



Boys at Home: Discipline, Masculinity, and "The Boy-Problem" in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Ken Parille

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In this groundbreaking book, Ken Parille seeks to do for nineteenth-century boys what the past three decades of scholarship have done for girls: show how the complexities of the fiction and educational materials written about them reflect the lives they lived. While most studies of nineteenth-century boyhood have focused on post-Civil War male novelists, Parille explores a broader archive of writings by male and female authors, extending from 1830-1885.

Boys at Home offers a series of arguments about five pedagogical modes: play-adventure, corporal punishment, sympathy, shame, and reading. The first chapter demonstrates that, rather than encouraging boys to escape the bonds of domesticity, scenes of play in boys' novels reproduce values associated with the home. Chapter 2 argues that debates about corporal punishment are crucial sources for the culture's ideas about gender difference and pedagogical practice. In chapter 3, "The Medicine of Sympathy," Parille examines the affective nature of mother-daughter and mother-son bonds, emphasizing the special difficulties that "boy-nature" posed for women. The fourth chapter uses boys' conduct literature and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* – the preeminent chronicle of girlhood in the century – to investigate not only Alcott's fictional representations of shame-centered discipline but also pervasive cultural narratives about what it means to "be a man." Focusing on works by Lydia Sigourney and Francis Forrester, the final chapter considers arguments about the effects that fictional, historical, and biographical narratives had on a boy's sense of himself and his masculinity.

Boys at Home is an important contribution to the emerging field of masculinity studies. In addition, this provocative volume brings new insight to the study of childhood, women's writing, and American culture.

Ken Parille is assistant professor of English at East Carolina University. His articles have appeared in *Children's Literature*, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, *Papers on Language and Literature*, and *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*.

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