

Scripts of Girlhood: Handwriting in *The Baby-Sitters Club*

In the essay “Girls Reading, and Narrative Gleaning” (2002), Janice Radway describes her experiences with reading, writing, and presenting herself to the world. In particular, she relates how she changed the way she wrote the number seven so that she might be more like an elementary school teacher she admired. She referred to this process as “narrative gleaning” or “re-narration.” In this presentation, I will take a cue from Radway to study how girl readers in the 1990s imitated the handwriting of characters the popular series *The Babysitter’s Club* with similar aims.

Each major character in the series is associated with a particular penmanship—which shows up at the beginning of many chapters in the book. Oftentimes these handwriting snippets are the only illustrations that appear in the books. I will show handwriting samples from girl readers in the 1990s—myself included—to illustrate the way that handwriting imitation tricked into the daily literacy practices of some readers. While some character’s handwriting styles can easily be linked to traditional gender performances—either passively feminine or tomboyishly masculine—other scripts are less easily mapped onto gendered roles, particularly one character whose handwriting seems to have inspired the most imitation, Stacy. I will consider how imitation, negotiation, and experimentation of handwriting was one tangible way that the “outside” world met the “inside” self for some readers during the nineties.

Since the Baby-sitter Club has ceased production, other series books for girls have taken its place, many of which use texting handles and status updates rather than notebook entries to integrate other voices, genres, and identity performances in the text. Still, *The Babysitters Club* is of historical interest because it provided girl readers with models for imagining their futures, for envisioning potential scripts for their lives and embodying them through the scripts of their hands.

Works Consulted

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