to which readers could or should aspire. *frankie's* 'nanna' identity is accessed by a gender manoeuvre that refuses the assumption of youthfulness as essential to desirable femininity and rejects the compulsory sexualisation of femininity. 'Nanna' femininity might be an undesirable femininity for young women to inhabit in a hyper-commercial, sexualised media context, but here the 'nanna' identity is the "honoured femininity". Issue 56's cover also appropriates a pariah femininity, with a drawing of a girl cradling a cat in her arms and holding a cup of tea – perhaps a 'cat

lady'. On the cover of *frankie* magazine, the 'cat lady' is revered, and the 'glossy' model femininity (found in a glamorous appearance, romantic relationships, and a 'cosmopolitan' lifestyle) is replaced with an alternative. These covers, then, are appropriating signifiers that have been associated with undesirable femininities for young women, and making them part of an appealing femininity: gender manoeuvring by making aspirational femininities about something other than heterosexual desirability. Of course, on the covers this is done in a non-threatening, aesthetically pleasing manner – as will become clear below, however, this aesthetic appeal is key to understanding *frankie's* gender politics.

The illustrated covers also gender manoeuvre by inviting adoption of 'girlie' femininities. Issue 55's cover, for example, depicts a young woman with rosy lips and cheeks, short blonde hair and a string of flowers in her hair: in other words, a display of signifiers of youthful femininity. The illustrated girl wears a frilly shirt with a high neckline, echoing the 'reserved' retro fashions of the model covers. Issue 53's cover also depicts a girl with a high ponytail and school-like dress, while Issue 51's cover depicts a girl with a guitar wearing black Mary Janes, seeming to represent a young, school-girl like femininity. Such covers can be thought to gender manoeuvre because they too reject the contemporary model of hypersexualised ideal femininity. The covers also gender manoeuvre by embracing signifiers of the traditionally devalued identity of 'girl', departing from models of "alternative girlhood" that appropriate traditionally masculine traits in order to resist contemporary models of desirable femininity, as described by Kelly et al. (2005: 236). Instead, they offer an alternative that happily inhabits femininity. These illustrated 'girlie' covers might also be read as intertextual references to earlier reclamations of the 'girl' identity in popular culture, such as the third-wave feminist 'Riot Grrrl' movement, which was built around a punk and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethos (Garrison 2000; Munford 2007). In these ways, the 'girlie' illustrated covers offer additional alternative femininities.

Finally, *frankie's* covers gender manoeuvre by reworking the relationship between femininity and masculinity so that they might be thought of as similar. Issue 63's cover characters, who can be read as a man and a woman (a heterosexual 'couple'), each wear black-framed glasses, shirts buttoned to the top and 'skinny' trousers, which are key signifiers of the 'indie' or 'hipster' style which is not tied to a particular gender. Though the styles are slightly different on each character, they hint towards the

potentially androgynous nature of 'indie' femininity. Schippers (2002: 116) conceptualises male and female styles in the alternative rock subculture as "gendered dress", as opposed to two separate gendered displays. In other words, the two styles communicate with each other and can be used to examine a particular "relationship between masculinity and femininity" (Schippers 2002: 116). For example, she suggests that in the context of alternative hard rock culture, the reclaimed identity of "slut" being paired with the masculine "geek", rather than the hegemonic masculinity of mainstream rock, complicates the relationship between masculinity and femininity traditionally found in rock music (Schippers 2002: 116-117). In applying the concept of gendered dress to Issue 63's cover, the 'hipster couple' illustration might be thought of as a gender manoeuvre that softens the strict distinction between masculinity and femininity, as the two styles communicate to offer a femininity less distinct from masculinity than that which might be found in mainstream media configurations. In sum, the illustrated covers gender manoeuvre by offering a femininity not underpinned by glossy photographic images, and also by celebrating multiple 'alternative' femininities. As with the covers that featured models, the potential subversiveness of these illustrated covers of course has limitations. These will be explored later in the chapter.

### **Indie craft and ethical consumption**

A third key feature of *frankie* in which it is possible to locate a gender manoeuvre is its craft and DIY content. Handmade crafts feature in many parts of the magazine, including the magazine's regular product pages (see Zhao 2013 for an analysis), longer features in the magazine on artists and professional crafters, and its craft patterns. Craft has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in recent years and has been imbued with a variety of contemporary meanings. While domestic pastimes such as craft were often understood by second-wave feminism as complicit in female oppression (Gillis and Hollows 2008: 1), the practices have been repackaged as pleasurable and ethical pursuits for women in a number of contexts. As Luckman (2015: 1-2) writes, "previously unfashionable women's making practices such as knitting and crochet have been stripped of their anti-feminist connotations". In contemporary popular culture, craft can be employed as a tool for feminism and revolution (Groeneveld

2010), a means of social connection for women (Minahan and Wilfram-Cox 2007: 18), a form of civic activism through practices such as yarn-bombing (Garber 2013), and a rejection or modification of modern consumerism (Hackney 2013; Winge and Stalp 2014). In particular, Groeneveld (2010: 274) suggests that in the craft content of third-wave feminist magazines, the aim is to “detach these activities from gender, through their ironic iteration of idealised womanhood”. In other words, they attempt to rupture the ‘natural’ connection between domesticity and femininity. Craft, then, has the potential to be a site of gender manoeuvring, where typical meanings associated with femininity are challenged or replaced. Craft is also central to ‘indie’ culture.<sup>6</sup> In sum, craft and domesticity are not necessarily signifiers of a ‘traditional’ femininity; instead, they occupy multiple spaces and contexts in contemporary culture, some of which have feminist or activist underpinnings.

*frankie’s* crafts are not overtly constructed as a means of resistance to gender or societal structures. This is in contrast to what Winge and Stalp (2014: 75) describe as “subversive craft”, which incorporates ironic or humourous political messages into traditional craft formats such as cross-stitch, and Groeneveld’s (2010: 266) description of craft in *BUST* magazine as discussed with the “language of revolution and reclamation”. Nevertheless, *frankie’s* content can still be read as inviting gender manoeuvres. This is because its celebration of craft makes what might be considered an undesirable or ‘pariah’ femininity in the women’s magazine genre – a femininity that embraces ‘traditional’ feminine pastimes such as craft – into a honoured identity. Thus much like *frankie’s* ‘nanna’ and ‘cat lady’ covers, the craft content offers an alternative femininity. The items are not necessarily for ‘domestic’ purposes, as with Issue’s 55’s ‘Hell yeah headdress’ instructions, which are perfect for “pom-pom flavoured festival fun” (Lincolne 2013: 125) – here, craft is associated with music festivals, which connote youth, freedom, and alternative culture. In these ways, craft is configured as a hip pastime. The activity is also constructed with an emphasis upon pleasure: for example, Issue 60 provides instructions for cushions in the shape of the letters to spell ‘Yay’ (or, as the title describes it, ‘your very own yay’). The instructions

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<sup>6</sup> See Oakes (2009) for an account of the indie craft movement in the US, and Waterhouse (2010) for a visual introduction to indie craft artists based in Europe and North America.

promise that these “cheerful and supportive pillows” will “act as a visual high-five everytime you’re near” (Lincolne 2014: 86-87), configuring the craft item in terms of the joys it can provide to the reader. The cushion instructions suggest “Just go crazy here and do whatever looks nice to you” (Lincolne 2014: 86-87), emphasising the creativity and personal nature of craft. By offering craft as a fun and creative pastime, *frankie* reclaims practices that have been devalued in ‘mainstream’ media representations of femininity, while also reconfiguring craft as a practice not connected to domestic labour, because the practice is offered as something pleasurable rather than essential.

As discussed above, glossy women’s magazines have been critiqued for locating female empowerment, and indeed femininity, in sexuality and maintenance of the body. In a similar vein, Nathanson (2014: 138) argues that contemporary “recessionista” fashion blogs reinforce “the pleasures found in consumer identities and objectified femininity”. In other words, the same critiques also have been directed towards newer media forms produced for women. In mainstream media femininities, then, happiness and empowerment have come primarily from achieving an appearance that is attractive to men via consumption. In *frankie*, it is engagement with craft that offers these rewards. In the instructions, exclamations such as “good on you!” (Lincolne 2013: 125), “marvel at your woolly cleverness!” (Lincolne 2013: 71) and “marvel at how amazing you are!” (Lincolne 2012: 60) congratulate readers for their efforts in crafting. Here, pleasure and empowerment can be found in something other than consumption which is dedicated to maintenance of the body and sexuality – instead they can be found in creative production, and in this way an ‘alternative’ femininity is made available. Groeneveld’s (2010: 286) suggestion that “perhaps, the politics is in the pleasure” is useful here – *frankie*’s inclusion of crafts as pleasure invites adoption of a femininity that rejects both the hyper-commercialised femininities of postfeminist media, and a more ‘traditional’ femininity associated with bygone eras (because it is about pleasure, not duty). In this way, the craft content offers multiple gender manoeuvres.

*frankie*’s craft content should also be read in the context of increasingly prevalent concerns about the impact of modern consumerism upon society and the natural environment. Literature on “ethical consumption” (Lewis and Potter 2011) has explored the emergence and significance of this concern. Ethical consumption can be

broadly related to the “growing politicisation of life and lifestyle practices” (Lewis and Potter 2011: 5). In other words, the personal, commercial, and domestic choices of individuals are increasingly viewed through a political or ethical lens – this can be seen in demand for products such as fair-trade chocolate and free-range eggs, and in the popularity of pastimes such as attending farmers’ markets and, indeed, shopping for or making one’s own handmade craft items. Luckman (2015: 70) locates the increased popularity of “design craft items” within this phenomenon: *frankie’s* content should also be understood in this context. Such a reading is possible when considering Issue 51’s special 16-page craft feature. Titled ‘Give and make’, this feature is dedicated to the making of handmade gifts in particular, and the introduction notes that “where possible, recycled materials were high on the agenda” (*frankie* 2013: 115). Here, the environmental concern that might underpin *frankie’s* craft content is made explicit. The ‘Give and make’ feature is punctuated with signifiers of ‘traditional’ feminine crafts: doilies, retro floral patterns and jars of buttons. The pages are made distinct from the magazine with their thin, tissue paper-like texture, evoking nostalgia. This might be read as a problematic romanticisation of the past – however, Hamilton (2012: 230) suggests *Mad Men’s* use of period style and the response of its fan base should be understood not as an uncritical nostalgia for the realities of the time period, but as part of a wish to “appropriate, reinterpret and reread the past according to alternative narratives informed by present day discourses regarding personal identity and provenance”. In other words, contemporary debates about the provenance of consumer objects inform the revaluation of ‘vintage’ style, meaning the retro aesthetics of *frankie’s* ‘Give and make’ feature are not necessarily harking back to a femininity tied only to domesticity, but are instead repackaging these signifiers in order to speak to contemporary concerns about consumption.

As with all of the magazine’s craft content, pleasure is emphasised in this feature: the feature’s introduction notes its focus is handmade gifts, which are “fun to make, fun to give and fun to have...” (*frankie* 2013: 115). Luckman (2015: 69) suggests handmade objects are “a sign of consumer distinction in a globalised marketplace increasingly marked by a lack of product differentiation”. *frankie’s* celebration of the handmade can therefore be understood in part as a textual example of the magazine’s assertion of difference and uniqueness. However, Luckman also argues there is more to the contemporary fascination with the handmade object: she suggests they signify “the prospect of something more ‘real’, more historically and socially connected, more

loving, more ethical and/or more sustainable” than mainstream consumer products (2015: 77). Drawing upon Bennett’s (2001) concept of enchantment, Luckman (2015: 81) argues that it is in fact the process of hand-making with which we are most taken. She suggests it is not just about objects, but about “a much bigger process, lifestyle and identity” (Luckman 2015: 83). In other words, the handmade offers not just a novel consumer object, but an entry point to alternative way of life, or what Soper (2008: 222) has described as “the satisfactions to be had from consuming differently”. Emphasising these satisfactions, for Soper, might be key to facilitating a more environmentally friendly culture, and Luckman (2008: 73) suggests understanding the “handmade cultural economy” in line with Soper’s approach. In *frankie*, then, the craft content contains an implicit politics of environmental and social concern, and by extension offers a gender manoeuvre that accesses an alternative to the hyper-consumerist femininities of mainstream glossy magazines. In sum, *frankie* offers gender manoeuvres that allow access to ‘alternative’ femininities, exemplified by its opinion pieces, covers, and craft content.

### **Complicating *frankie*’s difference**

Thus far, this analysis has focused on the idea of *frankie* as an alternative to mainstream women’s magazines, by considering its public branding, the editorial discourses employed by its producers, and its textual offer of subversive gender manoeuvres. However, this premise will now be complicated with an exploration of ways in which *frankie* can in fact be understood as distinctly ‘mainstream’, from both textual and industry perspectives. First, limitations to the magazine’s gender manoeuvres will be explored, in order to demonstrate that while these manoeuvres offer access points to alternative femininities, they do so within a largely conventional cultural framework. This will be followed by a discussion of the ways the magazine operates within a mainstream publishing context, despite its branding as outside of, or alternative to, the mainstream.

The alternative gender politics that the *frankie* text offers is very much about the individual. The magazine’s most obviously ‘political’ content – the opinion pieces – are presented not as the view of the magazine but of individual writers. The articles always emphasise that they come from the individual: for example, the caption to

Roberston's 'How not to be a good girl' reads "Eleanor Robertson is ditching forced politeness in favour of lady rage" (Robertson 2013: 64). As well as performing the basic function of indicating authorship, these captions might also work to situate the opinion pieces as individual accounts, rather than a statement on the part of the *frankie* brand. As well, the magazine's illustrated covers and craft content offer alternative femininities, but there is no suggestion in the magazine's structure of a collective element to this politics. Indeed, in Schippers' original study of gender manoeuvring, she found that "individual gender manoeuvring" was the preferred way of addressing gender inequality in alternative hard rock culture (Schippers 2002: 170). She argues that the alternative hard rock culture's focus upon individuals meant there was little room for a "structural interpretation" of sexism (Schippers 2002: 172). She situates this phenomenon in the context of "backlash" against feminism as well as feminism itself (Schippers 2002: 179). In other words, an individual approach made sense within the society of the time. The same can be said about *frankie*, as a politics of the individual woman is the contemporary norm (Budgeon 2015). To suggest that *frankie*'s politics is one of the individual is not to imply that it is not useful or important – as Budgeon (2001) explores, "micropolitics" can be a valid site of resistance – but to highlight the text still operates within a broader individualistic, neoliberal framework.

By honouring particular femininities, albeit alternative, *frankie* implicitly offers its own hierarchy of femininities. While this can be viewed as empowering in the context of women's magazines, it is also an example of the way indie culture, as Newman (2009: 17) explains it, "counters and implicitly criticizes hegemonic mass culture... but also serves as a taste culture perpetuating the privilege of a social elite". While Zhao (2013: 157) suggests *frankie* resolves this "paradox" by "allowing multiple consumptions within a single discursive space" – in other words, by simultaneously addressing readers familiar with the 'indie' taste and readers of mainstream magazines – I wish to suggest that when considering *frankie*'s hierarchy of femininities in particular, this paradox may remain unresolved. *frankie*'s femininities implicitly critique mainstream media models of gender, but in doing so might also reinforce traditional societal attitudes that deem overtly sexual femininities problematic. Dressing models in vintage clothing, removing female bodies from the cover, and emphasising the magazine's lack of 'sex tips' might also be read as a conservative move, at the same time as it can offer relief from objectification. This move is classed, because of the traditional association between "modesty" and middle-class femininity (Skeggs 2004:

100). In a study of young girls and subversion of the 'heterosexual matrix', Renold and Ringrose (2008: 332) found that "resistance to hypersexual embodiment often resulted in a renewed class binary through the abject category of slut". Here, they draw upon Deleuze and Guattari in describing this process of "deterritorialisation through rupture" and "reterritorialisation" (Renold and Ringrose 2008: 332). In other words, small acts or performances of resistance to the heterosexual matrix carried out by the girls in the study often simultaneously functioned to reaffirm class differences by designating overt expressions of sexuality to a working-class identity of 'slut'. While such discursive identity moves are never explicit in *frankie*, and are not necessarily intended by the magazine's producers, Renold and Ringrose's work serves as a useful explanation of how *frankie*'s reordering of the hierarchy of femininities may have classed implications. In rejecting hyper-sexualised femininities, the superiority and distinction of a middle-class, 'modest' femininity may be implicit.

It is useful here to return to press coverage of the magazine discussed earlier. The 2010 Fairfax article titled 'Forget celebrity goss, this mag plays it smart and cool' is particularly revealing. The following quote from editor Jo Walker was included:

We don't do diets, beauty or orgasms because that's already well and truly covered and also because we think there's more interesting things to talk about. We assume that our readers are fairly well read, probably watch *The 7.30 Report* and know where Afghanistan is ... Believe it or not, women are interested in more than just the way they look (Wells 2010, ellipsis in original).

In the headline's suggestion that the magazine is 'smart', echoed by Walker saying that readers are "well read" and "watch *The 7.30 Report*", there is an underlying discourse of 'distinction'. The article implicitly disparages mainstream women's magazines – signified by "diets, beauty [and] orgasms" – and suggests that *frankie* addresses a superior 'taste culture'. Here, *frankie*'s claim to subcultural capital is one of superiority to 'mainstream' femininity. Thornton's original concept has been critiqued for failing to adequately account for the function of class in producing subcultural capital (Jensen 2006: 264-265). The quote above, however, implicitly suggests that a certain class position (indicated by being "well read", in particular) is connected to *frankie*'s version of femininity. In this way, while *frankie*'s offer of an alternative femininity opens up a new subject position for particular constituencies, it might also replicate the structure of mainstream media femininities as one that values certain femininities as 'good' and others as problematic.

*frankie's* craft content should also be understood through the lens of class. Craft is perhaps most clearly available as a pleasurable way to pass the time to those who possess the means and the time to do so. The fact that 'ethical consumption' practices are not necessarily available to everyone has been noted in critiques of the phenomenon (Littler 2011: 34). As Littler (2011: 35) writes, ethical consumption can operate as "a further brand of middle-class distinction". In other words, it can serve to reinforce the privilege of affluent groups whose 'taste' is constructed as more 'ethical' than others. Perhaps the gender manoeuvre of *frankie's* craft content is available to only a particular middle-class constituency, and supports its re-ordering of the feminine hierarchy. Schippers (2002: 126) notes that the women of alternative hard rock culture were able to "do slut as transgression and a power move" only because they occupied a privileged position of being white and middle class. She writes, "gender manoeuvring is never simply about gender, but is also always about negotiating race, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality" (Schippers 2002: 126). In other words, gender manoeuvres are dependent on particular subject positions being available. For a person who cannot afford the time or materials necessary to make decorative craft items or handmade gifts, or for whom hand-making and craft skills are a necessity rather than a luxury, the potentially liberating politics of *frankie's* craft content may not be quite so radical.

If reading *frankie's* illustrated covers as a gender manoeuvre that offers an alternative to postfeminist sexualised media culture, it is important to ask whether that alternative is more inclusive, or available to a broader range of women than the identity against which it is constructed. Here, it is useful to turn to Gill's (2009c) "intersectional analysis" of sexualised advertising, which showed that sexualisation *does* discriminate. She writes that "through practices of 'sexualisation' people are discursively constituted as very different kinds of subject or object" (Gill 2009c: 154). In relation to women in particular, she argues "only some women can be sexual subjects: women who are young, white, heterosexual and conventionally attractive" (Gill 2009c: 150). In other words, the 'empowered' feminine sexuality associated with postfeminist media culture is made available only to a narrow demographic of women. This critique echoes scholars who have highlighted that potentially subversive female identities can be exclusive on the basis of race. For example, hooks (1992: 60) argues that the subversiveness of Madonna's "innocent female daring to be bad" identity is made available only to white women, because "[m]ainstream culture always reads the black

female body as a sign of sexual experience". Here, hooks suggests that the Madonna's subversiveness is reliant on her subject position as a white woman. In line with these critiques, the subversive potential of *frankie* should be further interrogated in relation to race.

It is useful here to consider the switch from covers featuring models to illustrations. Despite the gender manoeuvre offered by the retro clothing, the first 49 covers of *frankie* magazine were consistent with fashion industry norms in that they predominantly featured white models with a very slim body shape. Bramall (2013: 130-131) notes it is possible that performances of "austere femininity" might be received as "sincere", especially when performed by white, middle-class women. In other words, retro femininities might reinforce rather than challenge the signifying power of the referent. She cites Trussler (2012), who writes, "on a relatively privileged woman, the sugar'n'spice act counters next to no expectations" (Bramall 2013: 131). Considering the intersection of gender and race, then, reveals ways that *frankie's* gender manoeuvre was limited; this represents one way in which *frankie's* departure from mainstream magazine and media conventions is confined to very specific features, as opposed to a break from convention that permeates every aspect of the magazine. However, across the last 10 model covers, greater racial diversity was represented, which suggests these covers did provide at least the opportunity to represent diversity. Although Walker referred to the difficulty of sourcing a diversity of models from modelling agencies as a factor in the move to illustrations, and also noted the representation of racial diversity as an aim for their feature articles, where the illustrated covers have represented people, they have primarily represented apparently white characters – this is true of both the sample analysed and covers released since. Cover imagery in the sample analysed could be said to be distinctly 'Western', referencing Western indie culture and forms of Western domesticity (exemplified by the hand-stitched Issue 50). This might reveal the function of "whiteness" (Dyer 1997) in *frankie*. For Dyer, the power of whiteness is in the way it is not named, and it "reproduces itself as whiteness in all texts all of the time" (1997: 13). In other words, it is an assumption of whiteness as the norm that is continually reinforced, and this might be reflected by the illustrated covers. It has been argued that whiteness functions in Australia (see Ang 2003). This is another example, then, of *frankie's* location within mainstream culture, even where this is not necessarily intended. *frankie's* whiteness also reflects the magazine's context within indie craft

culture. Luckman (2015: 36) argues that the craft economy “remains marked by its whiteness”. She argues this can be seen both in the makers (she cites a 2012 report that found over 90 per cent of respondents from the UK craft sector identified as white) and the “very aesthetics of the goods” – she describes these aesthetics as “Neo-Nordic” (2015: 37). Thus although *frankie*’s gender manoeuvres offer an alternative to objectification (or subjectification), they do not necessarily always offer a more *diverse* representation of femininity.

*frankie*’s gender manoeuvres are sometimes limited in other ways. Here, we might turn to Renold and Ringrose’s (2008: 315) notion that engaging with “micro complexities” can reveal girls as “at once reinscribing and disrupting the postfeminist terrain that demands hypersexualised femininities”. In other words, individual acts can present a challenge to the heterosexual matrix and its ideal femininity in one way, but at the same time leave other aspects untouched. For example, in Eleanor Robertson’s ‘All Made Up’ opinion piece, the notion that women must wear makeup is challenged, but at the same time the inherent differences between men and women are reinforced. Robertson (2014: 28) writes that “a lot of people, and almost all men, don’t understand how make-up works”, and indeed the premise of the article is that men have unreasonable expectations of women when it comes to make-up. The article disrupts the notion that women exist to please men, but reinscribes the assumption of two distinct, opposed gender categories at the same time. Particular gender manoeuvres, then, are subversive in some ways but conform in others. As well, despite the magazine’s inclusion of same-sex relationships, it is not immune from presenting the assumption of heterosexuality. In the 2014 media kit description of the *frankie* reader, the claim that 33.4% of *frankie* readers share the magazine with “their boyfriend” (Frankie Press 2014) demonstrates an overarching assumption of a heterosexual female readership. Issue 63’s hipster cover need also be revisited. Schippers (2007: 90) asserts that the construct of heterosexual desire in Western culture “does the hegemonic work fusing masculinity and femininity together as complementary opposites”. Though the two characters on the *frankie* cover stand apart, perhaps signifying an alternative to an overtly sexualised relationship between masculinity and femininity, the placement of one male and female wearing similar (but still different) styles might reinforce the notion of masculinity and femininity as a binary that is ‘complementary’, albeit not one of ‘opposites’. Opening the magazine reinforces this reading: the inside cover features a second illustration in which the two characters link arms and skip happily

together: here, they can be read as a heterosexual 'couple'. Thus certain aspects of the relationship between masculinity and femininity are being challenged, or manoeuvred away from, while others are being reinforced. A strict heteronormative sexuality has commonly been associated with mainstream magazines (see Winship 1987: 117). Here, perhaps, the cover invites a particular gender manoeuvre, but only within the framework of what Rich (1980) terms "compulsory heterosexuality". This cover, then, is a reminder of the limits to *frankie's* subversiveness.

*frankie's* status as 'outside' the mainstream is also complicated from an industry perspective. To begin with, as noted earlier, a sports radio network now owns the magazine's publisher, making it a subsidiary company rather than an independent producer. According to Jo Walker, this sale has not affected the production of the magazine (Interview, 22 July 2015), but it does situate its production more firmly within mainstream media models. However, even in the beginning, the magazine still had the support of an overarching publisher, albeit a niche, independent company. Walker highlighted the supportiveness of this publisher as important to the magazine's success:

Especially at the beginning, the proposition of having a women's magazine that didn't have all of that stuff that we've been mentioning, that didn't have all of the obvious stuff in it, and that was talking about going to the op shop and championing music no one had ever heard of, that was probably a really tough sell. [...] we were really lucky to have people that kind of went, actually this could work, let's spend some time figuring out how it could work (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Here, it would seem that the structural support provided by the niche publisher was important to the magazine's ability to break convention: this might have been different had the magazine been produced entirely independently. The magazine is also distributed via mainstream channels: its distributor Gordon & Gotch also distributes magazines produced by major publishers such as Pacific Magazines, which publishes glossy titles such as *Marie Claire* and *InStyle*, and Bauer Media, publisher of titles such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Australian Women's Weekly*. While *frankie* can be found in independent and specialty bookshops, it is also distributed to newsagents and supermarkets. *frankie* is also 'mainstream' in the sense that it features advertising for major brands such as Marc Jacobs, Converse, and Corona. As well, as Zhao (2013: 157) has argued, the magazine does promote consumption, particularly in its editorial product promotion pages as well. It also has a "familiar macro-generic structure",

featuring formats typical of women's magazines, such as letters to the editor, interviews, fashion spreads, and recipes (Zhao 2013: 148).

Though the magazine has a public identity of breaking convention, its production is still subject to mainstream industry logics. This can be seen, for example, in Jo Walker's explanation for the magazine's earlier use of models on its cover. Though qualifying that she was not editor at the time of the first issue, Walker explained the model covers with reference to industry expectations:

I think initially to sell a women's mag to the industry, but also to keep our publisher happy, do you know what I mean? You do have to make it like, this is a lady's magazine, there's a lady on the front cover. Even though it was not like a tits and ass kind of model, ever – she was more likely to be wearing a cardigan or a vintage dress or something – that kind of helped almost in a branding thing. We're a women's magazine, don't be afraid, pick us up. Just real obvious kind of stuff (Interview, 22 July 2015).

This reveals that the break from women's magazine conventions which has so often been emphasised in discussions of *frankie* has its limits. Models could wear a cardigan rather than revealing their bodies (here, Walker alludes to *frankie*'s representation of an 'alternative' femininity), but there still needed to be female models in order for the magazine to qualify as a woman's publication. These models were thought to be reassuring, offering a familiar and non-threatening invitation to the magazine's publisher and readers. This reveals ways in which *frankie*'s production exists *within* the mainstream publishing industry. Walker also explained that they "wanted the girls on the cover to look like our readers, so there was that connection also for the audience" (Interview, 22 July 2015). In her study of celebrity gossip magazines, McDonnell (2014: 50) draws upon Umberto Eco's notion of textual "codes" to demonstrate the uniformity of magazines in the genre. She writes that the clearest example of this uniformity is found on the magazine covers, which must be "exciting but not deviant, lest it confuse readers who are familiar with the visual standards of the genre" (McDonnell 2014: 53-54). For *frankie*'s earlier covers, certain 'codes' of the women's magazine genre were retained in order to situate the magazine within the genre from an industry perspective, and also to address a target reader. While the success of *frankie* has often been attributed to its break from convention, here, following certain conventions was important to its success.

Of course, these covers were eventually replaced by the illustrations. For the magazine's editor, the model covers were no longer a fit with the rest of the magazine:

I think it got to a point where the girl on the cover just had less and less to do with what was inside. We always have a rule that if something doesn't excite us then it doesn't go in the magazine. It has to pass our awesomeness test before it goes in. And then we were going, 'none of us are really inspired by these covers so why are we – why do we keep on doing this?' And then the decision was made (Interview, 22 July 2015).

This quote reveals very different considerations to those described in relation to featuring models on the cover. While when discussing earlier issues, Walker considered the industry convention of the use of women on the cover important; in discussing the illustrated cover, by contrast, it is about the excitement and "awesomeness test" of the producers, which suggests a greater degree of editorial freedom was afforded to them once the magazine was established. However, industry logics were still present in this decision. Walker noted that Issue 50 was a "test case", and its success ensured the continuation of the illustrations. She also explained how she saw it from the reader's perspective:

[T]hey're more memorable, like you can go, 'oh I remember that story that was in the one that had the black cover with the flamingos or I really liked that particular issue that was green with the reading girl on it'. It's almost good in terms of like, brand awareness [raises hand] or whatever, if you want to say that, as well (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Despite Walker's reluctance to employ the term "brand awareness", the fact that she does use it is revealing. It suggests that the illustrated cover, which can potentially be read as subversive 'gender manoeuvre' offering access to an alternative femininity, is also a strategic branding move that further differentiates the magazine from its many competitors in a highly fragmented market. This demonstrates the way in which *frankie's* offer of an alternative femininity can be read not only as a political move, but also a strategy for differentiation within a heavily crowded magazine market.

As mentioned above, in discussing the switch from models to illustrations, Walker noted the difficulty at the time of sourcing a diversity of models from local agencies:

[I]t's difficult to find racially diverse models in Australia. It may be better now. I know that when we were looking around, that was extremely difficult. It's very difficult to find [...] [a]ny kind of size diversity (Interview, 22 July 2015).

This demonstrates another way in which *frankie's* production remains within the constraints of the mainstream fashion and publishing industries. By suggesting a lack of diversity in the industry as a factor in the move away from using models, Walker implicitly acknowledges the boundaries of *frankie's* production within the mainstream industry. In Milkie's (2002) study of the ways US women's magazine editors respond to reader critiques of unrealistic images of women, she found there were two main barriers to change. Most pertinently, she found that "editors' frames about forces internal and especially external to the organisations", namely the preferences of photographers, advertisers and broader society, were a key constraint (2002: 854). In *frankie's* case, Walker speaks about the model covers within particular frames about the fashion industry, namely that the models who appear on magazine covers are determined by modelling agencies.

Another way in which *frankie's* production might be thought of as unexceptional is in the development of the magazine into a 'brand'. Writing about the US glossy magazine industry, Duffy (2013b: 42) suggests that one of two main ways in which magazine publishers have responded to the threat of digital technologies is "the strategic repositioning of magazines as *brands*" (emphasis in original). For Holmes (2013: 176), such a characterisation is key to the longevity of the form: he suggests that "when regarded as brands rather than particular entities in specific forms, 'traditional' titles are perfectly capable of responding to the demands of convergence". Discourses such as these are common to mainstream publishing: for instance, Duffy (2013b: 116) describes the "rhetoric of convergence" reflected in particular by the US magazine publishing industry body's rebranding as The Association of Magazine Media, and in Australia, the CEO of Bauer Media has described the company's "holistic approach to magazine media" (Homewood 2015). Such discursive strategies are employed in the production of *frankie*. The magazine's 2015 media kit states that "when you advertise with *frankie*, you associate with the power of the brand" (Frankie Press 2015). While this is written in watercolour on a notepad, signifying the magazine's artistry and creativity, it reveals that *frankie* is still reliant upon advertising revenue, and this is appealed for by emphasising the magazine's 'brand'. Most obviously, the very existence of a 'Brand and Marketing Manager' for Frankie Press demonstrates the importance of 'brand' to the publisher. Brendan McKnight explained his role as "to increase the brand presence". He further explained:

I guess the brand part is just overseeing that everything we do is on brand. So everything from, if we're a market or a gig or sales flyers or collateral, just having an overall view of everything to make sure that we are sticking to brand. That could be really small things like does the paper stock feel nice, and are the fonts correct, or just a general gauge of a feeling to make sure that it feels on brand (Interview, 24 September 2015).

Terms such as “brand presence”, “on brand”, and “sticking to brand” connote a commercial logic that was often absent from the discussions of *frankie*'s production in my interviews, where the unplanned aspects of production were emphasised. These terms seem to exist in tension with McKnight's description of “organic growth” as key to the magazine's success of *frankie*, echoed by editor Jo Walker's assertion that they “never really advertised *frankie*”, however this reveals that the magazine is in fact employing similar strategies to mainstream magazines by promoting the ‘brand’ rather than just the magazine.

As outlined above, discussions of *frankie* have emphasized the intelligence of the magazine's readers. This is reflected in the magazine's media kit description of its demographic: *frankie* describe their readers as the “smartest” in the country (and also the “funniest and coolest”) (Frankie Press 2015). The same kit lists a \$75 thousand median income and notes that \$23 million is spent online by its readers each week, thus emphasising both economic and cultural capital. Constructing readerships as affluent is common practice in the industry: Curry et al. (2004: 139) found that statistical and visual representations of magazine audiences placed emphasis on white readers with high incomes, understating their other readers. They argued that this was intended to “create the impression that advertisements in their magazines were read by an audience that is financially capable of and inclined to buy the advertisers' products” (Curry 2004: 139). Again, *frankie* seems to be employing conventional magazine strategies. The media kit also notes that 89% of readers “have been directly influenced to buy something after seeing it in *frankie*” (Frankie Press 2015). This reveals the consumerism inherent in the magazine's business model, despite the fact that the text also offers alternatives to consumption (such as craft production – which in itself is limited as an alternative, given the need to purchase at least some tools and materials to engage in this production). The magazine's break with convention, then, is not something that permeates the entire magazine and its production: it is limited to specific features and is also, perhaps, sometimes more evident in discursive constructions of the magazine than in practice.

### *frankie's success*

In answering the question of why *frankie* magazine has been successful, I have identified two seemingly conflicting reasons: first, that the magazine breaks with the convention of a heavily criticised genre and offers access to a subversive model of gender, and second, that it operates within the mainstream publishing industry and strategically emphasises what makes it attractive to advertisers, addressing a specifically 'classed' identity. In concluding my analysis, I now wish to suggest that *frankie* has been successful because it has been able to balance alternativeness and conformity, thereby occupying a lucrative market position *within* the mainstream publishing industry.

In relation to *frankie's* gender politics in particular, I suggest it is the offer of resistance within a broader mainstream context that can explain the magazine's success. This is because the magazine provides access points to resistance of mainstream ideals of gender, while avoiding potential pitfalls experienced by more explicitly political publications. By providing an accessible politics of gender, *frankie* can address an audience who might be disillusioned with the genre, but who may not necessarily identify with a more overt or radical politics. As well, the magazine can differentiate itself and appeal to a contemporary youthful demographic while still retaining a desirable advertising environment. As Farrell (1998: 193) wrote in relation to *Ms.* magazine, "[c]ommercial media demand an atmosphere conducive to a consumer ethic; they want to create a culture of commodities, not a culture of politics and social transformation". Indeed, Farrell (2011: 403) later argued that the demise of *Ms.* signified the beginning of a new media reality in which corporate advertisers are not willing to support "anything that did not promote a particular consumer ethos". In other words, anything that is outside of an individualistic, neoliberal worldview cannot be viable in a consumer context. While in the case of *Ms.*, this was seen as a failure because it represented an abandonment of principles, in *frankie's* case there has never been such a claim to an explicitly activist politics, meaning it also avoids such criticisms and can more freely navigate the commercial sphere.

In order to demonstrate the importance of the accessibility and pleasures of *frankie's* particular politics, it is useful to examine some comments made by the magazine's

editor. For example, Jo Walker resisted a characterisation of *frankie's* craft content as political, but did refer to the inclusion of a “Radical Cross-Stitch” crafter:

Oh ... Not overtly [political]. To be honest, we probably do have a quiet – I don't know if it comes out so much in our craft and DIY. Though, for instance [in] the issue that we just put to bed, we've got a lady, we actually commissioned her to do some non-swearing cross-stitch, but her brand name is Radical Cross-Stitch. She does cross-stitch that says 'smash the patriarchy' and that kind of stuff normally. We got her to do something a little bit less full on [laughs] (Interview, 22 July 2015).

In referring to this crafter Walker distinguishes *frankie* from more explicitly activist or “full on” craft, like Winge and Stalp's (2014) “subversive craft”. Yet by featuring an artist who does engage in overtly political practice, *frankie* might provide readers with an entry-point or an introduction to more subversive crafts. This is one example of how *frankie* might remain accessible and pleasurable while also offering an alternative viewpoint.

Where Walker *was* willing to locate politics in the magazine was in its opinion pieces and “real life” stories. She outlined a very particular approach:

My approach to anything like that and it's probably more so in the broader-particularly in the real life stories but also a lot of the opinion pieces that we have – is [that] I just like to present stuff and not make a big deal about it (Interview, 22 July 2015).

The “not making a big deal about it” is perhaps what allows *frankie* to invite readers to enjoy an alternative politics while still addressing a potentially mainstream audience, and without alienating potential readers or advertisers. Walker referred in particular to a photo essay from a 2013 issue of the magazine to illustrate her point. The essay was titled ‘Loved Up’, and was created by a freelance contributor who, according to Walker, had decided she was tired of photographing only heterosexual couples. Walker explained:

We used those but we also interviewed all the people. And some of them had kids [recording skips] different stages in their lives, and we asked all of them about marriage equality, but that wasn't the focus of the piece. The focus was, here are these beautiful, lovely, happy couples, who happen to be queer, and this a bit of the story of how they met each other and what they do with their time, and, oh and P.S. here's one or two lines about marriage equality. I would much rather do something like that and just have it be part of the scenery, rather than big arrows pointing toward something that you're going to get battered around the head with. As I say, I would never ever tell anyone to do anything, from my high horse as the *frankie* editor, even if it's something I believe in, like marriage equality.

We just like to have it be part of the mix. For instance, if we do a story, we did one on different families, I would make sure to have some non-white people in there and some non-straight people in there, but not make a big song and dance about it and not be like 'hey, look at the minorities that we have!' We just want it to be fucking normal like it is in real life, do you know what I mean? And just be cool about it. So it's funny actually, we probably – we sneak some stuff under the radar because we don't make a big to-do about things [laughs] (Interview, 22 July 2015).

In explaining her approach to the 'Loved Up' essay, Walker reiterates her refusal of the instructional tone of women's magazines as well as expressing a preference for content that represents diversity but does not contain messages readers will be "battered around the head with". This may have something to do with what makes *frankie* pleasurable for the reader and appealing for the advertiser. In suggesting that the magazine is able to "sneak some stuff under the radar", Walker implicitly acknowledges the constraints of the mainstream publishing environment, while also hinting towards ways in which *frankie* is able to navigate those constraints.

The same logic can be applied to how a feminist politics figures in the magazine. For Walker, feminism was an assumed part of the world-view of those producing the magazine:

We're not, obviously, afraid to use the word feminist or anything. I think I can speak on behalf of all of our contributors, whether they're writers, illustrators or photographers, that they would all happily call themselves feminists. And I guess we just assume that and then move on (Interview, 22 July 2015).

Walker's comments can be contrasted with Keller's (2011) findings in her interviews with US teen girl magazine editors about feminism. Keller (2011: 5) found that editors were upfront about the obstacles in the mainstream industry to producing feminist content, namely the "corporate culture" of the major publishers and the conservatism of advertisers. Despite the editors' personal identification as feminist, the word itself or an explicit statement of its principles were "taboo at all mainstream teen glossies" (Keller 2011: 4-6). Perhaps it is *frankie*'s particular 'not a big deal' approach to feminism and political issues that makes it able to include feminist content.

Although the magazine's opinion pieces are explicitly political, and at least implicitly feminist, Walker described feminism's appearance in the opinion pieces as incidental rather than central, much like with her discussion of marriage equality in the 'Loved Up' piece:

[O]ur opinion pieces will throw up different kinds of lady issues, but also man issues, and just general people issues. Obviously we want them to be funny, and opinionated, and quirky, and just something relatable that probably just happens to be feminist (Interview, 22 July 2015).

In this way, perhaps *frankie* magazine offers not what Tasker and Negra (2007: 5) describe as contemporary media culture's "erasure" of feminism, but a presentation of feminism as an accepted and acceptable part of a worldview. Walker also emphasised the humour in the opinion pieces:

I think that's one thing that I'm really proud of in *frankie*, with all our opinion pieces, it's fucking funny as well. It's not earnest, and it's not dogmatic (Interview, 22 July 2015).

In describing the magazine as "not dogmatic", Walker again implicitly separates the magazine from mainstream women's magazines and the attributes for which they are criticised – in this case, their instructional tone. Her reference to a lack of dogmatism could also be read as a separation of the magazine from a more negative view of feminism as restrictive and inflexible. In this way, then, the magazine might be able to occupy a pleasurable middle-ground between the culture of mainstream women's magazines and a more radical feminist politics. D'Enbeau (2009: 30) suggests humour in *BUST* magazine makes the reality of women's oppression which the magazine highlights "more palatable" – perhaps it performs a similar function in *frankie's* opinion pieces. Furthermore, Keller (2015: 10) argues that feminism "can increase the value of one's brand if performed in a way that is read as 'hip' and avoids threatening the consumer logic of the capitalist marketplace". *frankie's* inclusion of humorous content that is not doctrinaire might be thought of in this way, as a way of offering an alternative gender politics that does not come into conflict with the magazine's position as a consumer magazine.

This chapter has examined *frankie's* public brand, the production discourses employed by its producers, and textual examples of potentially subversive gender manoeuvres. These manoeuvres allow mediated meanings about femininity (and in some cases, masculinity) to be challenged and remodelled within a more broadly mainstream context. The chapter suggests it is *frankie's* ability to be simultaneously mainstream and alternative that has enabled its success. The accessibility of *frankie's* gender politics is important to this success, and does not necessarily undermine its significance. Renold and Ringrose (2008: 314-315) suggest that "moments" of subversion or

“ruptures” to the heterosexual matrix are “often overlooked in the search for grand narratives of resistance”. In other words, instances of progress on a smaller scale are missed when focused only on comprehensive societal change. In *frankie's* case, that these moments of resistance have reached such a wide audience, and perhaps become normalised, in fact makes the magazine's politics all the more significant. In the following chapter, I will explore the significance of these conclusions to studies of magazines, media, and gender.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has provided a study of *frankie* magazine informed by existing scholarship on lifestyle magazines. In analysing *frankie* magazine's brand, text, and production practices, the thesis has suggested ways in which all three elements might work in discursive opposition to mainstream magazines and their models of gender. By examining industry strategies, the thesis has suggested that the magazine has been constructed by its publisher and producers, and in popular discourse, as an 'alternative' women's magazine. I have also argued that this 'alternative' brand is reflected in specific elements of the text that offer access to alternative femininities via subversive "gender manoeuvres". However, the thesis has also demonstrated that these alternative femininities are most clearly available to only a limited constituency, and that the magazine might in fact establish its own exclusive hierarchy of femininities through a process of 'distinction'. The fact that the magazine is ultimately operating within the mainstream publishing industry, and its industry strategies are subject to the same commercial imperatives as mainstream magazines, has also been highlighted. The thesis has argued that *frankie* has been successful because it balances an appealing textual subversiveness with conventional production practices, thereby allowing it to both signify an 'alternative' identity and occupy a lucrative position within the mainstream market.

The significance of this thesis relates to women's magazines and the magazine industry more broadly. *frankie* magazine and its success demonstrate that there is room for subversiveness within a genre that has typically been thought of as inherently conservative, and that potentially subversive representations of femininity can have mainstream appeal. It also suggests the continued appeal of print as a medium for women's magazines, despite the challenges faced by publishers of print magazines in recent years. It could be that it is not only the medium that is increasingly thought of as outdated, but particular conventions and tropes within the women's magazine genre. Somewhat paradoxically, this thesis also demonstrates that a largely conventional business model and approach to production can still provide success within the industry. It also, less positively, suggests the pervasiveness of gendered representations in which white, middle-class femininities are most visible and most

valued, which might be due in part to structural issues such as the recruiting practices of modelling agencies and the industry's tendency to privilege a middle-class demographic in order to be attractive to advertisers. As Duffy (2013a: 150-151) suggested in relation to the contemporary theme of authenticity in women's magazines, and Gill and Elias (2014: 180-182) have suggested in relation to media content promoting 'positive' body image, women's magazines do respond to criticisms of their conventions by adapting their content to align with contemporary media literacies and tastes. With *frankie*, the magazine's entire concept appears to and has been suggested to respond to critiques of the women's magazine genre. This suggests a two-way relationship between the media industries and the reception of their texts, as well as the continued importance of critique.

It is useful to return to Abrahamson's (2009: 2) prediction that the "narrow-casting" of the magazine industry will only continue in future years. As the standout success story of the contemporary Australian magazine industry, the trajectory of *frankie* suggests that narrow-casting is key to producing a successful magazine. Despite its mainstream appeal, *frankie* remains identifiable as a niche publication, and its uniqueness and niche-like qualities are emphasised in its branding and discourses of production. Its 'indie' and alternative status gave it a defined place within the market, which is important. *frankie* might also represent changing definitions of success within the magazine industry: while for *Cleo* magazine, a circulation figure of 42,200 copies spelt its end (Lallo 2016), for *frankie* reaching 38,000 copies in 2010 exceeded expectations and cemented its status as a successful magazine (of course the magazine would eventually sell over 67,000 and now sells over 50,000). This suggests that the narrow-casting of the industry may have changed what it means to be a successful magazine, and both major and niche publishers must recognise this when designing their business models.

In regards to gender and gender manoeuvring, the success of *frankie's* 'alternative' femininities suggests the increasingly broad appeal of ideas of gender that resist or subvert typical configurations of gender and the relationship between masculinity and femininity. Equally, however, the importance of the inviting manner in which *frankie's* politics is presented suggests that a more substantially non-conformist or explicitly feminist politics may still be unsuited to mainstream commercial culture. Nevertheless, as Schippers (2002: 187-188) argues in the conclusion to her original

study, “Feminist politics are about developing specific strategies for transforming the gender order in a very specified context”. She suggests we might think of feminist politics as “multiple and contextual” (2002: 188). Perhaps *frankie*’s politics can be thought of as just one version of a potentially feminist politics which addresses the gender order of a very particular context (women’s magazines).

This study has also demonstrated the usefulness of a combination of empirical industry research with qualitative textual analysis for the study of magazines. Industry research allowed access to the professional discourses that shape and inform the *frankie* text, allowing the magazine to be studied as not just a cultural text but also a brand and an artefact that results from a particular set of production circumstances and practices. Textual analysis allowed for other potential meanings to be explored, even where these are not necessarily intended or highlighted by the magazine’s producers, and for the broader cultural context to be considered. This approach is particularly suited to magazines, as it allows for examination of what Moeran (2006: 727) describes as their dual function as “cultural product” and “commodity”. This study has also contributed to the thus far underrepresented area of women’s magazine industry study, with a close analysis of the industry strategies and dynamics underpinning a successful women’s magazine.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the gendered dimension of *frankie* is just one potential reason for its notable success. Further research could examine other possible explanations using a combination of industry research, textual analysis, and audience study. Some areas for investigation might include the nostalgic and affective appeal of *frankie* as a printed object with high production values in an increasingly digital world, and, paradoxically, the magazine’s proficient use of social media and online extensions including a website and iPad edition. In this way, perhaps *frankie* might work because it offers the best of both ‘old’ and ‘new’ media. The magazine’s links with broader ‘indie’ culture and communities, such as its long-term partnership with the Finders Keepers craft market and its sponsorship of indie musicians, are also worthy of analysis. The particular business model the magazine has employed – a high cover price with a reduced percentage of advertising – could also be more closely examined. Further research could also consider the magazine’s success in the context of the ‘ethical consumption’ trend in more detail.

While this study has used a combination of industry research and textual analysis in order to best achieve its aims, an audience study would also have value, especially given the now widely accepted notion that readers do not necessarily engage with magazine texts in the way that producers intend or scholars might suggest. Further research could investigate reader responses to the *frankie* text, its gendered dimensions and other aspects of its production via surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Readers could also be accessed via the magazine's online following. More broadly, additional research could examine other 'indie' niche publications that have emerged in recent years such as indie women's magazine *Yen*, sustainable lifestyle publication *Peppermint*, *frankie*'s male-targeted counterpart *Smith Journal*, and indie bridal magazine *Hello May*. Research could examine this sector of the market as both an industry and cultural phenomenon that addresses a very particular consumer: the young, affluent, 'ethical' reader, as well as further examining why *frankie* in particular has been the standout success. Its success may have been reinforced by the industry hype surrounding the magazine – another niche women's magazines such as *Yen* might have attempted to occupy a similar position within the industry, but it has never achieved the same level of mainstream success, which might be due to its less subversive textual practices but also that it has never had the 'hype'. Indie publishing more generally also provides interesting case studies: *frankie*'s founding editor and designer Louise Bannister and Lara Burke now operate an independent publishing company, We Print Nice Things, which produces *Lunch Lady* magazine for a slightly older demographic with children. Interestingly, Bannister told *Mumbrella* that they would not have the magazine audited, saying it was more important to engage with a "tight, unique audience" (Ward 2015). This venture might provide another case study for research into the evolving nature of niche print magazine publishing and the changing definition of success in the industry.

### **Recent developments**

The most recent circulation figures available suggest *frankie*'s success may have reached its limit. When I conducted my interview with editor Jo Walker in July 2015, *frankie*'s circulation had only decreased once in the time it had been audited by the Audit Bureau of Circulations - in the last six months of 2014, the magazine had seen a

three and half percentage drop (Burton-Bradley 2015). However, since this time the circulation has continued to decline, with the audit for the first half of 2016 showing a decline of nearly ten per cent year-on-year - up slightly from the end of 2015 to 54, 531 (Ward 2016). This still puts the magazine ahead of both *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue Australia*, however it would seem its meteoric rise in circulation has come to an end, for now at least. According to the most recent audience data, *frankie's* average monthly readership is now just over 300,000, which still puts it within reach but just below the readerships of *Cosmopolitan* (344,000) and *Vogue Australia* (391,000) (emma 2016). This suggests limits to *frankie's* ability to infiltrate the mainstream market, and that perhaps its novelty factor or newness has been important to its growing circulation. Also, possibly as a result of its success, *frankie* now faces more competitors in the 'indie' niche market, with the publications mentioned above perhaps encroaching on its particular market position.

There have also been changes at the editorial level: in May 2016, editor Jo Walker moved to Editor-In-Chief of Frankie Press, and the magazine's deputy-editor Sophie Kalagas took on the editorship of the magazine. Whether this change will mean a shift in the magazine's style or direction remains to be seen, although the fact that Kalagas has already been with *frankie* for some time suggests there will be continuities. In spite of caveats regarding its circulation, the magazine's current readership is still remarkable for a publication that began as a niche magazine produced by an independent publisher. The magazine is also read internationally: in New Zealand it has a circulation of 9,058 (Frankie Press 2016a), and according to Frankie Press general manager Gaye Murray, it can also be found in Europe and United States (Burton-Bradley 2015). As well, the *frankie* 'brand' continues to expand – Frankie Press recently announced the release of a collection of its opinion pieces as a book 'something to say' (frankie magazine 2016c), and it continues to produce its diary and calendar and appear at events such as the national garage-sale trail. This suggests the magazine brand is not necessarily declining overall, despite reaching a plateau in circulation.

## Reflections

In researching and writing this thesis, I have come to see *frankie* somewhat differently than I did in those earlier years of readership. I now recognise ways in which the

magazine is not as different from *Cosmo* and *Cleo* as I first thought, and realise that while, to me, the magazine felt relatable, this might not be true for everyone. Perhaps the magazine has also lost some of its original magic as its formula has become familiar and the (anti-) 'gloss' has worn off. Certainly, *frankie's* success may be linked to its ability to tap into a particular cultural moment – just as some might suggest a magazine such as *Cleo* once did. Its subversiveness, too, is contextually specific, and may one day appear outdated. *frankie's* moment will not last forever, and perhaps there will soon be another women's magazine that speaks to new, more contemporary concerns. Perhaps that might look like *Womankind*, an advertising-free publication launched in 2014, which had great success in its first year (Dore 2015). While for *frankie*, a relatively traditional business model and approach to production has been important, this may not always be the case, especially as critiques of traditional media become increasingly mainstream and digital innovation continues to alter the place of print media in the broader media landscape.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes an analysis of a contemporary women's magazine to the long-standing tradition of women's magazine studies. It demonstrates the usefulness of empirical industry research combined with textual analysis, and highlights the need for further industry study in the field of magazine studies. The thesis also suggests that adapting to contemporary tastes and media literacies is key to surviving in a changing media industry. In the realm of 'indie' studies, this study has contributed to debates around the relationship between indie and the mainstream by suggesting that, for *frankie*, 'indie' is a market position within the mainstream, and its ability to occupy this position is key to its success. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates the potential for change within the media, at the same time as it highlights important continuities.

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