

## VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IMAGES IN CHILDREN MAGAZINES OF THE LATE SOVIET PERIOD (1960–1980S)

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### **Abstract:**

In modern Russian society, cultural, social, political and economic changes undoubtedly transform the traditional content of gender roles. However, in the sphere of literature and games for children, there is still a division into those intended for "girls" or "boys". This work is devoted to the formation of social stereotypes of behavior based on gender analysis of illustrations, games for children and materials for creative activity in the late Soviet period. The material used is magazines for children published from the 1960s to the 1980s, such as "Murzilka", "The Funny Pictures", "Pioneer", "Kostyor" and "Yunyj Tekhnik". The analysis of this material is carried out taking into account gender attitudes and based on the development of Soviet pedagogical thought.

**Keywords:** gender order, Soviet childhood, children magazines, games, pedagogy, children's creativity, gender role, gender image.

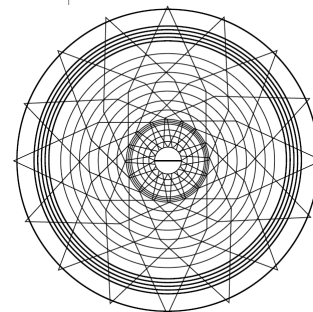
### **Introduction**

Currently, childhood is a concern of researchers in various fields, with issues related to the formation of social stereotypes of behavior through literature and media for children being of particular interest. In the 1970s, gender stereotypes broadcasted in children publications, were sharply criticized due to the influence of second-wave feminists, and in the 1980s, foreign studies were mostly devoted to the definition and identification of "sexism", and the promotion of measures to eliminate it (Brugeilles et al., 2002). However, a study conducted in 2019 by the German newspaper "Süddeutsche Zeitung" on gender issues in literature for children showed that in recent years the amount of books "for girls" and "for boys" (as well as games and creative material) not only hasn't diminished, but has also grown (see for more details Bruner et al., 2019). A semantic analysis of the keywords in modern literature for children has shown that the boy characters in the pages of books get a more unusual, exciting experience, and the world of girls revolves around such topics as animals, school, family, and rarely goes beyond the usual perception of the ordinary. Lars Burghardt, a senior researcher in the Department of Early Development and Education at the University of Bamberg, states that stereotypes not only limit a child's imagination while reading, but also affect their ideas about reality. His project "Perception of gender

## [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in  
Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*



roles in early childhood in the process of reading picture books" aims to find such books for the youngest that would not broadcast gender stereotypes. University researchers reviewed 130 books, and all depicted full families, stay-at-home moms, girls as their helpers, and boys as tomboys (see Burghardt et al., 2020).

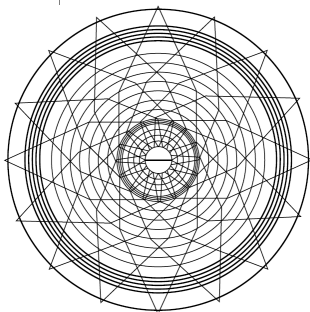
In modern Russia, social, cultural, political, and economic changes are undoubtedly transforming the traditional content of gender roles. However, in the sphere of literature for children, the division into publications "for girls" and publications "for boys" still remains. This is particularly evident in special publications and encyclopedias for girls, which are mostly represented by some kinds of household and self-care manuals. The history of such publications for girls and encyclopedias begins with the magazine columns of late Soviet publications, such as "Pioneer" and "Kostyor". Regarding the gender structure, the reviewed period is characterized by the separation of the roles: the man being the family breadwinner, whose social status was determined by his status at work, and the woman, also working, yet bearing the main responsibility for the household. It is worth noting that the Soviet era gender identities still have a significant impact on people's behavior (Pushkareva, 2012).

The purpose of this research is to analyze the gender images presented in the illustrations and games of children magazines of the late Soviet period (1960–1980s). For this purpose, a content analysis of the quantitative and qualitative categories was carried out for a number of children magazines. The scientific novelty of this study lies in a new methodological approach, as well as in the involvement of game material that was not previously considered as a source for gender studies of the Soviet period.

### **Materials and methods**

The process of socialization of children includes the adoption of cultural standards and the learning of social roles, including gender roles. For young children, this process is directly related to literature, creativity, and games. Speaking about children's culture, we primarily distinguish the visual component as the most expressive, rich in symbols and images. As a rule, literature and periodicals for children, as well as animation, theater, the subject-material world, etc., have a developed visual component. In general, during the Soviet period, the state placed a special emphasis on the education of new generations, and it was the child whom it saw as the builder of the future socialist state, hence the close attention to the everyday life of children (Kostyukhina, 2017).

In Soviet times magazines were the most accessible and popular source of literary works, educational articles, as well as games, materials for creativity and development. In the late Soviet period, from the 1960s onwards, such magazines for schoolchildren and teenagers as "Pioneer" (1924–present) and "Kostyor" (1936–present), in which stories, informative articles, tasks and material for creativity were published, were regularly released. The information was accompanied by a small number of illustrations, so these magazines are rather a source of general trends in understanding the process of constructing childhood in the Soviet period. The magazine "Murzilka" continued to be published for preschoolers and primary school



## [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in  
Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*

children, and in 1956 the magazine "The Funny Pictures" was released. These two magazines printed a lot of paper games, materials for creativity and development, and also paid more attention to illustrations and hand-drawn stories than to texts. Therefore, they represent a rich source of visual material. Such magazines as "Yunyj Tekhnik" (1956–present), "Modelist-Constructor" (1962–present) and "Tekhnika Molodyozhi" (1933–present) formed a special group of publications that were produced for the development of technical creativity. Such publications were very popular among Soviet boys, starting from the period of the "Khrushchev thaw".

Electronic databases of the Russian State Library, the Russian National Library, as well as various independent electronic resources have become one of the auxiliary tools for the search and research of children magazines. To confirm the individual theses of the research, the material was supplemented with illustrations, games and creative material from children's books.

The object of the study is visual material (illustrations, games, and creative materials) published in Soviet magazines for children in the period from the early 1920s to the late 1980s. The subject of the study is the visual representation of gender images. In this context, we consider not only the images of boys and girls as the main characters of illustrations for children, but also the models of gender roles transmitted through magazine games and creative materials.

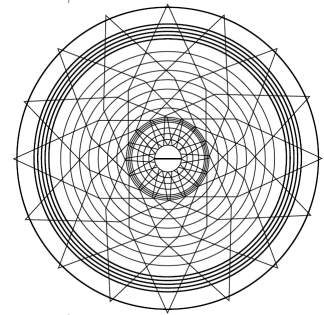
The work is based on the concept of gender images, which, according to Judith Lorber, constitute cultural representations of gender differences, as well as their implementation in the language of symbols and works of art, resulting in the reproduction and legitimization of gender statuses (for details see Lorber, 1994). Culture generally provides a reservoir of resources for gender ideology. The research is also based on the concept of gender display, introduced by the American sociologist Irving Goffman (for details see Goffman, 1997). His idea is that gender is constructed (produced) by people in the process of everyday practices, which means that the game and creative component of a magazine play a greater role than the visual, or otherwise, the passive one.

The theory of sexual roles, from which follows the gender-role approach in the socialization of children, criticized at the moment, but still existing in the institutions of socialization, is of no small importance for the work. The main idea of the theory is that being a man or a woman means performing the main role that is characteristic of a given sex type (male and female). This theory focuses not on biological interpretations of differences between the sexes, but on the fact that the behavior of men and women is different because it corresponds to different social expectations (Connell, 2015). In this regard, the most revealing are those studies that analyze these expectations in the media and demonstrate significantly limited woman images. In the 1960s, Betty Friedan spoke about this and described this feature of representation as part of the "The Feminine Mystique" (see Friedan, 1993).

## [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in  
Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*



### Results

The gender order in Soviet society was largely determined by state policy and ideology, that is, the state established opportunities and boundaries for people's actions. The creation of new relations between the sexes began from the very first days of Soviet power and subsequently followed the path of involving women in public production and political life, state regulation of the family, and the formation of discussions that interpret femininity and masculinity (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2015).

The gender order in the USSR can be nominally divided into three stages (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2003, pp. 303–304):

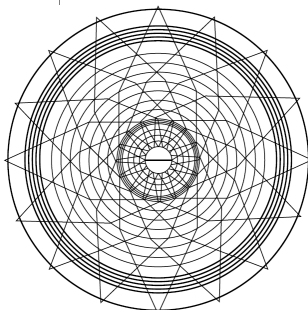
- 1) the period of experimentation in the field of sexuality and marital relations (1918-1930), or the period of political mobilization of women;
- 2) the period of totalitarian androgyny (1930s – mid-1950s), or the period of economic mobilization of women;
- 3) the period of liberalization of gender policy (mid-1950s – late 1980s), which is determined by the return to the traditional content of gender roles.

Each of these stages is characterized by certain gender attitudes that were reflected in the world of childhood, starting with experiments in this area and ending with a return to the traditional content of gender roles.

By the end of the 1950s, the active labor mobilization of women was completed, and the attention of the state turned to the birth rate, which in those years was alarming. The trend that was formed in the post-war years, when reproduction began to be considered as a woman's main duty, more important than work and social activities, is developing. The gender image of the Soviet woman at this time looks quite contradictory: on the one hand, it is a "woman-mother" with a set of feminine qualities, and on the other – a "working woman", which also suggested the presence of masculine qualities (Sazonenko, 2020). During this period, as well as in the post-Soviet period, women constantly experienced a role conflict, balancing between life, children and work.

In this regard, a good example is "Week as a Week", the story written by Natalia Baranskaya about the daily life of a Soviet woman, first published in 1969 in the "New World" magazine. The story is told on behalf of a young woman who works in a research institute, has a husband and two children, lives on the outskirts of Moscow and constantly tries to cope with everything. N. Baranskaya demonstrates that, despite the proclaimed equality of the sexes in the USSR, gender inequality persists at the domestic and everyday level. Also in the story, the author raises the question of the "triple burden" (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995) of home, work, and attractive appearance.

Of course, for Soviet women, the standards of beauty were different from those of women in capitalist countries, where objectification was already gaining momentum during this period, and sexual images were exploited by the media and cinema. However, the woman needed to buy tights, stand in line for boots, get a perm at the barber shop, and the deficit made it all take a lot of effort and time. Western cinema,



## [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*

international exhibitions, and foreign magazines influenced the perception in Soviet society of what an attractive woman should look like. It can also be noted that in order to maintain an attractive appearance, a certain resource of time appeared, since during the thaw there was a working week reduction, and later in 1967 a five-day working week with two days off was introduced.

As for men, the evolution of the gender order in the late Soviet decades (the 1970s and 1980s) led to a situation that could be described as a crisis of "masculinity". This crisis was characterized by men's early mortality, their poor adaptability to life difficulties, a high level of morbidity due to the high rate of occupational injuries, mass bad habits and, of course, alcoholism (Kohn, 2009).

It is worth adding to the mentioned above that during the thaw period, private life was restored, when communal apartments were actively settled and young families received their own separate housing. This gave new opportunities for arranging your personal life. From this moment on, the family becomes an autonomous unit, and everyday intimate relations, the organization of everyday life and the upbringing of children go beyond the constant control of state and society (Lebina, 2007).

All these processes in the field of gender order have in one way or another affected the representation of gender images in magazine illustrations, as well as the representation of male and female roles in game material and sections for creativity and development. In the course of the research, quantitative and qualitative categories were identified for content analysis (see Fomicheva, 2011). The quantitative are: visual material, text and content (stories, articles, entertainment). The qualitative categories are represented as a complementary pair: what to read and see? (passive part) / what to do? (Interactive part). The quality categories of the magazines were correlated with the context of the era. A content-analytical study of illustrated publications for children released from the 1960s to the 1980s showed that in magazines for preschoolers, illustrations occupied more than half of the total material (60-80%), and in magazines for older children, illustrations made up from 40 to 20%. In comparison with the previous period, the gaming component of the magazine had significantly increased (Table 1).

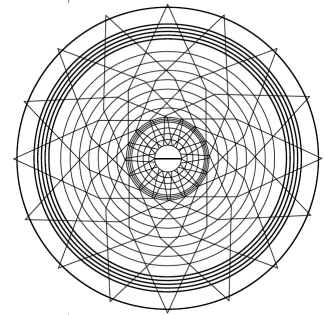
**Table 1. The percentage of the information component presentation**

Magazine	Age	Text component	Visual component	Short stories and poems	Articles	Game and creative component
Vesyolye Kartinki (1956-present)	4-11 y/o	20%	80%	64%	7%	29%
Murzilka (1924-present)	4-7 y/o	38%	62%	60%	13%	27%
Pioneer (1924-present)	10-14 y/o	60%	40%	33%	57%	10%
Kostyor (1936-present)	7-14 y/o	64%	36%	36%	35%	29%
Yunyj Tekhnik (1956-present)	8-14 y/o	74%	26%	7%	61%	32%

## [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in  
Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*



The content analysis of the content of children's magazines published between the 1960s and the 1980s identified a number of main thematic areas, which are reviewed below.

The militaristic theme continues in the form of stories and novels about the heroic deeds of children and adults during the Second World War, informative articles about heraldry, medals, shoulder straps and banners. On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the revolution, a lot of information about the history of the revolution and about Lenin's life appears in children's publications, both for older children and for preschoolers. Magazines for schoolchildren and teenagers, such as "Pioneer" and "Kostyor", though formally, continue to tell about the party and its congresses.

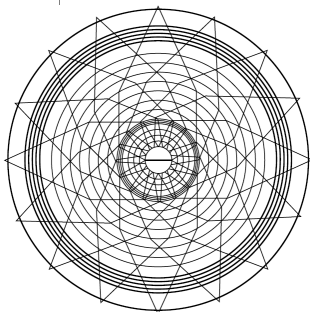
As in previous years, there are many articles on the industrial theme, about agriculture, transport, mining and various professions. A special place in magazines for older children is occupied by popular science articles and stories about navigation, travel, discovery and hiking. During this period, the material about various sciences, space, and fantastic stories become especially popular in all Soviet magazines. In the 1960s, articles about photography and cinema appear in children magazines.

The Olympics, the Youth Festival, and other events contribute to articles about children from different countries, including America and Europe, as well as notes about the culture of different peoples, not only living in socialist countries, appearing in the magazines. The intensified friendly relations between the Soviet Union and Latin America also affect the content of children magazines, with many articles about the culture and life of children from these countries. Constant topics in children magazines for all ages are: school, children camps, pioneers and Komsomol, the Timurovtsy movement. Stories and articles about animals and nature keep being a traditional component of a magazine for children of all ages since pre-revolutionary times.

In the second half of the 1980s the Soviet State symbols, which represented the continuity of generations of Soviet society and were an obligatory component of Soviet everyday life, disappeared from the pages of magazines. V. G. Bezrogov and G. V. Makarevich, speaking about the return to Russian ornaments and symbols in the design of books, noted that "the existing system of values and the Soviet world order were destroyed, and symbolic images of the new era were not found" (Bezrogov & Makarevich, 2010, pp. 9–29).

Children magazines start publishing stories by European and American contemporary writers, as well as detective stories for children. During this period, many magazines have special humorous columns. For the first time the "Pioneer" publishes interviews with singers, athletes and other personalities from popular culture. And the "Kostyor" publishes biographies of artists and other cultural workers.

"Yunyj Tekhnik" magazine focuses on scientific and technical creativity and education. The periodical contains many scientific (i.e. popular science) articles on chemistry, physics, and economics. It also tells about various industries, agriculture, and transport. There are reports on the work of various children's hobby groups, stations, and clubs. An important place in the magazine is occupied by sports and physical education. In the literary component and in the design, the theme of space is



## [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in  
Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*

often present and fiction for children is present in each issue. Children are educated about the inventions of other countries and translations of articles from European and American children magazines are published. A special place is occupied by sections and articles about radio electronics. Biographies of scientists and the history of inventions are published. Despite the scientific and technical focus of the magazine, the topic of the Second World War and military equipment also remains there.

The characters of children magazines are mainly children, their parents (mothers and fathers), depicted in everyday activities, with attributes and qualities that are clearly differentiated by sex. Even if those are animals ("humanized" or realistic) or fictional characters, their qualities are most often identified by gender. The late Soviet period is characterized by the female characters occupying secondary roles in illustrations, where they are attributed to the traditional female roles characteristic of patriarchal society. The images of boys show a more active, eventful life, but they are also stereotypical. To analyze this, let's look at a number of factors: the gender of the main character, personality, occupation, mother and father gender images. Games and creative materials will be analyzed from the perspective of gender roles.

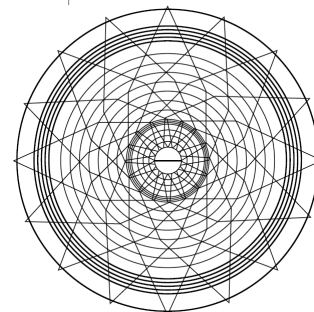
The previous period was characterized by the popularity of the themes of war and weapons, the cult of masculinity (mid. 1930s – mid. 1950s), and, accordingly, the dominance of male characters in illustrations. During the "Khrushchev thaw", images of family and school, where there is a place and female characters, appear in the illustrations. For a detailed analysis of gender images, all issues of the magazines "Murzilka", "Pioneer", "Kostyor", "The Funny Pictures" and "Yunyj Tekhnik" for 1970 were taken. To begin with, let's look at magazine covers, as the personification of the concept of the magazine as a whole. Children often became the heroes of the covers (about 30%), and the magazines "Kostyor" and "Pioneer" mostly placed men on the covers (50%). In 20-30% of cases, the magazines "Pioneer", "Yunyj Tekhnik" and "Murzilka" depict boys on the covers. Girls were placed on the covers less often, as individual characters (20%), and were not found on the covers of the magazines "Pioneer" and "Yunyj Tekhnik" for 1970. There were no images of women on the covers for 1970. Girls were depicted in a group of children or teenagers in a ratio of 1 to 1 with boys, on average, in contrast to the previous period (1940–1960), when this ratio was 1 to 2. In "The Funny Pictures" magazine, the characters of the "Club of Funny Little People" often become the heroes of the covers. The club consisted of male characters and one female character, Thumbelina. She was the last person to join the Funny Little People's Club – it had been an all-male group before 1959. Thumbelina appears on the cover of the sixth issue of 1959 and immediately takes the image of a little assistant who sews up Cipollino's pants.

When analyzing the visual content of magazines for 1970, we see that there are 2–3 times less illustrations where the main characters are girls compared to boys. However, in a group of children, especially in the magazine "Murzilka", there are often more or as many girls as there are boys. In the magazines "Murzilka" and "The Funny Pictures" pictures of adults and children are mostly showing a teacher or educator with children, a father with a son, a mother with a daughter, and grandparents with

## [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in  
Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*

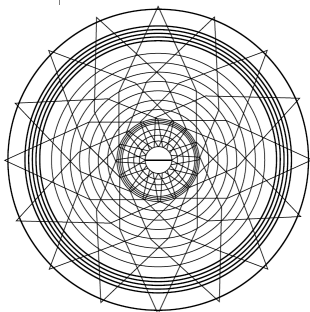


grandchildren. In general, the images of the family are one of the distinctive features of this period. As in the previous periods (1920–1960) of the Soviet era, magazines are dominated (25–45%) by images of adult men (except for "The Funny Pictures" magazine), who appear as the military, pilots, revolutionaries, scientists, workers and historical characters. In "Pioneer", "Kostyor" and "Yunyj Tekhnik", photographs are often used as illustrations, where among children and teenagers we can meet girls much more often than in hand-drawn illustrations. In the magazines for preschoolers "Murzilka" and "The Funny Pictures", drawings of children themselves were often printed as illustrations during this period, where the gender balance was shown much better than in the illustrations of professional artists.

Analyzing the type of activity and characters of children in the illustrations of the 1960s and 1980s, we can come to the conclusion that boys have active roles, while girls are depicted as passive, quiet, caring. Analyzing how families are depicted, it can be noted that the presence of grandparents distinguishes this period from the rest, symbolizing the improving connection between generations, which was destroyed in the first decades of the revolution. Let us focus precisely on the images of parents in children magazine illustrations. In the previous period, the woman's image is of a worker and mother, a kind of collective image of "The Motherland": statuesque, strong, but with feminine forms, bursting with health, stout (Rudlova, 2012). In the late Soviet period, a mother's image is often completed with an apron, while the clothes are rather not casual, but elegant, which suggests that, most likely, she came to the lunch break and is cooking for the whole family. The poses are tense and confused. Detached from her household chores, she tries to understand what her son has done (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. "Murzilka" Journal (1979-1983)



## [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*

One of the normative models was the cult image of the man of the previous generation, the father's image. It's a man's man, having participated in the heroic industrialization of the country and the Great Patriotic War. This image was replicated by Soviet cinema, literature, and fine art as a positive socio-anthropological type (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2002). In the late Soviet period, the image of the father radically changes and loses the classic attributes of masculinity, appearing in the illustrations as elegantly dressed, in a relaxed pose, the "model" haircut is associated with the STR. In the illustrations, the father usually stands away from the whole family (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. "Murzilka" Journal (1981)**

The actualization of the image of the mother-woman, the "keeper of the hearth", is reflected in games and children's creativity: on the pages of children magazines of this period we often find cut-out paper dolls and clothes for them, which become very popular with Soviet girls. Interestingly, among the cut-out dolls of the late Soviet period, there are boy dolls with a set of forms of different troops and professions, as well as "transformer dolls" with a gender-neutral appearance, which can be both a boy and a girl depending on their wardrobe. The magazines also publish patterns of clothing and soft toys, recipes, fashion tips and practical tips on housekeeping. Special sections appear in magazines on this topic: for example, "Brave Little tailors", "100 tips for Cinderella", "Academy of home Wizards" sections in "Pioneer", "Tips from Darya The Crafty" in the "Campfire" and even "Tips from Murzilka" in the magazine for preschoolers "Murzilka" (Fig. 3).

# [Scientific Articles]

Sazonenko M.A.

Visual Representation of Gender Images in Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)

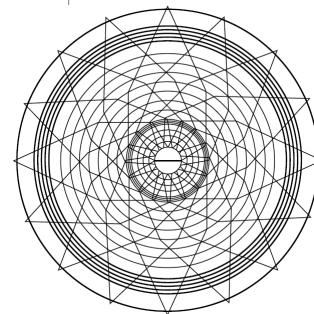
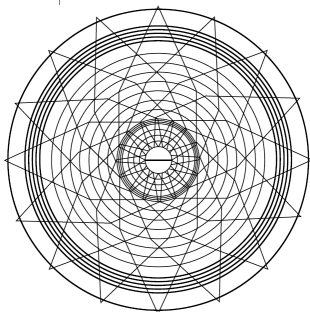


Figure 3. "Pioneer" Journal the 'Academy of Home Sorcerers' Section

All these sections were carefully collected by the girls in binders and used as recommendations for housekeeping. It is interesting that presently, on many women's forums dedicated to home, motherhood and needlework, users exchange similar clippings from Soviet magazines. And "Academy of Home Wizards" by S. Sakharova published on the basis of the section by the same name from 1989 was completely reissued again in 2016.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, creative work on the construction of appliances, models and various technical devices was widely developed in schools and extracurricular institutions. With the support of many children's publications, including the newspaper "Pionerskaya Pravda", the magazines "Yunyj Tekhnik", "Modelist-Constructor", "Knowledge is power" and "Tekhnika Molodyozhi", technical creativity gained popularity among a large number of Soviet boys. On the pages of these publications, we find instructions for assembling various large-scale models of aircraft, road and water transport. It is obvious that these publications were intended not only to promote interest in technical sciences and the education of scientific and technical personnel, but also to reflect the success of the state in the field of space exploration, the development of science and technology, and to demonstrate an optimistic vision of the future, an atmosphere of readiness for defense and large construction projects (Kukulin, 2017).



The practical result of the research, as well as a platform for master classes and discussion, was the exhibition "Gender/Scissors/Paper", which opened in the "Enter and Allow" museum in Moscow in 2020. The exhibition-study demonstrated the gradual evolution of gender policy on the example of illustrative material of children magazines of the Soviet period. Paper games and creative materials shown at the exhibition clearly demonstrated the changes in the content of gender roles in Soviet society from the early 1920s to the late 1980s. Also, paper games from magazines served as material for a series of family master classes.

### Conclusion

In the end, it should be noted that the period of liberalization of gender policy was marked by a return to the traditional content of the concept of gender roles, which undoubtedly affected children's everyday life. Since the beginning of the 60s and up to the end of the Soviet era, an unstable balance of gender images has been maintained in children magazines, the most popular image in illustration being an adult man. However, unlike in previous decades, images of the family appear in children magazine illustrations. Magazines create special sections for girls related to needlework, housework and self-care. In the game component of the magazines, there is a division of games into those that are traditionally played by girls, and those that are played by boys. Moreover, there are children's magazines aimed at maintaining the enthusiasm of Soviet boys for technical creativity and their interest in science.

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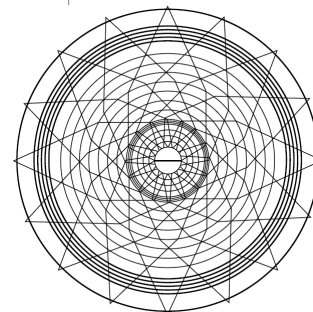
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Sazonenko M.A.

*Visual Representation of Gender Images in  
Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*



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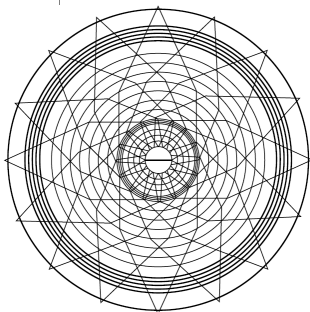
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## [Scientific Articles]

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*Visual Representation of Gender Images in  
Children Magazines of the Late Soviet Period (1960–1980s)*

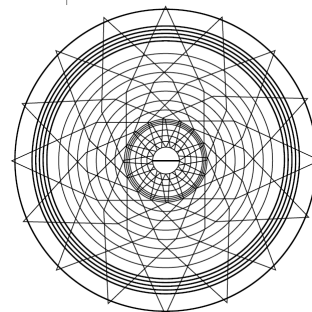
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# ВИЗУАЛЬНАЯ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ ГЕНДЕРНЫХ ОБРАЗОВ В ДЕТСКИХ ЖУРНАЛАХ ПОЗДНЕГО СОВЕТСКОГО ПЕРИОДА (1960–1980-х гг.)

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### Аннотация:

В современном российском обществе социальные, культурные, политические и экономические изменения, несомненно, подвергают трансформации традиционное содержание гендерных ролей. Однако в области детской литературы и детских игр сохраняется разделение на те, что предназначены «для девочек» или «для мальчиков». Работа посвящена вопросу формирования социальных стереотипов поведения на основе гендерного анализа иллюстраций, детских игр и материалов для творчества позднего советского периода. В качестве источников использованы журналы для детей, издаваемые в период с 1960-х по 1980-е годы, такие как «Мурзилка», «Веселые картинки», «Пионер», «Костер» и «Юный техник». Проведен анализ данного материала с учетом гендерных установок и с опорой на развитие советской педагогической мысли.

**Ключевые слова:** гендерный порядок, советское детство, детские журналы, игры, педагогика, детское творчество, гендерная роль, гендерный образ.