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He Said, She Said: *The Boy's Own Paper* and *The Girl's Own Paper*

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A research paper completed for English 4710. This is an advanced undergraduate course focused on the study of a particular genre and its ability to articulate meaning in historical, social, and/or literary contexts. This paper is part of the Children's Literature genre series.

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American feminist Gloria Steinem once said, “We’ve begun to raise daughters more like sons ... but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters” (Quotes). Steinem’s words ring true even in nineteenth-century Britain when it comes to raising daughters like sons. In [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#) and [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#), there are very large gender stereotypes, but one paper takes it to the extreme: [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#). Although similar in theory, [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) uses the era and power to their advantage to become a little large-headed on the idea of being an individual with newly acquired “rights” that mean something. It fails to gear the articles toward their (children) readers and instead uses a tone in which blame and gossip seem to overrule the main point of having a paper for girls.

At first glance, most people would see exactly what the two papers focus on: one ([*The Boy's Own Paper*](#)) working to grasp the attention of boys, and the other ([*The Girl's Own Paper*](#)) working to empower women. However, what many fail to notice when looking back at these papers is the time period in which they were written. [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#), surprisingly older than [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#), ran from 1880 to 1891. A lot was changing in England at that time. Women suddenly were given a say, a minute dose of power. This paper, on the other hand, serves as a guiding point to the idea of taking things too far in pushing a certain expectation on women. In the article “American Women,” it is said that the author was “confident that woman was not exceeding her mission in undertaking such a responsibility as was undertaken by Mrs.

Atkinson and her able colleagues” (Mostly, 155). In saying this, it is as if the author is saying women can only excel to a certain level ... a concept often heard from a close-minded male. Although both papers have the same purpose (to provide tips, educational information, and advice), the paper geared toward women was far more catty and pulled in a stereotype of “true women” being educated. There is a lack of fun and excitement seen in the paper. A number of editions begin with introductions on how to do a new art form or how to cook something, but quickly the paper delves into the idea of women having power through some sort of (usually) political piece. The women’s pieces have a clear target: expressing to the country the newly-found power of women, and getting women excited for their new privileges. There is an evident presence of feminist action throughout the paper. And a cattiness (not necessarily negative in manner) is seen in the “American Women” piece as well. An expectation is set (“one grand mission of women is the education of the young”), and those who fall short of the expectation will be criticized.

While the women’s papers are busy spreading rumors of what the “American Woman” is or pushing this idea of control in the faces of others, [*The Boy’s Own Paper*](#) comes along in the late 1800’s. In [*The Boy’s Own Paper*](#), the same theory of informing a gender-specific audience was built, but there is a subtlety in the way of expressing opinions and the paper seems far more informative. [*The Boy’s Own Paper*](#), unlike a “how to” on crafts and cooking, geared their “how to” to different types of defense or some kind of violent aspect. Ironically, this creates a huge stereotype when it comes to gender roles. It is evident that although women feel powerful through these changes of women with power increasing in government, the men still hold the upper hand when it comes to many things, such as self-defense or protection. Two issues particularly stood out to me under the “how to” sections: Nov. 2 1912’s edition of [*The Boy’s*](#)

Own Paper (p. 70) and the 1880 edition of *The Girl's Own Paper* (p. 155). In looking at the boys' page, it starts off giving a prediction of what to expect in the coming season, leading into a deeper explanation of how to play Rugby. Although girls today play and enjoy sports, at this time it was seldom that women excelled outside of the home in physical activities. This idea moves us to the girls' "how to" of how to mark on a canvas, which involves creativity. Through these two articles alone, a major contrast is shown in the "ability" of man versus woman.

Another interesting distinction between the two papers is the tone and volume of the pieces presented. In *The Boy's Own Paper*, it is almost as if the paper is played down and more focused on the boys reading the paper themselves, rather than in *The Girl's Own Paper*, where the focus seems to be on the audience and relaying the idea of femininity to any and all those who pick it up. Seth Lerer states, "Girls always seem to be put up on stages. How they look and sound is, in a way, far more important than how boys do" (Lerer 229). This paper definitely fits the mold of this concept. It is also quite evident in the display of the newspaper, which changes the tone and audience. In *The Boy's Own Paper*, there is an element of pop, of excitement. Stories are exciting and adventuresome, and pictures really come to life with bold drawings. The first issue of *The Boy's Own Paper* (1879) offers, on its front page, "My First Football Match," complete with vivid drawing of the scrum. The reader's eye moves from that text—where the narrator delights in being chosen for his school team, "whose glory it was to fight the battles of [the] school—to the mass of boys falling on the player with the ball" (Lerer 159-60). *The Girl's Own Paper*, interestingly, lacks any pictures past simplicity and seems to be far more centered on the number of words and how much information it can relay than anything else. Although in some aspects this may be marked as a sign of maturity (from the women), it draws attention

away from the idea that the papers have the words "Boy" and "Girl" in them, not the "Woman" or "Man" that would be generally associated with an educated adult who can read these papers.

It's funny to look back at how time has changed and shifted from the time of these papers to today. The "properness" of women fades day after day, and women act more "equal" or similar to guys. Nonetheless, guys tend to remain the same when it comes to interests (such as rugby or guns) or scholarship and power. Day in and day out we gender-code different objects without knowing it. Girls play with dolls; boys play with trucks. Girls go to dance; boys play football. We have even gotten to the stage where colors (Boy-Blue, Girl-Pink) are justified by gender. In the past several years, we see a push away from gender-casting everything in sight, but up until recently, stereotypes presented in these papers existed immensely. Boys still enjoy playing and reading about sports, and girls still enjoy crafting (two main focuses in these issues). Is it that women are willing to raise their girls in a "boy way," meaning she will grow up to be strong and fend for herself, but parents are afraid to make their boys "too girly"? It is important to have a good mix of both, which for the time of these newspapers, seemed to be starting to form a turn for the worst. Women gained power and let it go to their heads, while boys stepped back and just enjoyed "being a guy."

Seeing people the papers used to quote is also quite intriguing. In [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#), we see a number of men (both "well-known" and not) quoted and talked about in any given article. However, in [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#), the focus suddenly becomes more open to both genders. Does this show a contrast in the power women believe they are getting versus the power they truly have, or are men just knowingly more reputable and respected? Men (especially white men) were looked up to almost globally. By using men in their newspaper, [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) would not only attract those who weren't quite as into "feminist views" but also draw

attention to the diversity they are offering in their paper. [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#), although seemingly more mellow and geared toward a younger crowd, can be placing almost a subliminal message upon their readers that men truly are the ones in control.

These two particular newspapers were also chosen to contrast their focus on a global level. Where [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#) is finding comfort in roaming the streets of England, [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) seems to be glossing over the British as they (for example in the piece mentioned earlier) take stabs at the “American Girl,” stereotyping her as having a very specific role in the U.S. In the article, women in America are perceived as having very particular tasks in a jail and lack ability to grow into higher power. In [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#), girls are able to have a mind of their own and think for themselves but only to an extent, as topics seem to remain quite contained from issue to issue. Lerer says, “Girls grow up in the eyes of others” (Lerer, 235). [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) is a prime example of how girls put so much emphasis on what others see them as by carefully choosing which topics to address in each issue. This being said, the two newspapers reflect the attitudes of both women and men even in today's society. Men tend to enjoy the action-packed information of the outside world rather than personal feelings and emotions. Summarizing late nineteenth-century boys' books, Lerer states, “A young boy, often the child of British colonists, finds adventure at the side of a great leader. The boy grows as an ethical participant in the colonial world, and in that growth, his life calls attention to the childishness of a native populace” (Lerer 162). Due to this, [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#) takes pride in focusing on events and leadership rather than society's viewpoint on men / boys. Where the boy's paper is a fun, “down-to-earth” read that focuses on tasks to be done, the women's article plays a structured role of cattiness in stereotyping the world around them (something even today women unfortunately struggle by doing).

Having said all this, these articles are in turn geared towards children, or at the very least fall under the heading children's literature. This is worrisome because children are being exposed to these behaviors at a very young age. It is almost as if children are "brainwashed" into their emotions through newspapers such as these. If a child first learning to read got even the general idea of these, it can be easily inferred that girls are meant for the kitchen and boys are supposed to be fighters and join the military. These newspapers in no way are suitable for a child's eyes. As generations pass, things that were not acceptable back then have become largely more accepted by culture, which leads me to believe [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#) may have been suitable for the higher end of the age gap that falls under the word "child" when it was published. [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#), on the other hand, has failed to form a connection with readers any younger than adulthood; the paper should be *The Women's Own Paper* rather than [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#). Girls today would find reading the paper just as dull as I imagine most girls of the time would have.

Looking at the pictures presented in the two papers is quite distinguishing as well. In [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#), there are inviting colors, with people that have facial expressions. The paper uses children similar to the age of the reader to draw in the image of the reader being in his shoes. In contrast, [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) uses adult women, possibly as role models to the readers. A portrait shot seems far more likely in these editions, where most of the articles are scattered with pictures of objects rather than specific people. This also plays a part in the tone of the paper overall. While [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#) works to attract its readers through the ability to make the pictures seem exciting and that any boy (at any given moment) could be in the person's shoes, [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) simply lacks the substance it needs to attract an audience that isn't

highly educated and sophisticated. Instead, [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) uses very simple, unappealing, and often person-less pictures to keep a tone within the paper of maturity and structure.

In conclusion, [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#) and [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) are both newspapers published for a common reason (the entertainment and informing of a certain gender) but executed in two different ways. While [*The Boy's Own Paper*](#) achieves more success (at least to me), [*The Girl's Own Paper*](#) uses tricky tactics of comparing and subliminally leading the reader to question a specific mindset, while unfortunately focusing on adults rather than girls. Girls were being pushed to grow up and embrace their freedom as women, as the already free boys were being encouraged to live life and enjoy it. Stereotypes and gender roles play a huge part in the making of these papers. It is important to accept the differences in men and women but not play to each other's downfalls. The idea of women and men being similar and interested in common things must continue to grow and flourish so that the segregation of papers and the generalizations or labels that go with being one sex over the other can disappear from both media and our world as a whole today.

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