Serializing Boyhoods: Periodicals, Books, and American Boys, 1840--1911

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Abstract
Initially published in serialized episodes in periodicals, canonical nineteenth-century texts such as Thomas Bailey Aldrich's Story of a Bad Boy and Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn continue to influence current constructions of American boys as bad and "uncivilized." Although American boyhood has often been narrowly defined, cultural and textual evidence reveals many other shifting versions of American boyhoods. Examining the periodical production of canonical boyhood texts uncovers their connections to alternate boyhoods that intersect with and challenge the best-known versions of American boyhood. In both canonical and non-canonical texts, marks of serialization such as episodic gaps, letters from readers, and editorial prospectuses intervene in the construction of boyhoods and negotiate gendered citizenship possibilities. During the nineteenth century, serialized texts in middle- and working-class magazines (Youth's Companion, Young American's Magazine of Self-Improvement, Our Young Folks, and Boys' Life) explore national and regional boyhood citizenships; the portable form and dialogic nature of the periodical disperse these citizenships across the United States to readers who are not necessarily the white, prosperous boys for whom the texts seem to be constructed. In this study, I discuss the serialized production of middle-class property owning boys (Jacob Abbott's Rollo), which conflicts and coincides with the Young American's Magazine's efforts to educate working-class boys about their citizenship privileges. By the 1850s, the working-class magazine's emphasis on the power of the labor unions extends to the world of small town boyhood as Oliver Optic invests tightly regulated boyhood clubs with citizenship-shaping capabilities. I explore the regionally-gendered reconstruction of citizenship in Story of A Bad Boy's (1869) serialization and the serialized packaging of Little Lord Fauntleroy's androgynous conversational citizenship that influences its reputation as "American." I investigate how the uniformed, homosocial world of Boy's Life targets boys facing increasing moves toward co-gendered activities. During the twentieth century, serialization forms and reading accessories proliferate, blurring gender lines and promoting citizenship stratification. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, serialization has actively and "regularly" contributed to the construction of boyhoods that have shaped the available gendered citizenships in the United States.

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Aldrich's Story of a Bad Boy in 1869, on the other hand, as well as material in the Our Young Folks periodical, constructed notions of boyhood and citizenship that were more in line with antebellum reconstruction. These texts championed more mischievous boyhoods than those mentioned above, but they were, she argues, more about "reconstructed national citizenships" that "mixes Northern and Southern conventions of boyhood to ultimately locate compromises between the two regional cultures; these regional