



## Cover Girl

A side-by-side comparison of a magazine for girls and another for boys appears to reveal a major divide in the way the media socialize each, but there was more to the story.

**CLAIM:** The September 2016 issue of *Boys' Life* explores future careers and personal development, but the same month's issue of *Girls' Life* features articles about how to be pretty, showing a disparity in the way the media treats boys and girls.

**RATING:** MIXTURE



**ORIGIN:**



In September 2016, the magazines *Boys' Life* and *Girls' Life* put out their usual issues, with wildly disparate cover images and content listings. Pictures of the two covers were shared side by side in an image that went viral as a purported example of the divergent ways in which girls' and boys' interests are represented in the United States. [See the Facebook post, which we printed separately.]

A graphic artist designed her own **cover** based on the message she thought *Girls' Life* should convey.

However, the original photograph of the covers — while real — is misleading for a number of reasons, mostly contextual.



The *Girls' Life* cover is a sample size of one. While this particular cover appears to encourage teens and tweens to focus on their looks at the expense of everything else (and to tacitly say that being pretty is the only important thing) at first glance, a closer look at the magazine's web site quickly shows that previous issues bore covers focusing on stories about **body acceptance**, **getting jobs**, and dealing with **bullies** (and how not to be one) tucked amid pieces on fashion and celebrity gossip.

Graphic artist's alternate version (right)

Digging deeper into the web site also unearths articles about other (and not

at all trivial) topics, with titles such as "Nosy parents? Try this to set **boundaries**" (listen, communicate, compromise), "September is Childhood Cancer Awareness **Month**", and "5 books that will help you **succeed** this school year".

But if that's not the point (and if you consider the cover the most important part of the magazine), a look at some of the other covers shows a more balanced approach to the hormonally fraught life of the average ten- to sixteen-year-old girl, with headlines showing

articles about how to study better in school, how to handle friendships, how to create things, how to boost self-esteem, and book reviews and recommendations.

It also is important to consider that *Boys' Life* magazine is not a general boys' interest publication but rather the official trade **magazine** of the Boy Scouts of America, whose official oath is:

On my honor I will do my best  
To do my duty to God and my country  
and to obey the Scout Law;  
To help other people at all times;  
To keep myself physically strong,  
mentally awake, and morally straight.

To clarify, *Boys' Life* is a magazine that functions as a way to further the very specific (and positive) Boy Scouts' **message** to boys. It is not a usual newsstand magazine, and despite appearances, it is not affiliated with *Girls' Life* — which has a similar name, and is a magazine, but is not affiliated with the Girl Scouts or any other similar organization. *Girls' Life* states its **mission** as follows:

GL readers get real, honest advice. Parents can trust GL to guide their girls through the growing-up years—without making them grow up too fast.

Karen Bokram is the founding editor and publisher of *Girls' Life* magazine. She told us that the outcry seems to stem from adults placing their own expectations and pressure on young people. She says that by the time girls are reading her magazine, they're already receiving mixed messages about what they're supposed to be (and with additional pressure from their peers to fit in), which is in part what her magazine is trying to help them navigate:

I put this stuff in there, and once I point it out, people say — okay fine, you have a lot of high quality content, but you still should have it on the cover! And I'm like, okay, so we're shaming girls for having interests that aren't aligned with what you think they should be interested in? So getting good grades and making friends — which is on my cover — isn't within your wheelhouse?

While there is undoubtedly a conversation to be had about the gender binary, sexism, and the difference in expectations faced by young people based on their sex and outward appearance, this photograph of the two covers side by side does not illustrate those issues as clearly as it might seem to at first glance.

Useful words and phrases:

**to feature**  
**disparity, disparate**  
**to treat**  
**side by side**  
**to go viral**  
**purported, to purport to**  
**to convey**  
**misleading**  
**sample size**  
**tween**

**at the expense of**  
**tacit, tacitly**  
**body acceptance**  
**to be tucked** (*plus*  
*preposition*)  
**to dig deeper**  
**to unearth**  
**nosy**  
**fraught**  
**to boost**

**general interest** (*adj.*)  
**trade magazine**  
**to further**  
**newsstand**  
**despite appearances**  
**to navigate**  
**to shame**  
**wheelhouse**  
**gender binary**

Source of article: <http://www.snopes.com/girls-life-vs-boys-life-magazine-covers/>  
About snopes.com: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snopes.com>  
<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snopes.com>