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Keeping Myself Morally Straight:

A Rhetorical Critique of the Boy Scouts of America

(TITLE)

BY

Zachary Matthew Thuring

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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Master of Arts in Communication Studies

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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2010

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**Keeping Myself Morally Straight:  
A Rhetorical Critique of The Boy Scouts of America**

**Zachary M. Thuring**

**Eastern Illinois University**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>1. Introduction and Critical Perspective</b>	<b>10</b>
On My Honor...	11
A Scout Is...	14
Critical Perspectives	21
Mentally Awake	35
<b>2. Written Text and Performance: Loin Cloths &amp; Helicoptering</b>	<b>38</b>
Rhetoric of the Oath & Law	40
Order of the Arrow	48
Two Spirit in Context	57
Native Traditions and the OA Meet	59
<b>3. Visual Texts: Rockwell and Rainbows</b>	<b>77</b>
Rockwell and Visual Rhetoric	78
Crafting an Image for the Ideal Boy Scout	82
Subverting the Image of an Ideal Boy Scout	90
Uniform Trouble in Straightville	98
<b>4. Further Implications: Impossible Possibilities</b>	<b>107</b>
Trouble in Armyville	109
The BSA as a Homosocial Organization	118
Drawn Together	125
Acta est Fabula, Plaudite!	130
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>135</b>

**Abstract**

The centennial anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) marks the perfect opportunity to critique the rhetoric of an organization that has influenced millions of young boys across America. Over the last 100 years, the Boy Scouts have remained a solid pillar and exemplar of a certain set of dominant Western values and ideologies, primarily those associated with hegemonic masculinity. Through a critique of the rhetoric of this organization, we can see the various constructions of the dominant ideologies as well as various manifestations of subversions and transgressions from the dominant ideology. With this thesis, I explore the impossible possibility, namely, that through a polysemous subversive read of the written and visual texts of the BSA, gay Scouts are enabled to carve out a counter-hegemonic space for themselves within the organization.

To those who choose to love; to those who choose to express themselves freely; to those who choose to fight; to those who choose to believe in their rights; and to those who have no choice. This thesis is dedicated to those who have been oppressed, marginalized, stigmatized, and forced to know fear because of their sexuality. Uniting one hope, one wish, and one dream, that one year, one day, one hour, one minute, and one second, with one voice, everyone will unite as one and proclaim we are all equal.



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This road has been long and challenging, however I have been truly fortunate to have wonderful people in my life to share this journey. Thank you.

## Preface

Nearly 18 years ago, I joined an organization that would make a lasting impression on me and influence my life in practically every way. From weekly meetings and monthly camping trips, to high adventure activities and summer camp, a large majority of my time was dedicated to this organization. At the time, I was a mere child; entering second grade, I did not really have any clue as to who I was, nor any idea about the world around me. While I did not know the vast reach of this organization, I did know that it looked like a lot of fun. Through the training, influence, and guidance of Boy Scouts of America I became a member of an organization that taught me many things: the proper way to build a fire without matches, the importance of religion and doing one's duty to his country, how to pitch a tent, the ability to know which plants are edible as well as which ones are toxic, and the blind acceptance of a system of rules and values without explanation, substitution, or deviation. Over the course of the next 12 years my thoughts, actions, and identity were shaped by this organization. However, starting in 2004 I began deviating from the policies of the BSA; I explored other options and began to make my own moral decisions.

Growing up, I was the quintessential Boy Scout, the kind that is always referenced in movies or used pejoratively to describe someone that might be thought of as a "goody-two-shoes." From the ages of seven to 19 I followed the Boy Scout Oath and Law; I was trustworthy, loyal, friendly, courteous, kind, cheerful, brave, clean and reverent. Moreover I was patriotic, always ready to pledge my allegiance to the flag, and thought the action of burning the flag should be strictly

illegal. I was very religious, going to church regularly, singing in the church choir and always ready to say a prayer at any Scout function. I was helpful to other people, helping my neighbor carry groceries from her car to her house, collecting food for the local food pantry. Finally, I was totally and emphatically morally straight, or at least I tried to be. I squelched my feelings toward other boys and forced myself to date girls. I never let myself slip into entertaining the idea of kissing a boy, much less dating one. However, after my freshman year of college I started to change. I was ready to explore a world outside the strict conservative values of the Boy Scouts of America.

Despite my desire to explore new things, I was still very much afraid of going against the values of the BSA. I started to question the values of the BSA, perhaps I would even allow myself to think about what true patriotism was, thinking about the ways in which our flag represents and supports the First Amendment right to express ourselves and express our patriotism through burning the flag. I started to think about religion in a new light, and question why there was a requirement to observe religious values. I started to question my sexuality; I wondered what it would be like to be gay. However, through all of these ideas, I was presented with a conundrum: how would I maintain loyalty to an organization that I loved and cherished, one in which I built many friendships and innumerable memories while staying loyal and true to myself? This road that I started to travel down was very difficult and at times even treacherous. I decided that I would hide a lot of my newfound values from the organization, specifically my sexuality. I didn't want to be expelled from an organization through which I had grown up simply because I liked

boys instead of girls. Therefore, I decided to stay in the closet while affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America until either the BSA accepted homosexuality or when I could find a time to slowly remove myself from its constraints.

In 2008 I found myself in new territory. I was in a completely different time zone from my old Boy Scout council and all ties reminding me of the BSA. I was in graduate school; I decided that it was time to let go of the BSA and allow myself to fully emerge from my closet and join my gay brothers and sisters in the fight against oppression and marginalization. Through this fight, I chose the BSA as the source or front of my battle. I wanted to fight not only for an organization that I have loved, I also wanted to fight for my gay family to be included in this organization. Therefore, I decided to make the BSA the subject of my Master's thesis. It is my hope, my desire, that somehow through this thesis, people will understand that homosexuality does not threaten the BSA. Gay Scouts already find subversive space within the organization and through the exploration of the rhetorical texts used by the BSA we can see that homosexuality is not the enemy of a values based program; the enemy is tradition, bigotry, and oppression. The BSA needs to realize that a young gay boy can be just as successful in Scouting as a straight boy can be. However, until that time, I offer this thesis as a way to explore and understand this beloved, yet oppressive organization.

**Chapter One**  
**Introduction and**  
**Critical Perspective**

**On My Honor...**

The values, traditions and ideals of hegemonic masculinity are a consistent enumeration and a predominant subtext if not the leitmotif of the Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scouts of America perpetuate Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity of "the culturally idealized form of masculine character" (83), which emphasizes "The connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness," (94). Examples of hegemonic masculinity can be found throughout all levels of the organization, from the exclusion of women and homosexuals, to the declaration of religious principle, the BSA demands and defines stringent standards for its membership. The BSA attempts to constrain its membership into rigid categories and high membership standards; however, as I will later explore in this thesis, the BSA is unable to completely control the polysemic interpretation of its rhetorical texts. As noted by Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* where there is power, there is resistance to that power. This thesis will explore the subversions and transgressions from hegemonic masculinity through analyzing diverse rhetorical texts of the BSA including policies, position statements, uniforming standards, and praxis.

The Boy Scouts of America is an organization that teaches young boys the "proper" techniques and methodologies for becoming a "man." Through these lessons, a conservative and masculine agenda is continually perpetuated as an ideological pillar of morality throughout generations of Scouts for the last 100 years. The education that young boys receive from this organization is advanced through a militaristic rank system as well as participating in activities that will transform these boys into men. The primary medium through which the Boy Scouts of America

is able to indoctrinate young boys with the organization's ideologies is found within written texts in the form of handbooks, manual, policies, procedures and programs. These texts convey a collectively conservative message revolving around the goal of maximizing a young boy's masculine characteristics while minimizing his feminine characteristics and "motherly" influence.

Despite the strong adherence to traditional and conservative values, which can be seen throughout various written texts, there is subversion in the visual texts as well as in the performance of many scouts within the BSA. For example, the Boy Scout uniform is the site of many performative transgressions through which atypical or "undesirable" (gay) Boy Scouts are able to simultaneously 1) express their identity and 2) pass as a legitimate group member. Additionally, there are various performative situations that can be read as condoning and even promoting homosexual interpretations and homoerotic expressions.

In order to analyze the current structure of the Boy Scouts of America, it is important to understand the organization's past, specifically its creation. As with every organization, a founding "father(s)" experiences an epiphany that ultimately results in the formation of a particular organization. In the case of the BSA, Lord Robert Baden-Powell saw the creation of this organization as a way to turn young boys into men by taking them away from their homes (primarily the feminine influence from their mothers) and teaching the scouts "manly activities." These activities were explicitly intended to transform these boys into men who would ultimately serve in the British military. Furthermore, Baden-Powell saw this

organization as a way to prevent the working class youth from developing political aspirations (Jeal).

Studying social organizations, such as the Boy Scouts of America, is an important calling for critical and cultural scholars across the communication discipline. Through the investigation of texts produced by the BSA, we are able to discover the nuances and intricacies through which social organizations influence personal thought and opinion. Additionally, through close examination of text and performance, we can discover subversion and transgression within a seemingly homogeneous organization.

This thesis explores instances of subversion and transgression throughout the texts of the Boy Scouts of America. Specifically, I will look at the tension between written texts produced by the Boy Scouts of America, and the subsequent performance of those texts, as well as the tension between written and visual texts. For example the written texts of the BSA (handbook, mission statement, policies, regulations, etc.) are the primary source of hegemonic masculine and conservative values that are found within the organization. However, visual texts (the Boy Scout uniform, various emblems and icons) and performances (ceremonial and routine) are the primary sources of subversion and transgression from those hegemonic and conservative values. Through this thesis, I will explore and expose the discrepancy, disparity and disagreement between implied written intent and the practiced performance of “other” Scouts.

The year 2010 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America; therefore, I believe that this centennial marks the perfect opportunity to critically



analyze this organization. As a member of the Boy Scouts for nearly 20 years, I have a great passion for this organization and I have many memories and experiences that fuel that passion and will help inform this thesis. I have seen firsthand the various ways in which ideas of hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and homophobia have been perpetuated throughout the organization (coincidentally, I have also witnessed and participated in the subversion of and transgression from these ideological values). From the simple songs that are sung around campfires, to the emphasis placed on stereotypically masculine activities like shooting a rifle, physical endurance trials, and life-saving, the Boy Scouts prepare young men for a life of dominance, pandering to a hegemonic society.

### **A Scout Is....**

Few organizations have the distinction, dedication and determination of spreading ideological values that the Boy Scouts of America have had for 100 years. The BSA has become America's foremost youth organization with over 3,000,000 members. Since the organization's inception in 1910, more than 111,000,000 individuals have participated in the programs offered by the Boy Scouts (Boy Scouts of America). Over 100,000 men from varied walks of life have been involved in this organization.

The origins of the Boy Scouts of America organization are traced back to a British military hero and famed adventurer Robert Baden-Powell. During Baden-Powell's military exploits, he devised a system of training for the men under his command to be better soldiers. Baden-Powell became famous throughout most of the British Empire and was eventually elevated to the rank of Lieutenant General in

the British military. Throughout his tenure in Africa, he recruited several men to become intelligence gathering “scouts” during wartime. He taught these men how to care for themselves, track animals and people, and develop the ability to find food while on missions. These scouts are the earliest form of what would later be known as the Boy Scouts organization.

The Scouts were born in the anxieties of an imperial power at the turn of the century beginning to feel itself threatened both from within and without—at home, the threats included labor union movements, the danger of the working classes disturbing the serenity of a highly stratified society, and a sense of immorality was creeping into the public sphere. Abroad, the United States was beginning to become increasingly competitive commercially, and the Germans were increasing their military might (Rosenthal). From the very beginning, Scouting was conceived of as a remedy to Britain’s moral, physical, and military weaknesses. During this time, Britain was involved fighting the Boer War, which exposed the fragility of its military might. Military ineptitude in the field was matched by domestic and industrial inefficiency at home; both were blamed for the decline of the manly British character, which had been given credit for the country’s military and commercial might. Rosenthal surmises that while the decline of “manly” British men did not entirely originate with the Boer War, it was nourished by it, and it is only in this context that the true formation of the Scouting movement can be understood. Although the Scouts were very much the creation of one man, Robert Baden-Powell, they were also as characteristically a part of Britain’s urgent post-Boer War self-scrutiny as were the various royal commissions on physical deterioration, physical

training, and boy labor that were also a product of the time. Upon noticing these inefficiencies within the British Empire, Baden-Powell devised a plan that would remedy these malignancies plaguing the empire. Thus, the organization received a royal charter in 1912.

While Scouting's identification with the simple pleasures of outdoor living certainly constituted one of its attractive features, it should not lead us to overlook Scouting's powerful ideology -- an ideology intent on producing, out of the morally dubious, unformed lower-class youths, a certain kind of serviceable citizen for the empire (Rosenthal). This ideology stresses the unquestioning obedience of Scouts to properly structured authority, happy acceptance of one's social and economic position in life, and an unwavering, uncritical patriotism, for which one would be willing, if necessary, to die. These ideological commitments are offered as the key to both social utility and personal fulfillment. With its emphasis on submission and discipline, on curbing the impulses of the self in the service of the community as a whole, it is an ideology firmly rooted in the self-interest of the upper-classes (Rosenthal). Baden-Powell's efforts, through the Scouts, to inculcate in the lower-class boys those values and character ideals that the more privileged received in the private schools, to teach a boy to follow orders, was to render him useful to both employer and nation, thereby bringing him to the highest possible pitch of moral perfection.

Baden-Powell always maintained that he organized the Scouting movement merely as a kind of training which might be adopted by various existing youth organizations, such as the Boys' Brigade, Church Lads' Brigade, YMCA, and others.

Rosenthal concludes that what Baden-Powell had in mind was never a simple set of rules and games but rather a coherent, self-contained system of education intended to shape the entire life of the boy, and to implant in him a set of values and even emotional responses that would make him most useful to the state. In its ideal embodiment, Scouting was not a simple social organization for boys to join, but a total ideology that boys should adopt, which would determine their actions, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. Therefore, the creation of a physically healthy, morally sound, and politically reliable generation of Scouts who were prepared to follow orders without question was eagerly welcomed by an empire worrying about an uncertain future (Jeal).

Moving across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States, national feelings of doubt were not as prominent as they were in Great Britain. America was experiencing a vast growth both economically and politically. BSA lore holds that on a foggy night in the streets of London, an American named William D Boyce lost his way. Subsequently, a young boy encountered Boyce and led him to his destination. When Boyce offered to give the boy some money, the boy said “no, thank you, sir. I am a Scout. I won’t take anything for helping” (Boy Scouts of America). Boyce was so impressed with the attitude and generosity of this young boy that he later met with Robert Baden-Powell to discuss the feasibility of taking his Scouting movement across the Atlantic to the United States. The American version of Baden-Powell’s Boy Scout movement started in 1910 and borrowed nearly all of the methods, ideologies, and values from its British counterpart. In the early years of the American organization, founding members were faced with creating a foundation of

values which the organization would hold for the next century. In order to accomplish the many tasks associated with creating a new organization, the founding members created a commission of individuals who would handle the day-to-day operations of the organization, as well as craft bylaws and standards of the Boy Scouts of America. This first commission was comprised of a few successful men of the time, including then American President, William Howard Taft. This commission was also responsible for the inception of the American Scout Oath and Scout Law, which were primarily borrowed from the English version of the Boy Scouts and Baden-Powell (Murray). Later in the history of the Boy Scouts of America, on February 7, 1916, the 64<sup>th</sup> Congress chartered the Boy Scouts of America as a federal corporation through the passing and ratification of HR 130 (Murray). Furthermore, on June 3, 1916, through the National Defense Act, the uniforming and insignia of the Boy Scouts of America became protected under federal law.

Perhaps two of the most notable and recognizable texts of the Boy Scouts of America are the Scout Oath and the Scout Law. The Law was a distinctive emblem of Scouting from the very beginning. More than a code of behavior, it summarized the aspirations of an entire movement, equipped it with slogans, and provided it with the panacea for the social dysfunction it was attempting to treat (Rosenthal). During the time that Baden-Powell was attempting to construct this Scout Law, there were many revisions and rewrites until the first form was completed in 1908. The British Scout Oath and Law are subtly different from the American version.

The American Scouting movement also changed the text of the British version of the Scout Law. The American version stands as: "A Scout is: Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, and Reverent." The most notable change from the British version of the law is the addition of the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> laws. Quoting the Scout Executive at the time, Murray writes:

We took the nine English Laws and analyzed each of them. We had before us recommendations, including some fifty laws including many suggestions by Mr. Ernest Thompson Seton. We agreed finally to add one for cleanliness, which the English did not then have. We added one for bravery. They did not have this. My judgment of the twelfth Scout Law is that it is one of the very finest things in the whole scheme of Scouting and one of the reasons we have had such outstanding success. It is one of the reasons we have such a large percentage of boys. From my point of view, the real people in America from the early days, are those who have had deep religious convictions based upon personal religious experiences and those who serve others because of the joy of service. I felt at that time, as I feel now, that there is nothing more essential in the education of the youth in America than to give them religious instruction and I advocated that this be included in the Twelfth Scout Law.

(54)

The addition of cleanliness and bravery are simple reproductions and redundancies of the intentions of the earlier laws; however the American movement felt as though these should be explicitly stated. The addition of reverence to the Scout Law sets up

an increase in the importance placed on religious values in the Boy Scouts of America.

The Scout handbook, often dismissed today simply as a repository of useful information concerning camping activities, merit badges, knot tying, and the like, was viewed rather differently by Baden-Powell (Rosenthal). "For him it was very decidedly the sacred text of the brotherhood, arguing for the importance of what it was doing even as it initiated people into its mysteries" (160). The first edition of *Scouting for Boys* is less a practical guide to outdoor living than a "thoroughly didactic introduction to Scouting's ideology" (160). In a sense the handbook is the movement, defining the total universe of the Scouts, its priorities, practices, and principles. It diagnoses problems, establishes remedies, and makes the case for its own centrality. Although Baden-Powell's first handbook has gone through drastic revisions, there is still an air of the aforementioned characteristics contained within current issues of the Boy Scout Handbook and other printed materials (e.g. leader guides, patrol leader guides, and the guide for safe scouting). For example, various principles and positions are contained within current issues of these texts which include the BSA's mission statement, vision statement, and purpose.

The program of the Boy Scouts is based upon rank advancement and the completion of various merit badges (also hints of militarism). For each rank advancement, a Scout must accomplish various challenges, and successfully demonstrate adequate knowledge and mastery of various skill requirements. There are a total of seven ranks throughout the program including Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class, Star, Life, and culminating with Eagle. Each rank

advancement has specific details and requirements that must be met, usually including some form of physical endurance test, leadership test, and adhering to the Scout Oath and Law. Additionally, for each rank advancement, a Scout must earn a set number of merit badges ranging from auto mechanics to entrepreneurship. Further, in order to achieve the Eagle Scout honor, a boy must earn 12 required merit badges and nine elective merit badges. The required badges are rooted deep in the ideologies of masculinity and being a “productive” member of society. Through the ideologies of the Boy Scouts of America, I will be rhetorically critiquing various texts of the organization. To this end, I have decided to add the following theories to my rhetorical toolbox.

### **Critical Perspective**

For this thesis, I have chosen to base my analysis on four theoretical foundations. First, I will be using Connell’s idea of hegemonic masculinity. This theory will be used as a way to examine the textual constructions of the Boy Scouts of America. Second, I will employ Morris’s theory of the fourth persona. Using this theory, I will evaluate several visual texts of the Boy Scouts of America as well as various colloquial performances. The third concept I will use is McGee’s concept of fragmentation. Fragmentation justifies my use of various fragmented texts to create my own text for critical examination. Further, fragmentation responds to the ways in which these texts relate to the culture in which they are embedded, as well as the various ways they can be interpreted. Finally, I will be employing theories of polysemic interpretation, particularly relying on McKerrow’s explication of critical rhetoric. This final concept is crucially important to this thesis because of the



multiple interpretations, dominant, and secondary meanings of the various texts that I will be using.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

The unique experiences of men can be seen as being influenced through varying social institutions and subject to a wide range of things including race, class, and historical contexts. These experiences are able to establish conceptualizations of masculinities, which for each man may significantly differ (Bird). Through this, each male incorporates various meanings into his gender identity, some of which go along with the larger conception of hegemonic masculinity, while others tend to be subversive and counter hegemonic (Connell; Messner).

The origin of the term hegemony is found in the writings of an Italian Marxist, writing from jail circa 1930, Antonio Gramsci. The concept of hegemony is derived from Gramsci's analysis of class relations and portrayal of the wars of position characteristics of social formations. Hegemony is a competition of significance in which a group gains control of the social order it rules by naming its power as normal and natural. Miller argues that in addition to these ideas, the society contains old cultural meanings and practices, no longer dominant but still influential, and emergent ones, either propagated by an upcoming class or incorporated by the ruling elite. Ordinary people give "spontaneous consent" to the "general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci 12).

As noted by Barrett, the term hegemony originates with the notion of class relations and refers to the dynamic processes by which groups create and sustain

power, and how normal definitions and taken-for-granted expressions come to define situations. Hegemony goes beyond the material holding of power and refers to the process by which normal and ideal definitions emerge, how the terms of morality surface and persuade. Hegemonic ideologies preserve, legitimate, and naturalize the interests of the powerful while marginalizing and subordinating the claims of other groups (Wetherell and Edley). As described by Connell, hegemony refers to the “Cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (77).

The term hegemonic masculinity refers to a particular idealized image of masculinity against which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated. The hegemonic ideal of masculinity in current Western culture is a man who is independent, risk-taking, aggressive, heterosexual, and rational (Connell). “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 77).

Hegemonic masculinity is therefore understood as both dominant over women and dominant over subordinate masculinities. Taking this into consideration, gay men are subordinated to straight men not only in terms of social status and prestige, but also by a series of material practices, which include political, cultural, economic, and legal discrimination. Additionally, effeminate masculinities, as well as “other” masculinities such black and other non-white masculinities, are marginalized.

Furthermore, gay males are subordinated in the hegemonic model because their

object of sexual desire undermines the institution of heterosexuality, which is of primary importance for the reproduction of patriarchy. To further illustrate this point, Connell argues that women exist as potential sexual objects while men are negated as a sexual object. The subordination of gay masculinities is therefore a part of the strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy through the institution of heterosexuality.

We see that hegemonic masculinity is a societal construction of the ways in which a male figure is idealized. If a male demonstrates or portrays a weak persona, or has a subordinate character, society casts him as less than ideal due to the constraints of hegemonic masculinity. These displays of gendered roles and social constructions are present at nearly every stage of human development in American culture. Boys as young as six-years old are being put into these constraints in the media as well as organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America.

One consequence the practices of the Boy Scouts of America, for the last 100 years, has been the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity by encouraging young boys to turn away from qualities associated with femininity or homosexuality and molding them into properly masculine, heterosexual men. The BSA organization is a place in which hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and defined, as a Scout represents the ideal of what it means to be a man, a definition that contrasts what it means to be feminine and/or gay. The gay man is uniquely situated to undermine masculine orthodoxy because of his unique ability to invisibly gain access to masculine privilege before coming out as gay (Bourdieu). Therefore, gay men are

perceived as dangerous to the structure of the Boy Scouts of America in that they defy culturally defined structures of hegemonic masculinity.

Pharr describes a form of discrimination, heterosexism, which safeguards the one form of sexuality (heterosexuality), which is deemed noble and true, while marginalizing and stigmatizing homosexuality. The ideas set forth by heterosexism lead people to believe that the expression of heterosexuality is right, just, and natural, while all other forms of sexuality are immoral, unhealthy, or inferior. Despite the fact that American culture as a whole is rapidly moving away from legal forms of homophobia (Loftus) and many states are enacting pro-gay initiatives, the Boy Scouts of America still object to any notion of the desirability of gay members. Additionally, through my experience as a Boy Scout, many individuals display strong attitudes of homophobia and outwardly chastise and harass any individual that may be perceived as even slightly effeminate. Furthermore, many Scouts will do everything in their power to ensure that their peers are viewing them as a straight, masculine leaders. Lehene, notes that the fear of being labeled gay “is a threat used by societies and individuals to enforce social conformity in the male role, and maintain social control... used in many ways to encourage certain types of male behavior and to define the limits of ‘acceptable’ masculinity” (389). Talk of “faggots” and gays is also used throughout the BSA as a way to help define a boy’s own masculinity. Hanke “refers to the social ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that, operating on the terrain of ‘common sense’ and conventional morality, defines ‘what it means to be a man’” (232). This quotation corresponds to the BSA’s notions of training for young men, especially being a moral individual.

To further emphasize the Boy Scouts of America's promulgation of ideologies of hegemonic masculinity, scholars of gender ideology have described at least five features of hegemonic masculinity in American culture: (1) physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality (see Brod and Kaufman; Connell; Jeffords; Kimmel; Trujillo). Each of these five features of hegemonic masculinity are subtly promoted and indoctrinated into the minds and actions of young men throughout the programs offered by the Boy Scouts of America.

### **Fragmentation**

This thesis incorporates a great variety of texts, written, visual, and performative. An argument could be tendered that I am only looking at fragments of the whole picture. Therefore, in order to use and manage these fragments of text, and transform them into a clear and concise picture, I will employ McGee's concept of fragmentation to add texture to my canvas, while filling my pallet with texts across the spectrum. Michael McGee has argued that rhetoricians should no longer assume that the texts they study are organically unified entities with a clear center (McGee).

Fragmentation incorporates the inclusion of a variety of perspectives when viewing text and context. To this end, McGee concludes that fragmentation is an important element to consider in rhetorical criticism, specifically "new cultural conditions that require different strategies for managing the relationship between a text and its context." (274) Some of these new cultural conditions could be

perceived as referring to the availability of texts from an online source, thus expanding the dissemination of the text.

As McKerrow points out, criticism is a vehicle for doing rhetoric, which is the end or purpose of “critical rhetoric.” Therefore, using “criticism” as the vehicle for rhetoric, we assume that rhetoric is a form or type of discourse presented for study as are novels, plays, or poems. The question of what constitutes “the text” is unproblematic – the discourse as it is delivered to its audience is considered “finished,” whole, clearly and obviously the object of critical analysis (McGee).

However, as McGee continues:

Critical rhetoric does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent. The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made. It is fashioned from what we can call “fragment.” Further, whether we conceive it in an Aristotelian sense as the art of persuasion, or in a Burkean sense as the social process of identification, rhetoric is influential. That is, the rhetor understands that discourse anticipates its utility in the world, inviting its own critique (the interpretation and appropriation of its meaning)(279).

Throughout this thesis, I include the Scout Oath, the Scout Law, the BSA uniform and other texts that are “simultaneously structures of fragments, finished texts, and fragments themselves to be accounted for in subsequent discourse.” (279) For this

thesis, these texts are fragments that revolve around the discourse of power and meaning between the author and the audience.

Through using McGee's fragmentation, I will be able to develop a more concise picture of the BSA texts by "considering three structural relationships, between an apparently finished discourse and its sources, between an apparently finished discourse and culture, and between an apparently finished discourse and its influence." (280) Through this, the Boy Scout of America texts are fragments of finished texts because of the cultural influence upon them. Moreover, through analyzing the fragmented texts of the Boy Scouts of America, I will be able to offer cultural insight into the rhetoric of an organization that perceives its texts as whole, finished, and completely free from alternative interpretations. Moreover, throughout this thesis, I will be taking "fragments" of the "whole" text from across the entire Boy Scout movement and analyzing them together to make one cohesive and coherent picture that will clearly demonstrate inconsistencies and hypocrisy that exist within the organization.

### **Polysemy**

In addition to McGee's idea of fragmentation, I will also employ the concept of polysemic interpretation. When a scholar considers the idea of texts being open to multiple meanings, poststructural theories about the infinite play of language might enter his or her mind. However, with the idea of polysemy, while related to the deconstructionist idea of indeterminate meaning, is not identical to it (Ceccarelli). Moreover Leah Ceccarelli, a rhetorical scholar, states, "with polysemy, distinct meanings exist for a text, and they are identifiable by the critic, the rhetor,

or the audience; with dissemination, meaning explodes, and the text can never be reduced to a determinable set of interpretations” (398). McKerrow’s ideas will inform the critical interpretation of the texts that I will collect for this thesis and thereby allowing alternative views of dominant culture to be expressed. As described by McKerrow, a polysemic critique:

is one which uncovers a subordinate or secondary reading which contains the seeds of subversion or rejection of authority at the same time that the primary reading appears to confirm the power of the dominant cultural norms (108).

Through this, McKerrow describes polysemic interpretation as a way of overturning dominant power structures. It notes of a moment where oppressed or subordinate audience members are allowed and enabled to resist traditional meanings of the dominant cultural forces by creating new meanings that better fit their own needs and desires (Ceccarelli). From McKerrow’s idea of polysemy, we see that the interpretation and resistance comes from the audience, not the rhetor.

However, there are a myriad of other ways to define polysemy. First, Martha Solomon’s view of polysemy seems to be an instrument of the skillful rhetor, rather than as a tool for a subversive audience. She notes that polysemy is a strategy of the rhetor, not the audience, and his or her power to construct a text that can be popular with diverse audiences. Specifically, she claims:

We as critics should pursue more assessments that explore the polysemic nature of works and how varied the supportable interpretations of works can be... Rather than construing the meaning in a work as unitary and fixed,



critics should expose the tensions within works that open up possibilities for distinct interpretations. (64)

For Solomon, the polysemous nature of texts is to be discovered by critics and established as being products of a skilled rhetor. Second, John Campbell agrees with both Solomon as well as McKerrow for his interpretation of the nature of polysemy. First, he states: “from the Delphic priests to Darwin, exploiting the undecidability of a phrase or figure is a rhetorical technique ancient in lineage and catholic in scope... from a rhetorical standpoint, it may explain [the text’s] simultaneous appeal to different audiences.” (354) Here Campbell, like Solomon, argues that polysemy is a rhetorical strategy used by the skillful rhetor to bring different audiences, through different paths, to find common ground in the acceptance of a text (Ceccarelli). However, despite this view of polysemy, Campbell seems to also agree with McKerrow through stating that “insurgent” polysemy adds “to our appreciation of the co-creative role of the audience by underscoring their role in facilitating, rebelling against, and enduring the meanings of their tradition.” (369) Through this statement, we see the way that a subversive audience uses polysemy to rebel against the hegemony of traditional culture situations, that the audience is able to resist the rhetor’s meaning and attaining a creative space or control of its own (Ceccarelli).

John Fiske (1987) details the way viewers have the “ability to make their own socially pertinent meanings out of the semiotic resources provided.” (65) Therefore, audience members have “considerable control, not only over its

meanings, but over the role that it plays in their lives." (74). Additionally, Celeste Condit expands conceptions of polysemy. She concludes that:

The ability of audiences to shape their own readings, and hence their social life, is constrained by a variety of factors in any given rhetorical situation. These factors include audience members' access to oppositional codes, the ratio between the work required and pleasure produced in decoding a text, the repertoire of available texts, and the historical occasion, especially with regard to the text's positioning of the pleasures of dominant and marginal audiences. (103-4)

Through this we see that the polysemy of texts is not universal or infinite; there are several restrictions when perceiving polysemy. Critics must account for not only the rhetor, but also the audiences that receive a particular text. Furthermore, Fiske argues that even without the additional step of circulating one's own representations, these pleasures may offer a real resistance to the dominant ideology. Moreover, he indicates that escape from dominance is liberating and constructing one's own subjectivity is an important step toward social change. Fiske purports that:

While there is clearly a pleasure in exerting social power, the popular pleasures of the subordinate are necessarily found in resisting, evading, or offending this power. Popular pleasures are those that empower the subordinate, and they thus offer political resistance, even if only momentarily and even if only in a limited terrain. (230)

Fiske's conception of pleasure comes from the pleasure audience members take from receiving a text, primarily a television show, but can be extended to other forms of rhetoric. This pleasure comes from being able to insert one's self into the text and finding a space through which to agree or occupy. Specifically, pleasure can come from identifying with the dominant culture in the text or through subverting the dominant culture.

Through this thesis, I employ the use of polysemy primarily through the audience's perception of the Boy Scouts of America. Specifically, I examine the texts as an audience member and then give potential polysemous reads to the texts. To this end, I will be largely attaching McKerrow's view of polysemy to this thesis. There are multiple meanings that exist within a text, which can be interpreted by subordinate audience members. Through these polysemous texts, counter-hegemonic individuals may find space within the text that the BSA attempts to constrain and limit. However, as later discussed, the BSA is not able to control their texts, as there is always a polysemous read available for subversive audiences to find space.

### **The Fourth Persona**

An intriguing (and relatively unused) facet of rhetorical criticism that I explore throughout this thesis is the concept of the fourth persona. Created by Charles Morris in 2002, the fourth persona includes ideas of an oppressed or marginalized individual being able to "pass" and keep the secret (being counter-hegemonic) in a hegemonic or dominant society. Furthermore, through the use of rhetorical strategies, an individual is able to express signs and indications (which

Morris terms as “winks”) of belonging to an oppressed culture, but is able to fool or “dupe” the larger, dominant culture. Specifically, as applying to this thesis, gay men and boys (oppressed culture) are able to exist within the Boy Scouts of America, (dominant, hegemonic culture) despite a ban on homosexuality in Scouting.

Throughout the Boy Scouts of America, several counter-hegemonic individuals exist and are able to pass or conceal their existence in this organization from some individuals, while allowing their existence to be known by others. To be successful in concealing one’s identity, or convincing certain audiences of an acceptable or even tolerable persona, these scouts will employ tactics of impersonation, deflection, and silence in the public sphere (Morris). Holistically, these acts constitute a type of secrecy and rhetorical action that Morris calls “passing.” To illustrate this “passing” situation in a clearer manner, Morris describes the development of passing while Peter Rabinowitz elaborates on the distinction between:

Social passing, by which one misleads others into believing he is something that he is not, and rhetorical passing, which is not simply a disguise, but a virtuoso tightrope performance. The rhetorical passer engages in unnameable [*sic*] speech acts that unfold before two audiences: one audience that’s ignorant and another that knows the truth and remains silent about it. (Morris 230)

Moreover, this passing “requires the dupe, one to be fooled, but also the in-group clairvoyant who, because it takes one to know one, collaborates by recognition and silence.” (230) From this, Morris continues:

Every act of passing is enacted, in other words, by means of the fourth persona: a collusive audience constituted by the textual wink. Similar to its counterpart, the second persona, the fourth persona is an implied auditor of a particular ideological bent, presumably one who is sexually marginalized, understands the dangers of homophobia, acknowledges the rationale for the closet, and possesses an intuition that renders a pass transparent... passing rhetoric must imply two ideological positions simultaneously, one that mirrors the dupes and another that implies via the wink. The fourth persona also resembles its other counterpart, the third persona, in its partial constitution by silence. Instead of a silence that negates and excludes, as with the third persona, here silence functions constructively as the medium of collusive exchange. (230)

Basically, Morris argues that members of an oppressed group are constituted through signs, signals, and silence, which he refers to as "winks." These winks exist as a way to communicate with other members of the oppressed group without alerting their existence to the dominant group. Therefore, the rhetoric used by subordinate or oppressed groups must possess ideological values identifiable with the dominant group while containing ideological winks in the same text identifiable solely to the fourth persona audience. Furthermore, unlike Charland's conceptions of constitutive rhetoric, the fourth persona is hidden, with groups' expressions and ideologies being relegated to private winks and not called forth into being. The fourth persona creates an environment for the oppressed to:

Succeed in veiling one's identity... in the public sphere [through using] subversive enthymeme – an appeal that manipulates the assumptions of heteronormativity to achieve the telos of sexual secrecy – dupes facilitate the masking performance that deceives them. (Morris 230)

Applying this concept to my thesis, a gay Boy Scout would employ the use of the fourth persona by simultaneously acknowledging that homosexuals are not allowed to be members of the organization and condemning any homosexual in the organization while “passing” and keeping his sexuality a secret, except to other gay members living in the same secrecy to whom he communicates through theoretical winks. Moreover, through the polysemy of Boy Scout texts, we see that subversive or transgressive Scouts are able to create a space for themselves within the organization. These subversive Scouts are able to be counter-hegemonic to this hegemonic organization while “winking” at other subversive Scouts.

### **Mentally Awake and Morally Straight**

The Boy Scouts of America is an organization that promotes its founding ideologies, principles, and values to the extent of near fundamentalism. With deep ties to religion, hegemonic masculinity, and militarism, the BSA has zero tolerance for individuals who do not fit into the mold of a true Boy Scout. Additionally, through the trajectory of the teachings and practices of the BSA, it seems as though the belief is held that if a young boy follows these directives he will turn out to be a great-straight-religious leader. Further, in the dominant interpretation of the BSA, there is no possible way for a Scout to be anything but a hegemonically masculine male, unless there was something wrong with the boy before he started the

program. However, as I describe throughout this thesis, instances of subversion and transgression from these values and ideologies are prevalent across the organization. From the variations of the Scouting uniform and rainbow insignia, to “blood” ceremonies and “loin cloths,” an undercurrent of “deviant” behavior can be found in nearly all texts produced by the Boy Scouts of America.

Therefore, over the next three chapters, I will perform a rhetorical critique of the Boy Scouts of America. This critique will detail several texts from the BSA including those from written, visual, and performative forms. Moreover, this thesis will also describe connections to other organizations that promote hegemonic masculinity while oppressing other forms of masculinity (and women). Furthermore, this thesis will serve as an important contribution to the communication discipline in that it will reveal and critique the practices of an organization that has the largest youth participation in the country. No other scholar has attempted to perform a rhetorical critique on the texts produced by the Boy Scouts of America. Therefore this thesis is needed to open the door into a world that has been locked for an entire century. Throughout the rhetorical exploration of my thesis, new insights will be offered and conclusions will be drawn about an organization that has influenced young boys across the nation for 100 years.

The next three chapters will offer a critique of various Boy Scout texts. The fourth chapter concludes this thesis and culminates with an overall critique of the Boy Scouts of America. Additionally, I will make connections between the BSA and other similar organizations, and suggest possible implications for this research. Through the third chapter, I will critique visual texts created by the Boy Scouts. This

chapter will specifically examine three paintings by Norman Rockwell, the Boy Scout uniform, and various insignia used by the BSA. The second chapter will critique the written texts produced by the Boy Scouts of America. Throughout this chapter, a major part of my critique will include the Boy Scout Handbook, paying special attention to the Scout Oath and Scout Law, as well as Order of the Arrow Ceremonies. Through analyzing written texts of the Boy Scouts of America, I will be able to further establish the ideologies of the organization and demonstrate various transgressions and subversions of those ideologies.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Written Text and Performance:**

#### **Loin Cloths & Helicoptering**

The Boy Scouts of America have one clear, clean cut idea of the perfectly hegemonic masculine male, an ideology that it promotes as the only method for being a Scout. However, the tighter the BSA holds to its values and policies, the more slippery they become and more difficult it is to adhere to those ideologies while maintaining control over each piece of rhetoric and text. Throughout this chapter, I will critique three of the most salient texts from the Boy Scouts of America: the Scout Oath, the Scout Law and the ceremony scripts of the Order of the Arrow. These three texts represent the collective ideals that Scouting promotes throughout its programming. Through the critique of these texts, I will show the ways that the BSA both promote and promulgate ideas of hegemonic masculinity and the subtle ways that these texts subvert the very hegemonic ideals that they uphold. While there are no obvious or outward demonstrations of homosexuality, there are several winks of subversion and hints of transgression from traditional BSA policy. This chapter will supply information leading to arguments for the polysemy of the very texts upon which the BSA has built its empire.

The Oath and Law are Scouting's founding and most fundamental pillars; the building blocks for which all other texts are based upon. Moreover, they are the two texts that all Scouts are required to memorize. Therefore they become the two things that Scouts are most likely to remember once they have left the Scouting program. The words enclosed within the Oath and Law has resonated throughout the last 100 years in meeting halls, summer camps, and honor ceremonies. Moreover, through these two texts, the sum of the BSA's ideological values can be viewed; mainly hegemonic masculinity, Christianity, fierce heterosexuality –

completely disregarding the idea of homosexuality – and leadership. These values are expressed throughout the entire organization including the Order of the Arrow.

The ideological values of the Order of the Arrow and the Boy Scouts of America are one in the same. As the governing body of the Order of the Arrow, the Boy Scouts of America is responsible of all publication and approval of OA documents, manuals, and procedures. First and foremost, as with all other aspects of the BSA, the Scout Oath and Scout Law contain the fundamental principles and ideologies that govern this organization. Furthermore, these two texts are the most recognizable artifacts of the BSA and hold the most influence in Scouting decisions and policies.

### **Rhetoric of the Oath and Law**

Before continuing to a critique of the Order of the Arrow, the Scout Oath and Law should be discussed. The Oath was a distinctive emblem of Scouting from the very beginning when Lord Baden-Powell organized the organization. More than a code of behavior, it summarized the aspirations of an entire movement, equipped it with slogans, and provided it with the panacea for the social dysfunction it was attempting to treat (Rosenthal). During the time that Baden-Powell was attempting to construct this Scout Law, there were many revisions and rewrites until the first form was completed in 1908. The British Scout Oath and Law are subtly different than the American version. The British Oath follows as “On my honour I promise that: I will do my duty to God and the King, I will do my best to help others, whatever it costs me, I know the scout law, and will obey it” (Rosenthal, 109). The first two parts of the Oath merely state the ideals of duty and helpfulness on which

the Law later elaborates, whereas the third, helps to ensure Scout conformity. But the oath is interesting in another way. Asking a Scout to promise on his honor to do three things, it requires only that he do *his best* to help others, while he is *required* to do his duty to God and King and to obey the Scout Law. The notion of holding Scouts to some absolute standard of conduct to God, King, and the Scout Law, as opposed simply to asking for their best effort to help people denotes a discrepancy, which is later rectified by Baden-Powell in 1911 with the change from “I will do my best to help others, whatever it costs me” to “To help other people at all times.” (Rosenthal 113).

Apart from the Scout Oath, the Scout Law is the other most recognizable text from the Boy Scouts. Baden-Powell’s Scout Law consisted of nine laws by which Scouts must abide: “A Scout’s honour is to be trusted, A Scout is Loyal, A Scout’s duty is to be useful and to help others, A Scout is a friend to all and a brother to every other Scout, no matter what social class the other belongs, A Scout is courteous, friend to animals, A Scout obeys orders, A Scout smiles and whistles, A Scout is thrifty” (Rosenthal 111). Of the original nine laws, six have as their essential thrust the Scout’s unquestioning loyalty and his absolute willingness to carry out any orders given him. Only the obligation that a Scout be courteous, a friend to animals, and thrifty, three of the rather small claims, address other concerns. Whatever else the Scout might learn, the primary lesson is obedience.

The American version of the Scout Oath and Law follow the same structure, however more emphasis is placed upon certain aspects within the Oath and Law. First the American version of the Scout Oath is slightly different and attaches a

highly ambiguous phrase: “On my honor I will do my best, to do my duty to God and my Country, and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.” (Boy Scouts of America 45). Analyzing this version of the Oath, several things become evident. The initial phrase of the Oath, “On my honor I will do my best” diverges from the British version in that instead of an absolute directive, American Scouts should do their “best” to adhere to this promise, recognizing that the membership is fallible, and thus giving some room for “errors” of judgment, character, or position (or at least one would think so). Aside from the obvious change from “duty to King” in the British version to “duty to Country” in the American version, the last phrase of the American Oath “to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight” is the final alteration to the British version of the Oath. While the American version of the Oath requests that Scouts simply do their “best” to adhere to this promise, there is a statement that has polysemic interpretations; the requirement that all Scouts *must* be morally straight, as stated throughout various position statements regarding homosexuals in scouting. The Boy Scout Handbook explains the term “morally straight” as

To be a person of strong character, your relationships with others should be honest and open. You should respect and defend the rights of all people. Be clean in your speech and actions, and remain faithful in your religious beliefs. The values you practice as a Scout will help you shape a life of virtue and self-reliance. (46)

While this statement seems to say that a Scout is to be respectful of other people and defend the rights of all people, it is obvious that the intended meaning is to respect and defend the rights of like-minded people. This so-called morally straight clause is the basis of many court cases dealing with homosexuality in the Boy Scouts of America, including the highly controversial US Supreme Court case of *Boy Scouts of America v Dale*. This case started in New Jersey where an Eagle Scout, James Dale reached 18 years of age, the distinguishing age where a Scout becomes an adult leader, and wished to become an Assistant Scout Master. The BSA denied Dale's adult application, because at the time, Dale attended Rutgers University and admitted his sexuality. The US Supreme court decided that the BSA was able to select membership, citing their First Amendment rights. In his opinion from the court, Chief Justice Rehnquist stated:

The values the Boy Scouts seeks to instill are based on those listed in the Scout Oath and Law. The Boy Scouts explains that the Scout Oath and Law provide a positive moral code for living; they are a list of do's rather than don'ts. The Boy Scouts asserts that homosexual conduct is inconsistent with the values embodied in the Scout Oath and Law, particularly with the values represented by the term "morally straight". Obviously, the Scout Oath does not expressly mention sexuality or sexual orientation. And the term "morally straight" are by no means self-defining. Different people would attribute to those terms very different meanings. For example, some people may believe that engaging in homosexual conduct is not at odds with being "morally straight". And others may believe that engaging in homosexual conduct is

contrary to being “morally straight.” The Boy Scouts says it falls within the latter category. (*Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*)

This court case outlines the BSA’s policy and justification for not allowing gays to be members of the organization. Looking at the content of the Oath and the explanation of morally straight, it is easy to see that this is only one of many inconsistencies that are omnipresent throughout the organization.

Furthermore, due to the extreme amount of ideological emphasis that is placed upon the Oath in the Boy Scouts of America, it is important to rhetorically analyze the American Scout Oath line by line; doing so is very revealing of the organization’s values and beliefs. First, the passage “On my honor” suggests that this is a solemn promise, a rule that all members co-construct and agree to do their *best* to perform everything contained within this oath. “I will do my best to do my duty to God and my Country” sets forth the idea that members have a sense of duty to their country (reminiscent of a militaristic organization). This “duty” can come in many forms such as participating in active military service, reciting the pledge of allegiance, or becoming a “productive” member of society. Additionally this passage sets forth an admission or recognition of religion, which is later stated in the Law (and which becomes increasingly interesting in later discussions of Druids, Jedi, and Atheists). The next passage, “to obey the Scout Law,” demonstrates a reinforcement of the significance of the ideologies contained within the Scout Law and that members promise to do their *best* to follow them, sometimes without question. The final section of the Oath reinforces the core principles and what it means to be a

member of the Boy Scouts of America; doing your *best* “to help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight” can be seen as a way of constructing and conforming to hegemonic masculinity. This passage supports the idea that American Boy Scouts are strong, masculine individuals that are always willing to help other people, such as the traditional scenario of that little old lady trying to cross the street. Keeping oneself “morally straight” is fairly clever and at times ambiguous, but definitely refers to making sure that members are not homosexual. Elaborating on the last phrase “morally straight” this phrase seems to pose as a roadblock for many gay individuals. What is “morally straight”? Can an individual be morally gay or perhaps morally crooked, bent, or U-shaped? And why are the Boy Scouts so adamant about using the word “straight”? Would it not suffice just to end with “moral”? If I do my *best* to be “straight” does that mean that I can still be a member of this organization? Sadly, and much to my chagrin, doing one’s *best* just isn’t good enough when it comes to being “morally straight,” especially when thinking of *Boy Scouts of America v Dale*.

The Scout Oath and Law set up a particular description of what it means to be a man, and what it means to be a productive and deserving member of the Boy Scouts of American and society as a whole. The sentiment and values included within the Oath and Law are final, unabridged, and absolute; there is a particular type of masculinity (hegemonic masculinity) that is acceptable, all other forms are ignored, marginalized, and oppressed. Ideologically, the BSA promotes that their members are the true, deserving leaders of society and the only ones equipped to do so effectively – because lets face it, if you don’t believe in God, are unable to chop



down a tree with an ax, and you can't have a child because you aren't sexually attracted to girls, then you cannot be a productive member of society.

The words of the Scout Oath and Scout Law attempt to close down and contain polysemy; the words are highly masculine and avoid femininity at all costs. The words and interpretations of the Oath and Law are very limited. If an individual were to alter the words of the Oath and Law using simple synonyms while maintaining the same core structure, they would find that the words of the original Oath are very purposeful, and eliminating any form of question. Each word and phrase was carefully constructed as to be unambiguous. The Scout Oath currently stands as "On my honor, I will do my best, I will do my duty, to God and my country, to obey the Scout Law, to help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight." These words were chosen for a specific purpose, to express masculinity, and the exact ideologies that a Scout must have. Through critical examination, we can see that these are the only words acceptable, and simple synonyms for these words alter the intended meaning. The first word that is purposeful, with no other word being able to express the same ideology is "God." God was chosen unique among other similar words like Deity, Holy being, or Supernatural being because using God emphasizes a Christian ideology. Second, the word "country" was chosen instead of motherland due to the feminine connotation and usually "mothers" are not usually associated with masculinity. Next, obey was chosen as opposed to submit or yield because these words are linked more with being a submissive individual, rather than being in control or leading a situation. A Scout is expected to be physically strong as stated

by the Oath instead of simply being physically fit. Being strong is ideologically more accurate (and hegemonically masculine) for the Boy Scouts than simple physical fitness. Next, the Oath requires that Scouts are mentally awake instead of being emotionally conscious or psychologically aware. Being mentally awake affords the BSA to once again be unambiguous about the ideologies of Scouting; mental wakefulness allows for Scouts to be alert to thinking and leadership instead of being emotionally conscious which would feminize Scouts into acknowledging their emotions or aware of their psychological needs and desires. Finally, Scouts are morally straight, which as noted before, as meaning a moral, value laden individual that is completely heterosexual. This last phrase is one that simple synonyms cannot even describe. The BSA has created its own meaning for morally straight in a way that simple synonyms would simply be ridiculous to acknowledge. The Scout Oath, is a statement of affirmation to the ideologies promoted by the Boy Scouts of America. The words contained are purposeful, accurate, and directed to be unambiguous in interpretation.

In addition to the Scout Oath, the Scout Law is an equally important piece of rhetoric used by the Boy Scouts of America that is purposeful and unambiguous when describing the ideologies that a Scout is supposed to uphold. This list of 12 words or laws of Scouting is very clear and apparent to the values of the Boy Scouts. Furthermore, these words were chosen specifically because of their masculine connotations as opposed to potential feminine or counter ideological synonyms. Scouts are: Trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent instead of being faithful, devoted, accommodating,

gracious, well-mannered, civil, submissive, merry, frugal, plucky, sparkling, and groveling. The second grouping of words is synonyms for the first group, however it is clear to see that the second group is subservient and feminine and definitely not characteristics of a masculine Boy Scout, which emphasizes the scrutinizing detail that was considered when choosing the words that comprises the Scout Law. These words were chosen to express masculinity while dismissing anything that would be considered to be feminine or antithetical to the Boy Scouts purpose and tradition.

The Boy Scout Oath and Law are two texts that have very limited interpretation. Great time and effort was spent ensuring that the words contained in these texts were as unambiguous as possible, thus eliminating additional interpretations to the Oath and Law other than the dominant read. While the Oath and Law are strictly unambiguous and constrains interpretation, the Order of the Arrow on the other hand is devastatingly exposed to polysemic interpretations that counter some of the ideological values expressed through the Oath and Law.

### **Order of the Arrow**

In addition to the regular curriculum and activities of the Boy Scouts of America (i.e. earning merit badges and rank advancements) there is an “honor society” built into the program, the Order of the Arrow (OA). This “honor society” is intended to mirror the ideologies of the BSA and to induct only the Scouts who are the exemplars of the BSA’s ideal Boy Scout. However, despite only inducting the “cream of the crop” into its membership ranks, the OA is one of the most blatant examples of polysemous text and the place where Morris’s winks are able to run rampant, as will be discussed in the coming pages.

Serving as Scouting's national honor society, the Order of the Arrow inducts thousands of Boy Scouts into its ranks each year. Created in 1915, shortly after the Boy Scouts of America was founded, the OA has become a bastion of Scouting values, influencing Scouts from coast to coast. The OA was intended to recognize Scouts who best exemplify the ideologies expressed through the Boy Scout Oath and Law. The values of the Order of the Arrow parallel those of the Boy Scouts of America and the induction ceremonies include direct reference to the Scout Oath and Law. Today, the OA still perpetuates the same values that it did 95 years ago and has refused to change since Woodrow Wilson was President of the United States. The Order of the Arrow is an unmovable force of conservative values that spreads its messages to young boys throughout America. These values have remained a resolute force in both public policy and politics. The BSA consistently refuses membership to Atheists, gays and Agnostics into this "secret society."

Many members of the Order of the Arrow claim that the organization is a secret society and will not discuss the ideologies of the OA. While technically speaking, there are no secret societies within the Boy Scouts of America, members are urged to keep secret things learned through membership in the OA. The BSA goes as far as publishing "Safeguard this material" statements inside the front cover of a great number of documents, specifically the induction ceremony scripts. Moreover, many forums, blogs, and websites for Order of the Arrow members are password protected. The security level of the passwords depends upon the level or degree of membership; Ordeal members, as they are known, are privileged to certain select material, Brotherhood members obtain a password for more

information, and Vigil members have an all encompassing password serving as a key to the kingdom. However, since there are no secret societies within the Boy Scouts of America, I am free to divulge some of the mysticism, traditions, and ideologies contained within the ceremony scripts and offer a critique of the rhetoric used. One potential reason for the BSA to refer to the publications of the Order of the Arrow as safeguarded is so that scholars and the general public would not be able to critique the texts or to uncover some of the underlying themes that contradict the BSA's idea of masculinity.

The heart of the Order of the Arrow balances upon three pillars; "Love for one another," self-sacrifice, and community service. These pillars become the foundation and subsequent reason for all actions and attitudes expressed through the Order of the Arrow. First, "Love for one another" is the admonition of the Order of the Arrow, or at least its English translation. The OA version of the admonition is "Ahoalton," which comes from the Delaware language in Native American history. Second, self-sacrifice encourages members to forget about ourselves. This leads into the third pillar, community service. The legend (fictional story of how the OA was founded) claims that only through cheerful service can we achieve a higher being – think Maslow's Self Actualization. While these are very noble tenets by which to live, they present an often- paradoxical view in Scouting, specifically because of discrimination policies.

An individual becomes a member of this organization through being elected by his peers as demonstrating excellent leadership capabilities and a expressing a passion for Scouting's philosophies. Once a Scout is elected by his peers, he has the

opportunity to participate in the induction ceremony, called the Ordeal ceremony. This ceremony is the first honor level or degree of three and takes approximately 24 hours to complete. It starts with candidates arriving during evening hours at a designated location (usually a Boy Scout camp) and being prepared for the rest of the night. This preparation consists of organizing each candidate's gear (sleeping bag and ground cloth) to be carried over a long distance (usually about 1-2 miles). Next, the candidates start out on a hike across camp to the ceremonial grounds where the pre-ordeal ceremony takes place. This pre-ceremony is an introduction to the OA and the principle characters of the ceremonies. During the ceremony, the principle characters challenge each candidate to "sleep alone tonight under the stars," "keep a pledge of silence until the next night during the ceremony," "fast, eating only scant food," and "work in arduous labor tomorrow." After the ceremony, the candidates are led by so-called trail Indians out into the forest where they will be sleeping alone. The next day, the candidates are awoken and pointed to the areas that they will be working for the day. After the work has finished and evening has arrived, the candidates are once again gathered and led by trail-Indians to the second ceremony site (also called a circle) where they will receive full induction rites and rituals. After the ceremony, they are declared full members of the Order of the Arrow, and welcomed into the circle. Some aspects of this ceremony may seem strange, and honestly at times it is. However despite the oddity of the ceremonies, one lingering fact remains: there is a significance source of counter hegemonic masculinity tendencies expressed throughout the ceremony script texts as well as the performance of these ceremonies. This source of transgression from hegemonic

masculinity and the BSA's idea of the ideal Scout set up a very interesting discussion on polysemy as well as various examples of Morris's 4<sup>th</sup> persona. However, before starting the discussion on these examples of transgression and subversion of hegemonic masculinity, a number of things must be discussed about Native American culture and tradition, as the customs and traditions Order of the Arrow is based upon Native American culture and tradition.

The Order of the Arrow has borrowed many customs and traditions from Native Americans to help shape and mold the organization. Almost every facet of the Order of the Arrow can be traced back to Native roots with a sprinkling of Western ideology. The Order of the Arrow is based upon an idealized Native America tribe, the Lenni Lenape, also known as the Delaware Nation (Barret). While this is a real tribe, the principle characters and "historical facts" used by the OA are complete fiction and can be found in the novel *Last of the Mohicans*. However, while the Boy Scouts of America is quite willing to use Native customs and traditions for the advancement of the ideologies taught within the OA, it ignores many of the other meanings and interpretations of the Native customs which it is using.

Many lines can be drawn connecting the Native traditions to Order of the Arrow tradition and ceremony. The incorporation of Native American lore and tradition into the Order of the Arrow can be seen as a direct contradiction of the BSA's hegemonic concept of masculinity. Everything from the conduct, method and logistics of ceremonies to the symbolic nature of their totem, the arrow, nearly all aspects of this organization are influenced through Native culture. This reliance on

Native American culture to inform the Order of the Arrow sets up many interesting reads of OA texts, when informed with some help from Native culture.

Before diving into Native American culture, it is important to establish American culture and society. As our society has evolved over the past centuries, many of the founding principles of Western thought still remain. Our society is based on the philosophical basis of thought that classifies people, things, places, and experiences into dichotomous categories that are assigned values such as good/bad, happy/sad, right/wrong, good/evil, and so forth (Wilson). American society is specifically dichotomous with regard to gender and sexuality; one is either/or, male/female, gay/straight. However, as Tafoya noted, "most Native communities tend not to classify the world into the concrete binary categories of the Western world – good/bad, right/wrong, male/female, gay/straight – but rather into categories that range from appropriateness to inappropriateness, depending on the context of the situation" (2). Therefore, Native American cultures would have a Burkean both/and approach to many of the binaries we see in Western cultures. To extend this idea further, Tafoya continues,

Native American concepts usually prefer circles to lines. If one takes the line of a male/female, gay/straight, and bends it into a circle, there are an infinite number of points. Just so, there are theoretically an infinite number of possible points of gender and sexual identity for an individual that can shift and differ over time and location. (8).



With the Native America emphasis on the concept of the circle, what would otherwise be perceived as opposites or dualities on a linear continuum are thought of as actually existing in a circle, which has no real beginning or end.

One interesting component of the Order of the Arrow ceremony is that it takes place in a circle formation. Additionally, throughout the ceremonies, the circle is referenced several times and regarded as an entity of great symbolic value. In Native American culture, a circle has great significance, which may be contradictory to the way that the Boy Scouts use the circle. In Native tradition, using a circle, or while being inside a circle, it is believed to be more important for a person to look beyond surface value, such as good or bad, in order to seek what is true based on the needs and/or context of the situation (Garrett and Myers). In the Native traditional way, an understanding of the relative nature of opposites facilitates the recognition of meaning and truth, which provides an operational means of "walking in step" with the circle, seeking purpose and direction in life (Garrett and Barret). With the circle as a model, understanding the gay and lesbian experience takes on a different dimension. The terms *gay* and *straight* no longer suggest polar opposites but rather elements of experience that fluctuate and influence each other without being dichotomous (Robinson and Watt).

So, how does this tie into the Order of the Arrow? First, as noted, the Order of the Arrow places a great deal of emphasis on the circle. Each induction ceremony is conducted in a circle. The word "circle" is referenced nearly 100 times throughout the ceremony scripts. This emphasis on circle could lead us to believe that the Order of the Arrow encourages members to adopt the same definition and frame of mind

regarding the circle as Natives once did. Second, once members view circle in Native terms, many lines, including the line between gay and straight becomes much more difficult to distinguish. With this interpretation of circle a polysemic read of this text could include an insinuation to the inclusion of all individuals, regardless of sexuality. Moreover, this could be the start of a more all-encompassing mantra as opposed to their exclusivity, which would hold that all aspects of the human condition exist in a harmonious cycle.

Another aspect of the OA that has been borrowed from Native culture is the reliance on eagle and eagle feathers. These magnificent birds and their feathers, much like the use of circles, is another element of Native American lore utilized by the Boy Scouts and the Order of the Arrow. As noted by Garrett and Barret, the eagle feather, which represents duality, tells the story of life. The eagle feather has both light and dark colors, dualities and opposites. Although an individual could argue which of the two colors that comprise the eagle feather is the most beautiful or most valuable, the truth is that both colors come from the same feather, both are true, both are connected, and it takes both to fly (Garrett). Through the eagle feather, we can see life stories that include the many dualities or opposites that exist in the Circle of Life, such as light and dark, male and female, substance and shadow, summer and winter, life and death, peace and war.

One piece of Native culture and tradition that the BSA, and subsequently the Order of the Arrow ignores is the concept of the Two Spirit person. Native tradition emphasized transformation and change through harmony and balance (Tafoya). Just as the eagle feather is held in many tribal traditions as a sacred symbol of this

process, the Two Spirit was similarly regarded. Two Spirits were acknowledged and given the role of sacred persons who represent transformation and change through harmony and balance. The term "Two Spirit" is not used by all Native cultures (Garrett and Barret), the Two Spirit person is know by different names in different tribal languages: *adanvdo tali* (Cherokee), *tubasa* (Shoshone), *nadleeh* (Navajo), *bote* (Crow), *winkte* (Lakota). Although the words used to describe someone who possesses both male and female spirit differ from nation to nation, the meaning and purpose of such a person historically was very similar across tribes (Hall). Historically, the status of the Two Spirit person was highly valued in Native communities and played a critical role in traditional Native societies (Schnarch). In a traditional Western worldview, men typically see the world from a male perspective, whereas women typically see the world from a female perspective, each perspective respectively defined by the social context of the tribe at any given point in time. On the other hand, Two Spirit people in the Native worldview are believed to possess both male and female spirit, were looked on as having unique abilities to view both male and female perspectives and therefore to be able to see beyond the ordinary boundaries of limited human existence. In other words, as Hall commented,

Because you walk in both worlds. Because you are elements of both male and female – but you're neither. You don't fit in, you're a go-between. And consequently, it's easier for you to transcend from the physical to the spiritual realm. (122).

In many Native traditions, the Two Spirit was looked on as having the ability to walk in two worlds, physical and spiritual, thereby having the ability to move between worlds to learn and teach about balance. As such, Two Spirit people were highly revered as Medicine persons, leaders, and intermediaries. They were an integral part of tribal society just like anyone else and not looked down on as being abnormal in any way. They were seen as an asset to tribal life, not a liability that would erode the community's stability (Garrett and Barret).

### **Two Spirit in Context**

One of the foremost ways in which the Order of the Arrow ceremony scripts express a polysemic read that supports a more complex view of gender and sexuality can be found through the principal character, Meteu. Throughout the ceremonies, Meteu is portrayed both through ceremony script as well as ceremony symbolism as the medicine man and spiritual leader of the lodge. However, throughout the ceremony Meteu is also portrayed as a character that is Two-Spirit, the Native American way of expressing gender and sexual multiplicity, as having both male and female spirit. While there is no direct reference to Two Spirit people in the Order of the Arrow, one does not have to look far to find that there are distinct similarities between Two Spirit people and Meteu. This character Meteu is the token "medicine man" portrayed throughout the ceremonies and it is clear that he is Two Spirit. As noted, Two Spirit people were considered to be spiritual leaders because they possessed both male and female spirits. Throughout the ceremonies, Meteu has an influential role and is the only character that is concerned with the spiritual well being of the other members of the OA. Furthermore, throughout the

ceremony, Meteu offers prayers to the spirits and is responsible for maintaining and “blessing” the fire. Moreover, throughout the ceremonies, each principal character is responsible for one specific challenge to new members. It is no coincidence that Meteu is the principal character that demands all OA members to adhere to the admonition of the organization, to love one another. Meteu’s character implores each of the individual members to love their fellow man and to not judge them because they are all connected in the circle of Brotherhood.

In addition to Meteu’s “medicine man” duties and privileges, he is also responsible for maintaining the circle and the fire (both the fire within the members and the fire in the circle). Meteu is responsible for the maintenance of the circle because of the symbolism behind the circle – being connected to all aspects of life, dualities and the Burkean both/and philosophy. Moreover, often times, Meteu speaks of cycles, for example, he talks about the changing of the seasons;

In this state of bliss so happy, many moons they lived contented. Springtime blossomed into Summer, Summer into Autumn ripened, Autumn died on Winters bosom. Thus the seasons in succession, never ending seem to pass on. (Pre-Ordeal 15)

This circular speaking pattern reinforces the emphasis of Meteu’s Two Spirit persona and encourages us to remember to think of things cyclically instead of linearly. Next, he is also responsible for the fire – which will be discussed in great detail in the coming section. As we will come to find out, the fire represents both a burning desire to love one another, in an all male organization, and that it is the OA’s responsibility to nurture the fire within the members.

Incorporating a Two Spirit character into the ceremonies of the Order of the Arrow indicates a striking example of the ways in which the Order of the Arrow subverts the Boy Scouts of America's hegemonically masculine ideology. To add further color to this pattern, local leaders of the Order of the Arrow may view Meteu in the same light as I have described. Several years ago, when I was an active member of the OA, I was chosen to portray Meteu in the ceremony scripts. While this could be passed off as simple coincidence, it is a little too much to completely write off the twist of fate that would allow a gay member of the Order of the Arrow to portray a Two Spirit character. Even my given Order of the Arrow name, Williset Takachsin meaning Spiritual Leader, hints at a Two Person persona, noting the emphasis on spirits. These examples could even point toward one of Morris's winks in that the person who chose me to portray Meteu and to give me my name might have been aware of the subliminal messages contained within the OA scripts and the lessons we learned from Native Americans.

### **Native Traditions and the OA meet**

Another interesting component of the Order of the Arrow that was borrowed from Native culture and tradition is the ceremonial regalia of members and participants. While all members who are not actively participating in the ceremony, i.e. only watching the ceremony, are required to wear a full Boy Scout uniform, all members actively participating in the ceremony, i.e. ceremonialists, drum team, trail Indians, etc., are required to be in Native regalia. The regalia worn by ceremonialists differ based upon the importance of the role that each individual holds. For example, the four principal characters, Allowat Sakima, Meteu, Nuitkaet, and Kitchkenet, are

fully dressed from head to toe. Typical regalia for these characters include leggings (Native equivalent of pants), loincloth, shirt, vest, moccasins, head dress (type and style of head dress varies among the lodges, most typical include regional animal furs like coyote, fox, beaver, and occasional buffalo and feather war bonnets typically comprised of faux eagle feathers) and various accessories such as medicine bags, chokers, breast plates, bracelets etc. However, from that point, clothing and accessories diminish. A typical head trail Indian and head drummer would wear leggings, loincloth, vest, moccasins, one accessory and maybe a less flashy head-dress such as a roach. From there, trail Indians would most likely wear a loincloth and moccasins. Loincloths are the most traditional and interesting regalia item, as well as the most homoerotic when it is the sole item of clothing an individual wears for an all-male outing in the woods. The loincloth is a single piece of cloth about four feet long, 12-16 inches wide and is worn in conjunction with a leather belt or piece of rope made with natural materials. The belt is cinched around the waist and the loincloth is threaded between the belt and the skin from front to back making a loop that covers the loins of the individual. You might be asking yourself questions about this loincloth like. *“Is this the only thing that a young man would be wearing during the ceremony? How does the loincloth stay up when you are walking? What if it rains?”* All of these are valid questions, which will be addressed. First, yes, this loincloth is the only piece of clothing that a young man wears while roping around the forest with other similarly dressed young men, which is an awkward sight, considering the BSA’s ideologies, especially in reference to homosexuality. During these ceremonies, a lot of walking, and at various times, running and standing is also required, which

results in a large number of wardrobe malfunctions throughout the ceremonies. There is a lot of variation throughout these wardrobe malfunctions, which result in different situations. For example, if a trail Indian is running, it is highly likely that the belt or rope holding his loincloth could come loose and eventually completely falls off, resulting in full nudity, except for moccasins. Next when walking great distances the loincloths are likely to loosen with an excess of fabric collecting in the under section of the loincloth, which results in the “peaking” or “popping out” of certain parts of the male anatomy. Finally rain; this is perhaps one of the most devastating scenarios for loincloth malfunction. First the rain makes the loincloth heavier, second the water is likely to reduce the belt’s friction and hold against the skin, this combination results in a larger number of naked trail Indians, finally, rain against uncovered skin lowers body temperature and induces shivering, in an attempt to get warmer the trail Indians congregate in close circles to conserve body heat, resulting in very homoerotic image, naked men, dripping wet, huddling close to each other.

Not only is the image of a young man wearing a loincloth and romping around the forest a very homoerotic image, as well as the very interesting wardrobe malfunctions that occur, the “dressing room” is also a source of homosexual desires and erotic fantasy. Since these ceremonies are performed at Boy Scout camps across the country, no formal dressing rooms exist. Many dressing rooms are semi-permanent buildings on camp property that double as a storage place for ceremony costuming and props and as a dressing room. Therefore, the dressing room is usually one very large space where everyone drops their drawers and gets naked.



This process is often accompanied with gay themed humor that would put any fraternity or locker room hazing ritual to shame. The dressing ritual is a no-holds-barred, free-for-all that incorporates a wide variety of performances including songs, talk of masturbation, "helicoptering" (an activity where a male stands naked, while swiveling his hips in circular motion in an attempt to make his penis rotate, emulating the blades of a helicopter), towel and belt snapping, throwing one's underwear into another individual's face, sex noises, and faux humping.

Once everyone has been properly dressed, other rituals and games begin. Many of the principals don face paint, as it is the only part of their body not covered by clothing or accessories, while trail Indians receive body paint, which is applied with fingers. Usually and as part of tradition (depending on the lodge) there is a large likelihood that at some point throughout the painting process one or two individuals will have images of penises, testicles, and semen painted somewhere on their bodies. Additionally, during the painting process various "flashing" games occur. These games incorporate everything from holding the front of one's loincloth up as to expose his genitalia and yelling at everyone to look, to grabbing (or pretending to grab) other individuals' genitalia in an attempt to make them uncomfortable. Furthermore, as you might expect in a situation where there is no genital support (i.e. underwear) erections happen and are enthusiastically pointed out.

### **Polysemy and Metaphors**

The symbolism contained within the text of the Order of the Arrow ceremony scripts suggest that the OA be read as friendly to homosexual members (or at least

to homoeroticism) and encourages members that may be in the closet to come out to his family or a small group of friends (or brothers) or to help those that are already out feel more comfortable in the organization. Using the principal character Meteu as a model, the homosexual undertones of the Order of the Arrow scripts become obvious. Using the conception of polysemy, its ideas will inform the critical interpretation of the texts that I have collected for this thesis, thereby allow alternative views of dominant culture to be expressed through various phrases within the scripts to show how the Order of the Arrow may be read as supporting homosexuality, or at the very least subversive to dominant hegemonic masculinity.

Before addressing some of the examples of polysemy in the ceremony scripts, it is important to outline some of the key ideas and terms contained within the text. First, the Order of the Arrow is also referred to as the "Brotherhood of Cheerful Service," which primarily establishes this organization as a male-centered organization whose focus is on happily performing community service. This Brotherhood of Cheerful Service is the embodiment of the Scout Oath and Scout Law, since only Scouts who exemplify the Oath and Law in their daily lives can become part of the brotherhood. Second, two reoccurring words within the texts, "fire" and "circle" also become very interesting when viewed through a critical lens as they establish both an atmosphere of intriguing mystery within the ceremonies and a sense of subliminal homosexual messages. Fire, both the symbol and the referent becomes very interesting when described as being a metaphor for burning desire or raging passion to love their fellow man. Several times throughout the ceremony scripts, fire is explained as this burning desire that is a spark, ready to

erupt like a volcano from each of the members, but it is the Order of the Arrow's purpose to nurture that spark so that it becomes a fire. To emphasize this point more, principal character Nutiket explains:

Seek the fire at the center! Kindle cheerfulness within you! Gather round your hearts the tinder, lay the oak and pine together, kindle all that is within you with a warm and cheerful spirit. The spark is there, already glowing, fan it now, feed it, till it is a fire. (Pre-Ordeal 5).

This passage describes, in great detail, a number of polysemous messages. First, the emphasis on cheerfulness, as described earlier, cheerfulness can be attributed to mean being merry or gay – in the joyous definition of the term – definitely not a very masculine trait or definition of fire. Next, laying oak and pine together, two distinctly different types of wood – oak is often described as a very hard wood, while pine is often described as a very soft wood – this duality points us to believe that the Order of the Arrow is, in fact, referencing the Native American “circle” thinking, or a Burkean both/and philosophy, thus polysemously lending itself to include all types of masculinity, not simply the BSA's hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, to connect this even further to the subversion of the BSA's hegemonic masculinity, Meteu, the token Two Spirit principal in the ceremonies is responsible for both the circle and maintaining the fire, both within the hearts and minds of the members and the ceremonial fire. Third, the admonition of the Order of the Arrow – the sacred password and rule for life – ahoalton, which translates as “to love one another,” is a captivating rule for boys to live by, especially in an all male organization. Finally, part of the namesake of the organization, arrow can be seen in a variety of

perspectives, from symbolizing members of the organization, to the ubiquitous phallic sign in an all male organization.

The final example of polysemy in the Order of the Arrow scripts comes in the form of viewing all of the messages in the scripts as being a way for helping gay scouts realize their situation, and that it is alright for them to come out of the closet because this is an accepting environment. This section analyzes the scripts from the three honor levels and illustrates the ways in which this text could be interpreted to be a ceremony that acknowledges that there are other forms of masculinity in the Boy Scouts of America and offers a safe haven, the Order of the Arrow, for these Scouts. In the coming pages, I will illustrate the ways in which the text in the scripts could be interpreted as pertaining to a homosexual lifestyle, and as serving new candidates who are afraid to come out of the closet because they are afraid they will be disowned by their families, friends and the Boy Scouts of America.

### **Polysemy in the Ceremony Text**

Starting in the very beginning, with the “pre-ordeal” ceremony – the ceremony that is the introduction to the Order of the Arrow and the principal characters, we find our Two Spirit principal, Meteu speaking the first lines:

Brothers, some have been found who are willing to spend themselves in serving others. Yet they have not felt the fire, they have not heard the Admonition, they have not seen the Arrow. They must be willing to go upon a journey, and it is only right for us to stand by them through their ordeals until they enter into the bond of Brotherhood. (Pre-Ordeal 4)

This passage sets the tone for the remainder of the ceremony experience. Looking at these lines, it is clear that a polysemous read of Meteu's words undoubtedly refer to homosexuality, as I will explain. First, Meteu is speaking to his fellow principals as well as observers in the circle. He addresses them as "brothers," as they are already members of this organization. The phrase "spend themselves in serving others" may serve as a metaphor for a homosexual lifestyle, as both service to others and being gay are hard lives to lead; ones full of sacrifice and ridicule. Meteu continues to hint at some of the challenges that candidates will have to pass through in the near future. However, he calls this experience a journey. This journey represents the long and toilsome road that the new candidates will be taking, because it is never an easy process to come out of the closet. Despite this long and toilsome journey, as the sole Two Spirit principle, it is fitting that Meteu provides some hope and assistance for their journey when he states that "it is only right for us to stand by them through their ordeals until they enter into the bond of Brotherhood." Finally, the "bond of Brotherhood" that Meteu refers to is the Order of the Arrow, which is a safe haven for queer and questioning Scouts.

Following Meteu, Nutiket echoes the sentiment of Meteu's words:

You now are starting on a long and toilsome journey. But before you undertake it you must Be Prepared Completely... You were sent to seek a vision of yourselves, and of your purpose... but the trail that you have followed becomes rougher, steeper, fainter: you will need a brighter fire.

(Pre-Ordeal 5)

Like Meteu, Nutiket reaffirms to the candidates that this is a difficult road to take and he sets up that it will not be easy, therefore the candidates must prepare themselves for the coming trial. In the second part of his speech, he talks about a vision, this connotes that the candidates are here to discover and accept who they are and their true selves, and what it means to be straight, queer, or questioning in America. Finally, he makes another reference to the trip to self-discovery and that it is not an easy road to take, in fact it becomes more difficult with each passing moment. However, they will find refuge and solace in the fire (burning desire) inside them that needs to burn brighter than ever before.

After Nutiket finishes his monologue, Meteu once again speaks to the candidates, however this time, he is more descriptive and vivid in his words. While speaking in lyrical verse, some gay or questioning candidate might read his speech to be about his life being a gay member of the Order:

Listen to these admonitions for your guidance on your journey! I, Meteu, heard this message whispered on the western mountains where the sun from eve to morning never sets, while all beneath me as I climbed and then stood listening slept in darkness, slept in shadow. You need seek no rocky summit: these high places are within you. All the natural world around you shows you clearly your reflection. This ordeal is but a pattern for a journey whose directions are the whispers, urgings, promptings deep within your hearts and spirits. Therefore, from this moment onward, till you take the Obligation strictly keep a pledge of silence. Hours spent in thoughtful silence help us make the right decisions more than days and days of talking, help us feel the

cords of sunlight tying all the world together. Soon you will be bound as brothers in this great and honored Order, but only if you are determined to fulfill its obligations out of love for one another. (Pre-Ordeal 6).

This is a lengthy passage, but crucial to the explanation of the Order of the Arrow and the purpose for the candidates to be there. First, Meteu enlightens the candidates and requests that they listen to his “admonitions” for direction throughout this quest. (It is no coincidence that the script uses the word admonitions here, because if you recall, the admonition is to love one another, which becomes evident later in the scripts. Meteu is previewing the importance of loving and relying on your brothers for help along the difficult path ahead – perhaps the path of coming out.) Next, Meteu recounts his journey to self-discovery and his Two Spirit persona; this can be read as a quintessential coming out story that he tells to the candidates so that they can relate to the experience and therefore be assisted by his experience. He explains how he was alone and in the closet (slept in darkness, slept in shadow). Meteu then speaks words of encouragement to the candidates, that they do not need to struggle the same way Meteu struggled, all they need to do is look inward and discover who they are. This journey is a pattern that has been completed by other individuals before them. The candidates simply need to listen to their hearts and spirits for guidance. He then implores that they come out of the darkness (closet) and into the sun because soon they will realize that their struggle is shared by their brothers. Finally, Meteu concludes by telling the candidates that we all know the pressure of secrets and what it is like to be living a

secret, therefore, let go of your secrets and be free; your brothers are here to help you.

Next, Allowat Sakima addresses the sublime nature of this ordeal in a short quip:

If you decide to stop and go no further now, you may withdraw without discredit. He who follows such a pathway in unwavering cheerful service will be seen by many others and, by inspiration, lead them. (Pre-Ordeal 7).

This small line reiterates that this is not an easy path to take in life, in fact it would be much easier if everyone were straight and if a candidate no longer wishes to come out of the closet or remain hidden, then he can withdraw from this journey without fear of retribution. However, candidates that have accepted themselves and the lifestyle that accompanies homosexuality, their example will be an inspiration to all other individuals in a similar circumstance. The candidates will be able to help future members along their journey, as the principals are helping with the current candidates.

Finally, Kichkinet, the last of the four principals, speaks to the candidates about the world outside the Order of the Arrow:

I bid you, leave all daily cares behind you, leave the crowd and its opinions...  
It is not an easy journey. Sometimes even friends will mock you, tempt you to betray your resolve. All the world may seem against you and the path seem dark and lonely. All your strength will be required when you face isolation...  
with the gladness of a dawning, of a springtime, of beginning. This ordeal is



but a shadow of the rigors of the journey, but its joys also are shadows of the brighter, greater beauty in a life of cheerful service. (Pre-Ordeal 9)

Gay candidates may read Kichkinet as beseeching them to forget the outside world, and opinions, jokes and anti-gay sentiment while going through this ordeal. He cautions that the people closest to the candidates will mock them and make fun of them in an attempt to make the candidate question his choices. Gay candidates could also perceive Kichkinet's speech as discussing the way in which homosexuality is perceived in American culture, that it is ridiculed, and can be lonely, therefore candidates are required to build up passion and resolve to conquer homophobia. Once this ordeal is over, and the candidates are full members of the OA, they are able to lead their lives true to themselves; it is like a new life for them; a new beginning, a rebirth that will bring them great joy. The subversive nature of the text allows these new members who are gay to see a place for themselves in the organization, despite the promotion of hyper-masculinity.

The Pre-Ordeal ceremony is an introduction to the Order of the Arrow and it also serves as a way to warn candidates of the coming trials and hardships that they might encounter through their coming out process. Additionally, it sets up outlets for guidance and assistance through the principal characters while reassuring the candidates that while this is a difficult process, there are many benefits once completed. Next, the Ordeal ceremony is the follow up and full induction ceremony where membership rites are conducted. This part of the ceremony explains in more detail the process and purpose of the Order of the Arrow.

Throughout the Ordeal ceremony, the principals once again address the candidates in a manner that reflects their purpose, assisting with their coming out process. The Ordeal ceremony is a great deal longer and has an excess of verbosity; therefore, I will be discussing some of the major elements of this ceremony. In addition to critiquing the words spoken by the principals, I will also critique the accompanying performance of the ceremony. In the early stages of the ceremony, Kichkinet leads the candidates around the circle while answering challenges from the remaining three principals. The candidates are first stopped by Nutiket, followed by Meteu, and finally by Allowat Sakima. Meteu's challenge for the candidates tests their knowledge of the Admonition, which is given by Kichkinet. The ceremony script calls for Kichkinet to lean over to Meteu's ear and whisper the Admonition, Ahoalton. When Kichkinet leans over to whisper the Admonition, instead of saying "Ahoalton" Kichkinet would usually say something like "balls, cock, you've got a tight ass, etc." in an attempt to make Meteu laugh. Meteu would respond in kind and whisper into Kichkinet's ear in an attempt to achieve a laugh or smirk. Once all of the principals had their opportunity to challenge the candidates, Allowat Sakima would tell Kichkinet to "place the candidates in proper position to receive further knowledge." This line spoken by Allowat usually elicits slight chuckles and smirks from the other principals because of allusions to the film *Animal House*. Additionally, while practicing for the ceremony, the "position to receive further knowledge" is a position where an individual bends over and grabs their ankles, immediately eliciting rampant laughter from observers and coaches. In addition to the performance of some of these lines, there are also a number of references that

support the arguments made throughout the pre-ordeal ceremony. The process is still referred to as a long and toilsome journey, Meteu continues to serve as the medicine man and spiritual leader and the four principals remain to aid and assist new candidates through membership.

Finally, the Brotherhood ceremony is the source of greater references to homosexuality in both text and performance. First, just like the Pre-Ordeal, Meteu challenges the candidates to live up to the ideals contained within the Admonition – to love one another. Second, in the Brotherhood ceremony, Meteu is responsible for challenging these candidates to test to see if they know the hailing sign of the order. This hailing sign goes further than a secret handshake and could be considered an example of Morris's winks. This sign is used to identify members that have achieved brotherhood membership within the order. Additionally, it seems only fitting that Meteu is the one who challenges the candidates to reveal this secret sign. Next, during one of Meteu's prayers, hints of unconditional acceptance in the OA arise: "Thus to keep you true and faithful to yourselves and to your brothers, in this world of men around you" (Brotherhood Ceremony 9). This line reveals to the candidates that they should be comfortable to be themselves in the Order of the Arrow because we welcome all individuals. Furthermore, it describes a world of *men* that we need to be faithful to which could be indicative of homosexuality to some.

After the traditional greetings and challenges that have been relived from the Ordeal ceremony, the Brotherhood ceremony takes another step toward referencing homosexuality that has not been seen before. These references are in the form of the challenges of the Brotherhood. The first challenge of the Brotherhood is in the form

of a blood ceremony. Each candidate, as well as principal character, has blood symbolically drawn from his hand. Once again, adding to Meteu's mystery, he is the principal responsible for "slicing" everyone's hand so that we may perform a blood ceremony, which is described by Allowat Sakima:

You who choose to proceed will present your left hand to Meteu who will draw blood so that you may mingle your blood with that of your brothers thus sealing the bond. (Brotherhood Ceremony 9.)

This blood ceremony is a very homoerotic procedure, mixing your blood with the blood of another man could symbolize an intimate union among these individuals, reminiscent of the same rules and functions of a marriage. Moreover, through the ceremony, Meteu even states that: "the mingling of the blood signifies the joining of your life to that of your brothers in this Order." (Brotherhood Ceremony 12) which further substantiates the idea that there is a deep intimate and emotional bond shared by the members of this all male organization.

The next challenge is in the form of building upon the "fire of cheerfulness" – or as discussed earlier in this chapter, building on the burning passion for our fellow man. Adding a stick to the fire symbolizes a commitment to advance the ideologies and purposes of the Order of the Arrow and to continue to help other individuals with their respective coming out process. Finally, the last challenge that is required of Brotherhood candidates is in the form of the "heavy burden" as explained by Allowat Sakima:

Having proved that you can suffer cheerfully you will now arrange yourselves in two lines facing each other. The first one on my left will advance and take from the shoulders of Meteu the heavy burden that he is bearing. You will return with it to your place. Then the first one on my right will advance and take it and bear it until it is taken by the second one on the left. (Brotherhood Ceremony 9)

This final challenge, the coupe de grace of the Brotherhood ceremony is this “heavy burden.” The carrying of a heavy burden throughout the Boy Scouts could be seen as referencing the burden that all queer or questioning Scouts bear due to their sexuality and the BSA’s policy therein. Here, throughout the Brotherhood ceremony, that burden is shared among all of the members of the Order of the Arrow. One burden is passed on through the other until the burden is released. This burden serves as a metaphor for much of the suffering a gay Scout may be experiencing, the pain of rejection from an organization that he cares for, the worry of being outed, the concern that he has for his brothers that are in similar situations. Therefore, through this ceremony, candidates learn to ease the burdens of their brothers and to understand what it is like to be in someone else’s position. As an added symbolic bonus, the “heavy burden” starts with Meteu, who as previously discussed was the first one in this ceremony to experience the pain and “burden” of being Two Spirit or gay. This adds to the overall message of these ceremonies in that while there are no obvious or outward demonstrations of homosexuality, there are several winks of subversion and hints of transgression from traditional BSA policy.

**4<sup>th</sup> persona**

Through these performances it is clear to see that the Order of the Arrow ceremonies are a place where examples of Morris' fourth persona winks would thrive. Morris argues that members of an oppressed group are constituted through signs and signals, which he refers to as "winks." These "winks" exist as a way to communicate with other members of the oppressed group without alerting their existence to the dominant group. (Morris). Through these "winks," gay or bisexual Boy Scouts are able to quintessentially identify each other and hide in plain sight. Through the various performance expressions, ritualized bonding activities, and subliminal hints of homosexualized behaviors, boys that like boys enjoyed the "embarrassing" fraternity-style hazing.

In addition to the fraternity-style hazing and various attempts to embarrass each other through "flashing" each other, we also incorporated various components into our costumes. Through the use of our costuming and regalia, gay Boy Scouts could express "winks" to other "in the know" scouts without alerting non-group members. Incorporating various components to our costumes, we are able to send messages about ourselves to other Scouts portraying characters. Some examples of the items that we would incorporate into our costumes would be traditionally female moccasins (knee high) incorporating various bracelets, and other accessories into our regalia. Including these items into our regalia alerted other in-group members, which serves as examples of Morris' winks. These winks were especially beneficial to gay Boy Scouts and prevalent throughout larger gatherings of OA members such as Conclaves and the National Order of the Arrow Conference (NOAC). While attending a Conclave or NOAC, ceremony teams are able to compete

against each other for awards. At the various competitions that are available, gay Boy Scouts that display winks could covertly pass in the vastly heterosexual environment and connect with each other.

### **Conclusion**

The Boy Scouts of America attempts to put solid and unmovable constraints upon the ways in which its texts and ideologies are interpreted. Using the Scout Oath and Law as the fundamental pillars of the organization and the pulpit from which to establish ideas of masculinity, the BSA must rely on the right interpretation of these texts. However, as described throughout this chapter, the BSA does not necessarily always have complete control over the interpretation of their texts, in fact, many of the items, words, and actions contained within the texts are anything but conforming to hegemonic masculinity. Through the various interpretations of the Scout Oath and Law it is easy to see how dogmatic the BSA's ideologies can become. Whereas looking at the metaphors and polysemic views of the ceremony scripts of the Order of the Arrow provides some ideas of how gay Boy Scouts survive in an organization that bans homosexuality. Furthermore, looking at the OA, we can see several of Morris's winks when describing the performance of these ceremonies. Finally, the main purpose of this chapter was to expose the flaws in the BSA's logic that there could only be one type of masculinity, one type of Boy Scout, and one interpretation for their texts. Viewing the polysemous nature of these texts will hopefully provide arguments for repeal of the Boy Scouts of America's ban on homosexuality.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Visual Texts:**

#### **Rockwell and Rainbows**



Throughout this chapter I will be critiquing various visual texts of the Boy Scouts of America. Much like the preceding chapter, I will be posing a juxtaposition of the BSA's visual texts in an attempt to demonstrate the polysemic nature of their texts. Most of the images and visual texts that I will be describing would fall under the category art. Visual images are a form of rhetoric. Burke views symbolicity as encompassing not only talk, but "all other human symbol systems, such as mathematics, music, sculpture, painting, dance, architectural styles, and so on" (Burke 28) A work of art can be seen as representing the intentionality of its creator in that the creator's intention or purpose exists only in terms of the formal matter of the work. Visual works of art, then, may be considered rhetoric in that they produce effects and are intentional and purposive objects (Foss). I will start with paintings by Norman Rockwell depicting Boy Scouts throughout various functions and activities, followed by a critique of the Boy Scout uniform, and concluding with a few insignia of the Boy Scouts of America.

### **Rockwell and Visual Rhetoric**

Norman Rockwell's paintings and illustrations are unquestionably the some of the most well known American art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He was famous for the candor and level of reality with which he depicted everyday life in America. Most Americans can recognize Rockwell's illustrations and are able to associate his name with the very popular *Saturday Evening Post* covers that many of his paintings were chosen to adorn. However, before the *Post* employed him, the BSA offered him a job as the illustrator for the Boy Scouts of America's magazine, *Boy's Life* (Hillcourt).

After a few years working for the BSA he was later promoted to serve as *Boy's Life's* Art Director. Therefore, it is easy to see the great influence the BSA had on Rockwell's art and the deep passion he had for the organization that is visible in nearly all of his illustrations.

Norman Rockwell, referred to by many as "the people's painter" (Moffatt) has produced many popular Boy Scout themed paintings over the course of his illustrious painting career. The bulk of Rockwell's pictures revealed an idyllic America of wholesome holiday celebrations, sporting events, and family gatherings. As Laurie Norton Moffatt puts it, Rockwell appeared to share with the publishers of the *Saturday Evening Post* a "morality based on popular values and patriotism, a morality that yearns above all for goodness to trump evil" (26).

In many council offices across the United States, chances are there is a Norman Rockwell print hanging in the executive offices. Even the offices at my summer camp proudly displayed some of Rockwell's greatest works including "The Scoutmaster" (1956), the "Liberty Loan Campaign" (*Weapons for Liberty* and the March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1918 cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*), and "A Scout is Helpful"(1941).

As Hariman and Lucaites argue about the visualizing power of iconic photography,

since the public is a body of strangers constituted solely by the acts of being addressed and paying attention, it can only acquire self-awareness and historical agency if individual auditors see themselves in the collective representations that are the material of public culture. (365)

Susanne Langer continues to explain the crucial role of paintings and sculpture: “It is only when an object exists in our lives for no other purpose than to be seen that we really look at it” (31). Much the same, Hariman and Lucaites point out that visual images: “continually interpellate audiences and typically model preferred norms of response ... [and] can structure consciousness in ways that are not reducible to determinations of influence” (364). Finally, a central function of pictorial rhetoric is the evocation of humanity by moving beyond abstract or idealistic categories to depictions of social experience that are recognizable to common audiences and that add moral import to the decisions or developments before them (Gallager and Zagacki). As Warner concludes “It is hard to imagine such abstract modes of being as rights-bearing personhood, species being, and sexuality, for example, without forms that give concrete shape to the interactivity of those who have no idea with whom they interact” (57).

Hariman and Lucaites add:

Concepts such as citizenship, emotions such as love of country, acts such as public advocacy, and practices such as critical reflection can only be taken up by others if they also provide some basis for identification, some grounding in the positive content of lived experience. The abstract forms of civic life have to be filled in with vernacular signs of social membership (356)

Certainly, a large body of patriotic American painting and sculpture operated rhetorically in this fashion. Rockwell’s portrayals of the Boy Scouts of America affirm the values, morals, and beliefs of the BSA while protecting and maintaining its “image”.

Rockwell's paintings certainly elicit strong emotional responses, but unlike the flag raising at Iwo Jima photograph, these emotions, for the most part, are specified: We see boy's faces and we see them in their human particularity – we view them being brave, reverent, patriotic, courageous, and helpful in a visual form that is difficult to deny; living up to their calling and characteristics of being a Boy Scout. As a result, rather than having a “lack of topical definition and a corresponding open emotionality that facilitate the metaphoric carryover from the specific historical moment to civic life in general” (Hariman and Lucaites 381), these images are more topically and contextually bound. Yet because of this, they carry powerful ideological and perhaps even commemorative potential, as if the images are frozen in time and yet begging for present viewers to determine the patriotism, bravery, courage, and loyalty of the Boy Scouts in these paintings. Therefore, whether visual images are part of the discourses of the Scouting movement or of its commemoration, emblazoned on a post card or on a coffee mug, they are pedagogical tools. They communicate to the viewer, in the language of art, the qualities, the pleasures or pain, the duties, the kind of past, present, and/or future that is or that is desired of the Boy Scouts of America (Gallager and Zagacki).

This pedagogical character of visual images leads to a final means of considering their rhetorical potential. Gallger and Zagacki comment:

In museums like the Smithsonian and the Norman Rockwell Museum, the epideictic role of visual images like the Rockwell paintings functions to praise those who continue to work on behalf of the values they make visible and blame those who do not. (195)

In several of Rockwell's paintings, we see courageous and patriotic Boy Scouts. These paintings serve as a way to identify and celebrate these Scouts as well as the organization that is responsible for creating such honorable men. Over the next several pages, I will describe three of Rockwell's paintings, "The Scoutmaster," "Our Heritage," and "A Scout is Helpful." Through these paintings we see the ways in which the Boy Scouts of America not only influenced Rockwell, but the way in which the two entities (the BSA and Rockwell) co-construct the image of the ideal Boy Scout, the activities that an ideal Boy Scout participates in, and the manner in which an ideal Boy Scout should look.

### **Crafting an Image for the Ideal Boy Scout**

The first of Norman Rockwell's paintings that I will analyze is one completed in 1956, "The Scoutmaster." This painting epitomizes the ideals of masculinity, strength, frontiersmanship, and doing things outdoors that the Boy Scouts of America so greatly cherish. This painting started in 1953, when Rockwell visited the Third National Jamboree of the Boy Scouts of American at Irvine Ranch in California (Hillcourt). Rockwell wanted to celebrate who he thought was the most important adult leader in Scouting, the Scoutmaster. He arranged for a troop to put up an idealized campsite as a model for the background of the painting. This painting has become one of the most popular and inspiring of all the Rockwell Scout paintings. Prints of "The Scoutmaster" can be found in many Scouting offices across the country, including the office at my summer camp. The painting features what Scouts would call a typical overnight campout, complete with a Scoutmaster, campfire with

matching tripod for cooking, and tents full of young boys asleep in the background under a clear and starry night.

As its namesake suggests the primary focus of this painting is on the Scoutmaster himself. The Scoutmaster is portrayed as the epitome of a masculine and physically fit Boy Scout. He stands casually erect beside the campfire in the left half of the painting, taking up the majority of that half of the painting, denoting the importance of his position and his gender. As he is standing, he places his right hand on his right hip, while holding a large stick in his left hand. The purpose of this stick is unclear; it could be a stick used to tend to the smoldering campfire or to be used as a weapon for fending off a wild animal that wanders too close to the sleeping boys. Additionally, he is standing as an ever-alert sentinel, keeping watch and guarding the sleeping boys, ready at any moment to protect his slumbering troop. His gaze is fixed upon an unseen object, presumably benign, due to his relaxed posture. Although it is nighttime, he maintains proper uniforming regulations, as he is in uniform, complete with neckerchief and matching belt. He stands as a pillar of Scouting ideology: master and protector, ever vigilant and always prepared.

The other aspects of the painting give the Scoutmaster purpose. The sleeping Scouts in the background are the sole reason for his existence; without the Scouts, he would not be the subject of this painting. The Scouts are tucked away into their sleeping bags and nestled into the reassuring shelter of their tents, seemingly slumbering solemnly as the night passes without incident. Next, the campfire has been reduced to small burning embers with a small stream of smoke curling upward. The fire's flame is low, so as not to disturb the slumbering boys, yet burns

hot enough to heat a pot that has been suspended above the embers by a tripod. We also see a medium sized camp coffee pot sitting on a stump next to the fire, far enough away as to indicate that it is not in use, yet contained in the picture because of its regular use on a Boy Scout overnight camping excursion.

Holistically, the painting represents an image of a typical camping trip in the great outdoors. There are very few objects in this campsite that are man-made. The Scouts found rocks to make a fire ring, sticks to build (and lash) a tripod, as well as the use of sticks for tent poles. The scene is very tranquil, serene, and almost dreamlike. Observers of this painting are invited into the campsite. You can feel the cool, crisp touch of a summer night; you can smell the smoky aroma of the campfire ever so slightly burning throughout the night. While viewing this painting an observer could expect at any moment to hear a cricket's chirp or a coyote's howl, thus completing the camping experience. This painting resonates in the hearts, minds, and memories of Scouts across the country; almost every Scout would be able to recall camping trips such as this – an experience and memory that would last throughout their lives.

This painting effectively constructs a typical Boy Scout camping experience – the masculine ritual of sleeping outside, under the stars, cooking food over a burning fire, an idealized man protecting his boys. There is no wonder why this particular painting has become one of the most popular and reproduced illustration featuring the Boy Scouts of America. One interesting thing about the history of this painting is that the Boy Scouts of America required Rockwell to change certain aspects after it was finished. The problem that the BSA had with Rockwell's original

painting was with the tents that were used in the model campsite – Army surplus “pup” tents. Therefore, in order to appease the BSA, Rockwell painted a low sidewall and guy ropes on the tents in an attempt to make them look more like official BSA wall tents (Hillcourt). This small example of the rigidity that the BSA attempts to be portrayed speaks largely of its unmovable ideologies – if it demands that Rockwell change a finished illustration to correct a minor change, to what other lengths is it willing to go to protect its image?

The second of Rockwell’s paintings that I will analyze was completed in 1950 and entitled “Our Heritage.” Although this painting is not as famous as the aforementioned “Scoutmaster,” it has a certain powerful aspect that speaks to the ideologies and values of the Boy Scouts of America. This particular painting features two young Scouts in the foreground looking at a painting of George Washington praying at Valley Forge, PA. Additionally, through this illustration, Rockwell combined a Scout’s duty to God and duty to country in a single picture – a kneeling George Washington and two Scouts reflecting on American History.

There are many messages that Rockwell and the BSA communicate about the organization through this painting: an emphasis on religion and patriotism, as well as demonstrating Scouts participating in those actions. First, the two Scouts are the obvious main subjects of this painting, as they are standing in front of an illustration of George Washington. Second, they are also more vibrantly colored than the painting of Washington in the background, illustrated with duller colors and an illusion of fog. This immediately places an emphasis on the Scouts and diverts attention from the background. Also, we notice that Rockwell emphasizes the Scouts



instead of Washington to inform viewers that this painting highlights Scouting first, religion and patriotism second. Next, we see that the two Scouts depicted are in full and complete uniform, demonstrating the expected dress code for Scouts.

The next thing we notice about the two Scouts is that the younger scout is holding a book entitled "American History" by Howard E. Wilson and Wallace E. Lamb. The book that the two Scouts are holding is an actual reference book on American History and its author, Howard E. Wilson conducted research on the Boy Scouts of America. Howard's research concluded that young boys involved in the Boy Scouts of America performed better in the classroom than non-Scouts (Wilson). This inclusion of a text book authored by a reputable academic that favors the Boy Scouts of America is no accident, Rockwell and the BSA ensures that every small artifact in this painting affirms the message of the Boy Scouts and supports individuals that support the organization. Next, the Scouts look solemnly at the painting of Washington, as if to establish a sense of honor and loyalty, almost as if they are pondering what they would do in a similar situation.

Similarly to the two Scouts, the painting of George Washington is pensive and solemn. He is kneeling in the fog at Valley Forge, his face frozen in a meditative position indicative of a man with the weight of the New World on his shoulders. His hands are placed together, inches from his face, with his elbows resting on his knees. In the lower left corner of the painting, we can see Washington's sword lying on the ground. Washington's sword represents his power as a military general, the sum of his collected victories, triumphs, and pride rests within the hilt and blade of that sword. Through laying his sword on the ground while praying, Washington is

offering his pride, triumphs, and victories to God, surrendering the fate of this battle, and his men, up to God.

In this painting we see two great American icons, the Boy Scouts of America and George Washington. While the Scouts are in the foreground and Washington is in the background, the two images come together to express a sense of patriotism and reverence that could not have been described in any other manner. Here we see an American giant, the Father of our country, and perhaps one of its greatest stewards honoring God and asking for His help in the coming battle. This painting effectively portrays two ideologies held highly by the BSA, a duty to God and a duty to Country. Washington is expressing both of those ideologies while the Scouts are reflecting on his determination and sacrifice. Additionally, there was an extra significance to this painting – in 1950 more than 50 thousand Boy Scouts took part in the Second National Boy Scout Jamboree at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where Washington had allegedly prayed during the dark days of the winter of 1777-1778 (Hillcourt).

The final Rockwell painting that I have chosen to analyze in this chapter was completed in 1941 entitled “A Scout is Helpful.” This painting is the quintessential Boy Scout, strong, masculine, helpful, brave, self-sacrificing, and physically fit. Rockwell was inspired by the 1938 hurricane that struck New England. His original idea was to show a Scout in the midst of the hurricane’s fury helping to secure windows, and other tasks and duties that were required. However, then Chief Scout Executive Jim West insisted on a perfect uniform (Hillcourt) (apparently the weather would have made it impossible for the Scout to wear campaign hat and

neckerchief). Therefore, Rockwell decided to depict a Scout saving a little girl by carrying her through a placid flood instead of through raging waters with his uniform unkempt.

Although this painting may not be the most popular or well known to Boy Scouts, a number of Rockwell art critics and scholars have chosen to print this particular painting in their publications over other similar Scouting pictures (see Hennessey and Knutson; Hillcourt; Rosen). "A Scout is Helpful" is a very powerful and emotional painting. Upon seeing this painting a large amount of pride and honor would well up inside of any Boy Scout. Unlike the other two paintings that had a clear foreground with a busy background that added meaning and value to the subject of the foreground, it is clear that Rockwell (as well as Chief Scout Executive Jim West) wanted one thing to be adamantly clear: the Boy Scout carrying the little girl to safety.

Starting with the background, we see a number of things that tell observers about the scene. There is a large amount of water (what we can assume to be a flood) that has damaged a house (acknowledged by the broken house window and the illusion that the house has been shifted off its foundation) through which a Boy Scout carries a young girl (and her cat) to the safe refuge of a rowboat. Unlike the backgrounds of the other two paintings, this one simply sets the scene for the subject of this painting – the heroism of the Boy Scout.

The Boy Scout, as in all other Rockwell Scout paintings, is in his full and complete uniform, sporting the then popular flat brimmed campaign hat. The subject of this painting is portrayed as the embodiment of the Scouting Movement –

the manner in which every Boy Scout is expected to act. His face is marked with stoic concentration and fierce determination to carry the child to safety. Whereas the child is depicted as being an innocent victim in this natural disaster, there is almost a cherubic aura to her demeanor and expression, complete with light blonde hair and blue eyes. She looks intently into her savior's eyes with gratitude, yet tinged by the trauma of bearing witness to this disaster. As a further testament to the Scout's heroic behavior, the young girl's black and white cat is perched precariously atop the Scout's left shoulder. The cat is seemingly more frightened than the girl, yet fiercely holding on for its life. Holistically this painting expresses the determination and dedication that a Boy Scout has to help other people at all times, even in natural disasters. Moreover, an interesting element to note in this painting is that the victim of this disaster is a little girl, not a little boy. Rockwell's (and probably West's) decision to make the victim in this painting a little girl could suggest the little girl is a synecdoche for frail womanhood. Moreover, the little girls could never aspire to the courage and daring of the Boy Scouts mainly because they are perceived as the very opposite of what embodies Boy Scouts. Masculinity and femininity are expressly dichotomized, and femininity is equated to the victimhood and helplessness of small animals.

These three paintings by Norman Rockwell supply a clear image of what a Boy Scout is, the way a Boy Scout behaves, the way a Boy Scout acts, and especially the way a Boy Scout looks. These paintings supply observers with a specific view of Boy Scouts – individuals who express and honor their duty to God, country, and other individuals who are undeniably, traditionally masculine. Furthermore, these

three paintings depict a certain Boy Scout uniform, and one interpretation of the way that uniform is to be worn and one reason for wearing the uniform – functionality. Through these paintings it is clear that the Boy Scouts (aided by Rockwell) wanted Boy Scouts (and their uniform) to be represented in a clear and precise manner. The BSA has only one way, or one meaning for a Boy Scout to look: performing ideologically masculine duties in an almost militaristic looking uniform. The actions of Rockwell (and the BSA) demonstrate a conscious intent to close down and control the interpretation and meaning of Boy Scouts and their uniform. Despite the images provided to us by Rockwell, and the BSA, there are a myriad of other ways that the Boy Scout uniform can be worn and some BSA uniforms balance precariously on the border between fashion and functionality.

### **Subverting the Image of an Ideal Boy Scout**

The Boy Scouts of America, aided by Norman Rockwell was able to create an image of the ideal Boy Scout: a boy in a complete uniform, performing various activities and duties associated with being a Boy Scout, and having a certain and profound respect for a masculine image. However, despite these attempts to control and contain the ways in which the public, as well as other members of the organization, perceive the organization, there are a number of transgressions and subversions from this romantic version of an image of the ideal Boy Scout. In this section, I perform an in-depth analysis of the Boy Scout uniform as well as a few signs and insignias of the Scouting organization.

Beginning with the Boy Scout uniform, most Boy Scouts wear their uniform proudly, with distinction and honor, as it identifies them as belonging to a century-

old values-based organization, steeped with tradition and community involvement. Donning a Boy Scout uniform indicates membership in an organization and an individual's acceptance and adherence to the organization's rules and regulations. Upon seeing a Scout in uniform, many people would automatically make certain assumptions about that person's character, such as having high morals, wanting to help others, being kind, having a sense of duty to his country and to God, and being heterosexual.

For 100 years, the uniform of the Boy Scouts of America has been one of the most recognizable artifacts of the movement. Changing only slightly from 1910, the wide brimmed campaign hats, knee high socks, and khaki shirts, the Scouting movement has held its uniform with the utmost regard. The purpose of having a uniform in a social organization, from the BSA's perspective, is to show membership in the organization, that the wearer believes and agrees with the ideologies advanced by the BSA, and that they are supposed equals with every other man that wears that uniform. Although the hats, socks, and shirts have changed over the years since 1910, the uniform today is still very much the same as it was. Over the generations of Boy Scouts, the material, color and cut of this uniform has changed; however, the general purpose of this shirt has remained the same: functionality. In the BSA, functionality always trumps style or fashion; the Boy Scout uniform is highly utilitarian, as will be explained in the coming pages.

Looking back to the paintings provided by Norman Rockwell, we see that the Boy Scout uniform is held with the utmost high regard. Throughout the various paintings we see Boy Scouts performing various tasks from saving a little girl from

flood waters, to a Scoutmaster keeping watch over his troop, all the while wearing a uniform. Therefore, we can see that the uniform's purpose (besides identifying members of the organization) is to provide wearers with clothing that is suitable for all forms of functions and activities in which Boy Scouts participate. Moreover, throughout the Rockwell paintings, we can see how impractical a uniform would be if its sole function were to serve as fashionable or stylish attire for Boy Scouts to wear.

Today's Boy Scout uniform is drastically different than the Boy Scout uniform of Lord Baden-Powell. The old uniform, and its subsequent counterparts, can be seen in many of Rockwell's paintings. However, in the early 1980's, the National Council decided to put the uniform through a massive makeover. Today's uniform was created in the 1980's by fashion designer Oscar de la Renta, a prolific and popular designer of exclusive clothes for women. Today's uniform creates a visual text that makes observers wonder why the BSA would employ a major designer of chic clothing for women to design a uniform suitable for the rugged outdoor activities of the Boy Scouts of America.

The traditional purpose of the Boy Scout uniform was to espouse masculinity, as still is the purpose to this day. However, there is potential for a subversive read of today's uniform, specifically because it was designed by a designer of (mostly) feminine clothing, which calls into question the polysemous nature of this text especially whether this uniform could be perceived as "gay" to some individuals; and by extension resulting in the textual "wink" of the fourth persona. Asking Oscar de la Renta to design a uniform for the Boy Scouts that all

members would wear puts this text, or image, in the public sphere. By placing this image of the BSA uniform into the public sphere, members of a particular interpretive community can feel that their ideology has a legitimate place in the history of the Boy Scouts of America. Importantly, enlisting a designer of beautiful women's clothing to redesign the BSA uniform suggests that it's not all about functionality. Style must also be extremely important, or can certainly be read as extremely important. The following pages will detail interesting facets of the Boy Scout uniform and specifically the polysemous nature of the uniform.

Beginning with headgear (a colloquial expression used by many Scouts to refer to a hat) there are currently many options that a Scout could choose from: an old-style campaign hat (reminiscent of the same type Baden-Powell wore), an updated baseball style cap (introduced by Oscar de la Renta in the '80's) and a military style beret. While hats are a strongly encouraged addition to the Boy Scout uniform, it is not a mandatory component. Today, troops that choose to incorporate a hat into their uniform likely choose the red beret, with Scoutmasters opting for the wide brimmed campaign hat.

Next, the single most important component of the Boy Scout uniform is the Khaki colored shirt. While arguably every part of the uniform is crucial, the one part that is not open to debate is the shirt. The current version of the uniform shirt is khaki colored with brown buttons. Additionally, there are epaulets on the shoulders (often called straps) and corresponding tabs (often called shoulder loops). These tabs come in a variety of colors and are used to distinguish an individual's level or status within the organization. Additionally, much like the hat, the uniform shirt



comes in a variety of materials; two will be the focus of this thesis: first, a polyester-cotton blend, and second a polyester-wool blend. The poly-cotton is the choice of nearly every Boy Scout because of its practical properties (i.e. dries quickly, inexpensive, machine washable). Second, a polyester-wool blend, which only a few select Scouts choose to purchase and cater to the more stylish and fashion-conscious Scouts. Moreover, this poly-wool uniform is strikingly impractical and has virtually no functional use aside from looking good (i.e. more expensive, dry-clean only, holds ironed creases, and able to be custom tailored).

Accompanying the shirt and hat are uniform pants or shorts. Beginning with uniform pants, there have been various styles over the years; however, the color has been remarkably similar across each revision, an army olive drab. The pants are perhaps the most versatile part of the Boy Scout uniform as it comes in various styles and fits. Most notably, three different styles, the traditional polyester-cotton blend, the new and very functional nylon switchbacks, and the ever-fashionable polyester-wool are the choices Scouts have when choosing uniform pants. The poly-cotton version of the pants is the green olive drab pants for which the Boy Scouts are known, with large side cargo pockets and a durable construction. These are the most commonly purchased pants that the BSA offers. Next, the increasingly popular switchbacks are swiftly becoming the new favorite of in BSA uniforming. The switchbacks sport a light, flexible and durable material with an added bonus that makes it quintessentially the most versatile component of the Scouting uniform, a zipper that allows a Scout to switch from long pants to shorts in a matter of seconds. While these switchback pants are both economical (as you only need to buy one pair

of pants, which also moonlight as shorts) and functional (because of their flexible material, the pants are conducive to all sorts of outdoor adventure activities).

However, some Scouts, myself included, view these switchbacks as fashion *faux pas* and therefore choose the much more chic polyester-wool blend pants. These pants not only complement the uniform shirt of the same material, but they also are clearly the only choice for fashion-conscious Scouts. Next, much like the uniform pants, shorts are an equally essential component to the Scouting uniform. The Scout shorts are another uniform component that the Boy Scouts are known for, especially when complemented with knee high socks (which we will get to momentarily). If a Scout does not own a pair of the switchback pants, then he is likely to purchase a pair of the poly-cotton version of the uniform shorts. Similar to the pants of the same material, the poly-cotton shorts dry quickly, and are very rugged and durable for all Scouting functions; however, they are bulky around seams, and are often perceived as borderline ugly (even considering the color). Luckily for those fashion minded Scouts, there are poly-wool shorts available for purchase; however the most noticeable difference between these shorts and the poly-cotton shorts is the length of the inseam poly-wool shorts are notoriously short. The fashion savvy Scout would undoubtedly choose the poly-wool shorts, not to mention Scouts that might be trying to wink at fellow gay Scouts (or perhaps even show a little extra skin).

Moving from uniform components to uniform accessories, Boy Scout socks are an extremely recognizable trademark of the organization. Like many of the other uniform components, the socks come in a variety of styles and materials including ankle, calf and knee high red and green options. While there are many choices for

these socks, a popular choice among all Scouts is the knee high red and green socks that have almost become iconic both inside and outside the organization. Second, a Scout is expected to wear a belt accompanying his pants or shorts. While there are various versions of Boy Scout belts, the webbed belts (ranging in color according to which branch of the BSA you belong, e.g. olive green for Boy Scouts, navy blue for Cub Scouts, white for Sea Scouts, etc.) are the most acceptable, with brown leather (with a large BSA approved belt buckle) trailing closely behind. One final accessory to the Boy Scout uniform is the neckerchief. As the name suggests, a neckerchief is much like a handkerchief, except worn around the neck. Throughout BSA history, the importance of the neckerchief has waxed and waned as opinions about them change. Today's uniform standards state that the neckerchief is an optional accessory to the Scout uniform. Traditional neckerchiefs are typically yellow or red. However, Oscar de la Renta designed several neckerchiefs that have never really made it into mainstream BSA uniforms because of their suggested feminine nature. De la Renta's neckerchiefs were often made from a silky fabric and incorporated vivid colors, components that highly resemble neck scarves worn by some women. While these accessories are not nearly as important as the shirt and the pants, most of them are essential components of a full BSA uniform.

The fashion-minded and style-conscious Scout is likely to choose a combination of these uniform elements. For a shirt he will choose a crisply pressed poly-wool shirt, with accompanying short poly-wool shorts with a crease down the middle of the pant leg that resembles the crease of suit pants. Next, to coordinate with his razor sharp creased shorts, he is likely to choose knee-high socks to

accompany his shorts (as they really do look quite sharp). Next, depending on the Scout's mood he may or may not choose to wear a neckerchief, more than likely opting to forego the neckerchief because it can become cumbersome and warm in the summer time. Finally, it is time to choose a belt, rather than going with an olive green webbed belt, he opts for a nice contrasting brown leather belt (that matches his brown leather shoes) to complete the impressive outfit. These decisions could seem benign to casual observers, but this Scout has the determination of his convictions that allows him to not only look good in his uniform, but to also be attractive in his uniform. He is able to be a source of fashion and style in an otherwise unattractive and fashion unconscious populace. Perhaps he even gels his hair, dons white sunglasses and applies a conservative amount of cologne before he leaves his cabin to perform his daily Boy Scout duties. This uniform choice brings up a critical question about the Boy Scout uniform; is it designed to be functional or is it designed to be fashionable? Certainly both fashionable and functional uniforms exist (poly-wool and poly-cotton respectively); but why? Why in an all male organization would an individual need to be perceived as being attractive, or even seem to be fashion conscious?

### **Uniform Trouble in Straightville**

As mentioned before, the Scout uniform is one of the most critical elements for recognition that the BSA has. Boy Scouts across the country are identified by the uniforms they wear – those khaki shirts and olive shorts that have won over the hearts of millions of BSA patrons across America. As noted by Rockwell, and the

BSA, a Scout is expected to be in full uniform while participating in all Scout-related functions including hiking excursions, summer camps, community service, and all other displays of masculine activities. Therefore, it is logical that the Boy Scout uniform should be highly versatile and functional – indeed the perfect uniform should be made of strong and durable material. The uniform should be able to be laundered (either in mom’s washing machine at the end of camp or in the local stream while bushwhacking through the wilderness) and dried easily. A uniform should be able to withstand all the tests and trials, running and climbing that a Boy Scout would experience on a typical adventure. This assumption of the elements that a Boy Scout uniform should exhibit is indeed integrated into the design and material of the Boy Scout uniform, at least the uniform that is comprised of a polyester-cotton material blend as well as the popular switch-back pants. The poly-cotton uniform is machine (and stream) washable, suitable to be thrown in a clothes dryer (or laid out on the bank of the stream). The material is strong, durable, and resists tears and rips. Therefore, the poly-cotton uniform is the obvious choice that a Scout should make when purchasing a uniform. However, despite the obvious benefits of purchasing a poly-cotton blend uniform, the BSA still manufactures a uniform, the polyester-wool version, that is the antithesis of functionality. While the poly-cotton uniform is machine (and rock) washable, the poly-wool is dry clean only (there aren’t many dry cleaners along the hiking trail). Having no convenient way to launder your uniform is a large concern for Boy Scouts, because let’s face it: the uniforms do get filthy, therefore a uniform that is dry clean only is highly impractical.

Boy Scouts across America have a variety of choices when it comes to selecting the proper uniform, from versatility and functionality, to style and fashion there is almost a never-ending chain of possibilities. Despite these possibilities, most Scouts choose a uniform made from polyester and cotton, while a select few choose the polyester and wool variety. The reasons behind this are largely due to the functionality and versatility of the poly-cotton uniform as opposed to the simple style and fashion of the poly-wool uniform.

While certain parts of Scouting require the more popular rugged uniform, some individuals (perhaps less masculine individuals) would desire to look good and even attractive while performing specific Scouting duties, such as chopping down a tree or rescuing a stranded girl and her cat from a flood. However, the BSA would argue that fashion does not matter in a masculine organization, per hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, the BSA is stuck in a conundrum – they want their members to be masculine, manly, and participate in rugged activities that would tear apart the poly-wool uniforms, yet they continue to produce these uniforms for that fashion-minded Scout wanting to look his best.

So why would the Boy Scouts of America even manufacture such an expensive and stylish uniform that has no practical purpose? Perhaps one explanation (and a very simple explanation at that) is because Scouts keep purchasing these expensive yet attractive, and impractical yet fashionable uniforms. Therefore, another question arises out of this realization: why do Scouts keep purchasing these uniforms? Perhaps Scouts that chose to wear this uniform are attempting to resist the rigidity of the BSA's standards of masculinity. Through the

resistance to wearing the practical, functional and less-fashionable uniform, some Scouts are thereby resisting the BSA's version of masculinity as well as its definitions of practicality. The sexuality of these Scouts is inconsequential; however, they are visibly troubling the BSA's imposed notion of masculinity. This is one specific example of the polysemy of the Boy Scout uniform. Through this we can see certain Scouts resisting the rigid imposition of single-track masculinity. As previously discussed, the poly-wool uniform is dreadfully impractical and is not conducive to the performance of the activities that are promoted by the BSA which suggests that practicality is extremely important.

Dissecting this decision to produce (and subsequently purchase) poly-wool uniforms, and taking into consideration the polysemous nature of the Scouting texts, we can see how the one piece of Boy Scout rhetoric that is the most salient way in which a Boy Scout's image is established and maintained (the uniform) potentially subverts the hegemonic masculinity that the Boy Scouts so desperately cling to. Here we see a way in which a Scout can simultaneously resist the Boy Scouts of America's idea of masculinity while at the same time reading this uniform a way that accommodates their aesthetics. Moreover, we can see that while the BSA excludes gays from the organization through ideology, activity, and uniforming that gay Scouts are able to make subversive room for themselves. Through wearing a uniform that promotes fashion over functionality, style over performing masculine duties, a gay Scout could find subversive room and take refuge in his attractive uniform. Moreover, through choosing to wear a poly-wool uniform a Scout could be sending a wink and attempting to attract another gay Scout.

In addition to the variety of points already discussed addressing a polysemous view of the Boy Scout uniform through the poly-wool uniform, I conclude with the possibility of wearing a white belt with a Scout uniform as indicative of identifying the wearer as being gay. While I have not found any substantial research that shows that wearing a white belt signifies the wearer as being gay, anecdotally, it seems from my experience that this is the case. Looking around at the clubs in the summer, there is a ubiquitous presence of white belt wearing gay boys. While I in no way claim that this rule is universal, nor do I claim that straight boys do not wear white belts, I am suggesting that many gay boys choose to wear a white belt to subtly signify their sexuality. Additionally, it is through this cultural understanding of a white belt signifying gayness that I choose to wear a white belt with my poly-wool Boy Scout uniform, complete with knee high socks. It is my silent protest to the Boy Scouts of America toward their anti-gay policies. However, when an individual wears an accessory complementing the uniform that is not the traditional accessory (i.e. a white belt instead of olive green or brown leather) it becomes necessary to provide a diversion or logical excuse why the wearer chose that particular item. In my case, people would suggest that I was "out of uniform" and that I needed to change my belt. I would respectfully remind them that BSA standards say that any BSA uniform component, from any era may be worn and considered to be a full and complete uniform. I also add that the Sea Scouts (a division of the BSA) wears a white belt, so therefore, by extension I am allowed to wear a white belt with my uniform. This explanation is a simple red herring to the real reason, my silent protest.



## **Patches and Insignia**

Much like the uniform, other very popular images of the Boy Scouts of America are its patches (badges) and insignia. The BSA groups patches, badges, and insignia into one overarching category and calls the group "Boy Scout insignia." Therefore, all of the merit badges Scouts earn, event patches earned and achieved, as well as the signs and symbols of the BSA are all referred to as insignia. For this thesis, I will be looking at one specific patch that a Scout earns by attending and participating in the National Leadership Seminar (NLS).

The National Leadership Seminar is an intensive leadership training conference offered by the Boy Scouts of America to its youth members. Through this conference, Scouts are taught the proper ways of leadership as described by the BSA. Upon completion of this conference, Scouts are given a patch in recognition of successfully accomplishing all of the goals and objectives that were established throughout the conference. The award patch that is given to participants is the same design as the logo for this conference, a rainbow triangle (yes a RAINBOW TRIANGLE). The design of the insignia is an equilateral triangle containing the colors of the rainbow layered into its shape; in total there are seven triangles that comprise the entire logo. Starting on the outmost edge of the triangle, the layers follow as: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and culminating with an official BSA fleur de lis at the center set on an indigo background. These seven colors together are perhaps one of the most recognizable symbols of the gay community and are displayed by a number of organizations advocating for gay rights. Even more interesting is the way in which the colors are displayed. Instead of putting the

colors in a circle, or a square, a random squiggle or even an octagon, the BSA specifically chose a triangle, which of course has also become a prominent symbol of homosexuality throughout American culture. Out of all other possible color combinations and shapes that the BSA could have chosen to have as their insignia design, why would they choose a rainbow triangle? This triangle can be read in a multitude of ways by gay or gay-questioning Scouts. Perhaps it is a mere coincidence that the BSA chose to adopt a rainbow triangle for one of its most highly attended leadership seminars. However, gay Scouts could read this as a way to attend the seminar and wear the recognition patch on their uniform as another way to subvert the BSA's position on masculinity. Moreover, wearing a rainbow triangle on a poly-wool uniform could reinforce their resistance of the BSA's position on sexuality and further accommodating their aesthetic preferences. No matter which way an individual reads this text, a rainbow triangle opens up all BSA insignia to multiple reads. For this patch, a gay Scout would be likely to read to the triangle as a familiar and comforting symbol, regardless of its BSA attached meanings.

In addition to the National Leadership Seminar patch and logo, there is one more rainbow colored patch that is on the fringe of acknowledgement among some Scouts and Scouters: the Boy Scouts of America diversity award knot patch. Award knots are a small one-inch by one half-inch rectangular patches with a square knot embroidered on a khaki background. Knots to be worn on the BSA uniform, above the left pocket, in recognition of an individual's achievement of a particular award (think military ribbons). There are a number of different knot awards in the BSA and all have distinguishable colors that represent specific awards that a Scout has

achieved. For example, some of the more popular knots include ones for the Eagle Scout honor (red, white and blue), the Arrow of Light honor (blue and gold), the Silver Beaver honor (blue and silver), Scoutmaster Training (solid green), District Award of Merit (green and white), with many more. This diversity award knot looks very similar to the other BSA knots it is a one-inch by one half inch rectangular khaki colored patch with a square knot embroidered in the center; however the colors of this knot include all the colors of the rainbow. Unlike this knot's counterparts, the BSA diversity award knot is an unofficial knot produced by a third party and not affiliated with the Boy Scouts. Although it is an unofficial knot, produced by a third party, select Scouts will wear this knot alongside their other knots. Furthermore, there are several unofficial knots, produced by third parties, which can be seen on a BSA uniform. Some of these other unofficial knots include ones for attending Philmont Scout Reservation, the Order of the Arrow Vigil Honor, the Order of the Arrow Founder's Award, Wood Badge Training, and many others. The BSA is an interesting organization when it comes to its uniform. While there is a multiple page book published by the Boy Scouts of America that details and specifies the so called proper way to wear the uniform (*BSA Guide to Uniforming and Insignia*), the BSA includes a loophole for individuals to wear such knots on the uniform. The National BSA Council allows individual local councils to decide if an unofficial knot may be worn on the uniform. If an individual wants to wear one of these unofficial knots, he merely needs to talk to the local Scout Executive and seek approval. The process is not very difficult; in fact, on my uniform I currently wear an

unofficial knot for my Order of the Arrow Founder's Award (which has a red and yellow knot).

So how does this Diversity Award knot fit into this chapter? First, while the name of the knot (diversity award) might sound all-inclusive (and it is intended to be all inclusive) the primary focus of this knot is to acknowledge sexual diversity. This knot serves a variety of purposes for expressing sexual diversity in Scouting. First, since the knot is not very well known (I have never seen one in person) it can serve as one of Morris' winks to other sexually diverse individuals in the program. It signifies that you are covertly reaching out to your fellow members of the organization that you are gay. However, if this knot gains momentum and becomes more popular it could have other ramifications. Having a rainbow colored knot on your uniform, next to your heart is a very bold and direct statement. Perhaps by proudly wearing this knot, the BSA will take notice of the large amount of sexually diverse individuals in the organization and adopt a more inclusive stance on homosexuality. Furthermore, local councils could start adopting this knot and offering it as an award to troop leaders who are sexually diverse or promote diversity within the troop leadership. However, until that grand and glorious day comes, wearers of this knot are sending out a subversive type of protest to the BSA's policies.

### **Conclusion**

The Boy Scouts of America have always tried to control and protect the image of its members. From the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Chief Scout Executive Jim West was influencing Norman Rockwell's paintings of the

organization as well as the strict uniform and insignia guidelines that the BSA regulates, the BSA likes to have its image perceived in a particular way: masculine, patriotic, religious, heterosexual, helpful, etc. However, despite all of these efforts, individuals within the organization who do not agree with particular policies will find ways to transgress from those rigid and archaic traditions. Gay Scouts are able to subvert an organization that tries so hard to be impervious to subversion. Through trying to be a fashion-conscious Scout by wearing the attractive looking poly-wool uniform, this subverts the BSA's hegemonic masculinity. Through wearing a white belt when only olive or brown is suitable, this subverts BSA's hegemonic masculinity. Through supporting sexual diversity and wearing a rainbow knot, this subverts the BSA's hegemonic masculinity. Finally taking solace in the knowledge that the BSA awards a rainbow triangle to participants of the National Leadership Seminar, tomorrow's leaders of the organization and exploring the polysemy of that single patch, this brings hope for the future.

## **Chapter Four**

**Further Implications:**

**Impossible Possibilities**

The final chapter of this thesis concludes and summarizes the implications of this rhetorical critique on the Boy Scouts of America. In the next few pages, I will bring this thesis to a close while connecting the BSA's ideologies to other related groups' ideologies. There are many other organizations that are similar to, if not a reflection of, the ideologies, values, and morals held by the BSA. Some of these organizations or groups include sport franchises, fraternities, and the United States military. This last chapter illustrates the ways in which these other organizations resemble the Boy Scouts of America's ideologies and culminates with further conclusions and implications.

The Boy Scouts of America's ideologies are not strictly unique to the organization; there are many other groups that operate under the same ideologies and policies of the BSA. For example, physical fitness, as stressed as one of the more important elements of being a Boy Scout is also a very important element for members of the US military and various sporting groups. Moreover, the BSA's requirement to do one's duty to his country is shared with the US military, and patriotism can be seen at nearly every sporting event. From high school football games to NASCAR races, patriotism is displayed in various forms. However, the most salient of these similarities can be found through these groups' various policies, feelings, and ideologies regarding homosexuality. While some groups allow gays to be involved (perhaps begrudgingly) others view homosexuality as taboo and/or even as an undesirable quality or trait in its members.

In this thesis, I have explored a few intricate examples of transgression and subversion from hegemonic masculinity in the Boy Scouts of America. From the

seemingly homoerotic Order of the Arrow ceremonies and rituals to the interesting image that the poly-wool uniforms provide, some Boy Scouts are able to negotiate and create their own definitions of masculinity throughout this organization. Additionally some Scouts are able to thrive by finding the liminal spaces that exist within the BSA through their subversive readings of Boy Scout texts. However, despite the rigidity through which the BSA operates, there is one final facet that I would like to address: the shared ideology of hegemonic masculinity between the Boy Scouts of America and other organizations including the United States Armed Forces.

### **Trouble in Armyville**

A review of the history of the Boy Scouts of America suggests that the organization has certain paramilitary characteristics that prepare young boys for future military service. There are a number of similarities between the two organizations. For example, the BSA uniform is strikingly similar to the military uniform, the BSA values a duty to country and physical fitness, much like the military, and the BSA promotes hegemonic masculinity in a similar manner as the military. In the face of all of these similarities, officials within the BSA would still say that it is simply a private organization that promotes a certain set of values and beliefs.

Despite the battle over a paramilitaristic image, the BSA still functions within and across the boundaries of militaristic ideologies. Moreover, there are several interesting connections between the Boy Scouts of America and the US Military. From the incorporation of hegemonic masculinity, and the high ideological



emphasis placed on physical fitness to the importance of doing one's duty to his country and the expatriation of homosexuals, these two organizations share many common philosophies (more than any Boy Scout official would like to admit). This section will further illustrate the various commonalities between the Boy Scouts of America and the United States Military.

Perhaps the most significant example of common beliefs between the BSA and the military can be found through one of the underlying themes of this thesis, hegemonic masculinity. It is not difficult to find any of consistent attributes of hegemonic masculinity that are shared by the BSA and the military. Reviewing some components of hegemonic masculinity, such as the superiority of men and the subordination of women and the ban on masculinities that are counter-hegemonic (gay), we see that the military also emphasizes many of the same characteristics as the BSA. Specifically, throughout the military we see the ways in which heterosexual white males are given superior authority and credibility over other masculinities. Through this example there is an emphasis placed upon being better or stronger than one's opponent. Additionally, we see that women are almost completely marginalized throughout the military and homosexual men are entirely negated. As further evidence of the gender and sexuality inequality that exists between these two organizations, we see the variety of ways in which women and homosexuals are created into being less than their straight male counterparts. Specifically through various performances and definitions of manhood and masculinity, others are seen to go against the very notions of the purposes of these groups. Carol Burke notes that the purpose of training and routines in the military is one that "sets its sights

not only on instilling discipline, teamwork, and the knowledge of military skills but also on sculpting ineffable 'manhood' must set itself in opposition to all that is not 'manly.' What boys are trained to cast away as despised is called female. The feminine names traits to be loathed, ridiculed, and exorcised." (50) Therefore, we see that anything that is not deemed "manly" is also deemed to be unsoldierly also (i.e. women and gays). Burke continues to discuss the ways in which the military attempts to remove all forms of femininity from its soldiers, which has subsequently created a hostile environment for women. Moreover, while soldiers are in training exercises, Drill instructors attempt to disgrace male soldiers and "feminize them through the kind of humiliation designed to impress on them that to be degraded is to be female." (Burke 13)

The military and the BSA valorize masculinity while demonizing anything that is not explicitly masculine, thus warranting exorcism. These anti-feminine and anti gay-sentiments come to us in the form of songs. Therefore, I will offer a few songs that I have learned from the Boy Scouts, which are strikingly similar to ones in the military as described by Carol Burke. The first song that I will describe is one that is performed in small groups of older scouts, bonding around a campfire. The song, entitled "Yo-Hoe" depicts a Boy Scout reminiscing about a recent encounter with a female. The song starts off with the Scout discussing the various things he did to this woman, followed by her death and further sexual activities that ensued:

I placed my hand upon her toe, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my hand upon her toe, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my hand upon her toe, she said God dammit you're way too low  
 Get in get out quit fucking about, yo hoe yo hoe yo hoe.

I placed my hand upon her knee, yo hoe yo hoe

I placed my hand upon her knee, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my hand upon her knee, she said God dammit quit teasing me  
 Get in get out quit fucking about, yo hoe yo hoe yo hoe.

I placed my hand upon her twat, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my hand upon her twat, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my hand upon her twat, she said God dammit you're making me hot  
 Get in get out quit fucking about, yo hoe yo hoe yo hoe

I placed my hand upon her breast, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my hand upon her breast, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my hand upon her breast, she said God dammit just finish the rest  
 Get in get out quit fucking about, yo hoe yo hoe yo hoe

I placed my dick into her mouth, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my dick into her mouth, yo hoe yo hoe  
 I placed my dick into her mouth, she said waa waa waa waa waa (at this point  
 the Scout would make a sound that emulates the sound someone would make  
 trying to speak while performing oral sex)  
 Get in get out quit fucking about, yo hoe yo hoe yo hoe

But now she lies in an old pine box, yo hoe yo hoe  
 But now she lies in an old pine box, yo hoe yo hoe  
 But now she lies in an old pine box, for sucking too many Boy Scout cocks  
 Get in get out quit fucking about, yo hoe yo hoe yo hoe

So we dug her up and fucked her again, yo hoe yo hoe  
 So we dug her up and fucked her again, yo hoe yo hoe  
 So we dug her up and fucked her again, and again and again and again and  
 again  
 Get in get out quit fucking about, yo hoe yo hoe yo hoe

This song clearly demonstrates the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity throughout the Boy Scouts of America. It depicts Scouts reliving and bragging about a sexual conquest involving a woman. Specifically, it demonstrates the acceptability of rough sexual intercourse between a Boy Scout and a woman as well as the punishment for a woman that has too much sexual contact with Boy Scouts: death and the subsequent rape of her corpse. This song objectifies women as sexual objects while negating homosexuals. While this particular song may not be taught to

every Boy Scouts across America, other songs, expressing the same sentiment are taught. Moreover, many of these degrading songs about women are seen or perhaps come from the US military. Carol Burke describes a song “The S & M Man” which is performed at various functions in the military including summer basic training, and oddly enough sung by my summer camp staff. The song depicts a man, the S & M man, who like to have rough and painful sex or describes rough and painful sexual actions. Burke’s book details certain verses of the song:

Who can take a chainsaw  
 Cut the bitch in two  
 Fuck the bottom half  
 And give the upper half to you...

[Chorus] The S&M Man, the S&M Man,  
 The S&M Man ‘cause he mixes it with love  
 And makes the hurt feel good!

Who can take a bicycle  
 Then take off the seat  
 Set his girlfriend on it  
 Ride her down a bumpy street...

[Chorus]

Who can take some jumper cables  
 Clamp them to her tits  
 Jump-start your car  
 And electrocute the bitch

[Chorus] (xii)

This song can continue through an infinite number of verses, all with the same message: man’s domination over women. However, one verse that Burke does not mention comes from the staff at my summer camp. This verse follows the same

chorus and rhythm structure as the ones from the military, but takes a different twist:

Who can take a priest  
Bend him over a pew  
Fuck him in the ass  
Until he calls himself a Jew.

[Chorus]

Not only does this verse establish the same ideologies as expressed in the previous versus, it also incorporates ideas of homosexuality and a straight man's domination and rape of a perceived lesser man through the act of anal sex. Moreover, we see a clear link between the Boy Scouts and the US military, specifically through the songs they sing and the message of those songs. Furthermore, through the S&M man example, we can see that either the Military influenced the Boy Scouts or the Military was influenced by the Boy Scouts in the adoption of this song (the latter is less likely). Through this we see the connection of ideologies and the value placed on women and homosexuals. Furthermore, we see the unbalanced power distribution as being heavily weighted toward those individuals that support and reinforce hegemony and almost completely negating individuals that do not fit the hegemonic mold. Mostly straight men are seen as the ones being able to perform the duties described through these songs.

In addition to practices of hegemonic masculinity and the shared ideology of how a "true man" should behave, the BSA and the military also share an immense regard for serving one's country. Clearly, anyone involved in the US military has a very strong desire to serve his or her country; an individual is ready to perish for the betterment of his or her country. Likewise, the BSA requires all members to

have a passionate respect for his country and makes members swear an oath to serve their country. As previously stated this service can come from many forms including active military service or agreeing to specific policies regarding the military (such as the “Iraq War” or the “War on Terrorism”). In addition to serving one’s country, and a prerequisite to serve one’s country effectively requires an element or state of physical fitness, both the BSA and the military have physical fitness requirements embedded into their respective programs. It becomes an essential element for individuals to be physically fit in order to serve their country. It is not surprising for individuals in the military to be trained for physical fitness and endurance. Especially when one is trained in combat, the expectation is that one must be physically up to the task. However, Boy Scouts are not warriors, or entering the field of combat. Therefore, the emphasis on the physically fit body seems to be more than utilitarian. Physical fitness seems undeniably connected to the construction and maintenance of the hegemonic manly man.

Further similarities can be seen between the Boy Scouts of America and the US Military, specifically the uniform. As discussed in chapter three, there are many interesting facets of the Boy Scout Uniform. However, one thing that was not discussed about the uniform in chapter three was its striking resemblance to military uniforms. Almost every part of the Boy Scout uniform has a parallel component that can be found when looking at a military uniform. First, the colors of the Boy Scout uniform, khaki and olive are very similar to the drab color of the US Army battle uniforms. Second, the shoulder epaulets and corresponding loops are from a very militaristic design. In nearly all branches of military service, uniforms

integrate shoulder epaulets and loops which function is to distinguish rank or position. Correspondingly BSA epaulets and loops also designate rank or position within the organization. Next, several BSA units choose to wear berets on their heads that look much similar to the berets that are worn by several military units. One final similarity between the BSA uniform and military uniforms can be found above the left pocket flap of the shirts. This position on the shirts is where individuals are able to display honors, awards and recognitions on their uniform. In the military this position is decorated with a series of ribbons, which have corresponding meanings throughout the military. Likewise, the BSA has a series of knots that an individual may choose to adorn his uniform acknowledging various awards and recognitions that he has received. The similar uniform further emphasizes the influence the military has on the Boy Scout program as well as the national organization.

Several parallels can be drawn between the United States Military and the Boy Scouts of America. However beyond the simple aforementioned similarities, one major link between these two organizations can be seen: the respective policies regarding homosexuality held by these organizations. The US Military has the "Don't ask Don't tell" policy which has served as a way to discriminate against gay service members over the last decade. Likewise, while the BSA does not have the same name for their anti-gay policy, it can be seen in the same manner, particularly through my experience: They didn't ask and I didn't tell. This policy regarding homosexuals is just one more in a myriad of examples that depict the connection between Boy Scouts and the military. Moreover, these policies affirm the mission of

these two organizations to reproduce hegemonic masculinity. Through excluding a group of people that would be counter (gay) to a hegemonic culture extends the thought that homosexuals are inferior or second-class to other heterosexual individuals. Furthermore, this thesis has indicated that gay Boy Scouts actually exist, much to the chagrin of the BSA. Therefore it is logical to also assume that gay individuals serve in the US Military and subsequently discharged from the service if their sexuality is discovered. Specifically, between the years of 2004 and 2008 over 3,000 men and women were discharged from the military because they were gay; in 2008, there were 619 service members who were kicked out; 627 in 2007, 612 in 2006, 726 in 2005, and 653 in 2004 (Bender). For a nation at war, 3,000 trained and dedicated soldiers seems like a lot of people to kick out just because they are gay. So why would the Boy Scouts and the US military exclude homosexuals from its ranks? Perhaps the BSA is just mirroring the policies of the US military. Perhaps homosexuals are not associated with being strong, courageous, brave, or able to serve their country, which apparently the BSA and US military think this is true. Perhaps gays are too valuable to American culture and society to be placed in dangerous situations, much like college students were excluded from the draft during the Vietnam War. Perhaps, military and BSA officials are afraid that gays will intimidate straight members and an unprecedented amount of straight bashing will occur. In reality, the government argues that the policy is necessary to "(1) prevent potential sexual misconduct that violates the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the military's criminal code of conduct and (2) preserve the armed forces' high standards of morale, good order, discipline and unit cohesion that are the essence of



military capability" (Osburn 201). The right to serve one's country or even hold membership to an organization is a fundamental right and bedrock principle of this country. This so called rationale for Don't ask Don't tell does not make much sense. The only thing that does make sense is that gays should be able to become members of the BSA as well as have the opportunity to serve in their country's armed forces. These archaic rules and laws need to be repealed immediately; maybe 2010 is the year that will establish equality. Currently, Senator Joe Lieberman is gaining support for a bill that repeals this inane policy (CBS News, 2-22-10).

### **The BSA as a Homosocial Organization**

The Boy Scouts of America was not the first "boys only club" nor will it be the last. For centuries, males have created clubs to exclude women while promoting hegemonic masculinity. The preservation and continuation of hegemonic masculinity is particular evidenced through the analysis of male homosocial interactions. Homosociality refers specifically to the nonsexual attractions held by men (or women) for members of their own sex (Lipman-Blumen). Through this idea of homosociality, the concept promotes distinctions between men and women through segregating the two sexes in various social situations and organizations. Moreover, homosociality advocates salient distinctions between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities within a social organization. Furthermore, Bird argues that "homosocial interaction, among heterosexual men, contributes to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity norms by supporting meanings associated with identities that fit hegemonic ideals while suppressing meanings associated with non-hegemonic masculine identities" (121). In addition to establishing the Boy

Scouts of America as a homosocial organization, there are also two other boys only clubs that are strikingly similar to the BSA: sporting groups and fraternities. These two groups not only exclude women while promoting hegemonic masculinity, but also have very interesting policies on masculinities that are considered to be counter-hegemonic (gay).

The Boy Scouts of America is clearly an organization that is explicitly heteronormative, yet comfortable as establishing the homosocial bond between young boys in order to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. Specifically, Bird (1996) offers three requirements for understanding and establishing a homosocial organization as enabling hegemonic masculinity: emotional detachment, competitiveness, and sexual objectification.

emotional detachment, a meaning constructed through relationships with families whereby young men detach themselves from mothers and develop gender identities in relation to that which they are not; competitiveness, a meaning constructed and maintained through relationships with other men whereby simple individuality becomes competitive individuality; and sexual objectification of women, a meaning constructed and maintained through relationships with other men whereby male individuality is conceptualized not only as different from female but as better than female. (121)

Through this explanation, the Boy Scouts of America is clearly an organization that promotes hegemonic masculinity through the use of a homosocial youth organization. First, the emotional detachment requirement can be seen in a variety of forms throughout the BSA. Taking young boys out into the forest and doing manly

activities effectively detaches emotional bonds that were constructed through their mothers and other feminine influences. Second, competitiveness is a large component of the Boy Scouts of America. Scouts are encouraged to participate in activities and compete against their fellow troop members. Finally the sexual objectification of women can be seen throughout the BSA, particularly through the explicit exclusion of women in the youth program. While the BSA does not necessarily teach sexual activity or sexual objectification, there is a clear idea that men are better than women in all capacities. Therefore, through these examples it is clear that the Boy Scouts of America is able to join the ranks of other such reputable homosocial organizations as fraternities and sporting teams.

The Boy Scouts of America by any other name would be called a fraternity; in fact, the Order the Arrow should be called the national honor fraternity as opposed to the national honor society of Scouting. The organization's mission is to turn boys into men whereas fraternities do the same thing: "The fraternity makes men" motto from *Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities* (Robson), a handbook about fraternities, accurately describes the primary function of the fraternity system. Researchers have found that fraternities on American campuses produce a specific type of man through the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Yeung, Stompler, and Wharton). Moreover, fraternities exclude women from all forms membership. This exclusion from membership blocks women from the privileged social networks that could potentially lead to social mobility (Clawson). Even if women are formally incorporated into a fraternity they are still subject to exploitation. Much the same can be said about the BSA and the OA. As previously discussed, through hegemonic

masculinity the BSA and fraternities exclude and marginalize women; this action further emphasizes the connection between the BSA and fraternities. Moreover the brotherhood that is cherished by the BSA and fraternities produces and reproduces gender inequality. In day-to-day interactions, fraternity men use sexual jokes as symbolic means to devalue women, and hence, create a privileged bond among men (Lyman). Furthermore, other hazing and ritual actions within fraternities are centered on using feminine pejoratives to denigrate pledges. Essentially, through forcing pledges to adopt feminine markers throughout the pledge process emasculating the pledges. However, through this process fraternities are able to reinforce and reconstruct their ideologies of hegemonic masculinity through subjugating the feminine and establishing the superiority of masculinity (Yeung, Stompler, and Wharton).

Much like the BSA, college fraternities do not stand independently as an institution designed merely for young men to bond. Rather, they are part of a larger gender system, one that is defined by power and conflict between two sets of socially constructed binaries: men/women and masculinity/femininity (Yeung, Stompler, and Wharton). Additionally, these two dichotomous sets are interwoven and connected to one another. For example, men who do not conform to the hegemonic definition of masculinity – being white, heterosexual, aggressive, dominant, competitive, muscular, class privileged – are equated with women and thus feminized. Therefore, following this dichotomy, the BSA and fraternities are able to create an ideological space that maintains itself through the exclusion of both women and marginal men who are rejected by the terms of hegemonic masculinity.

However, despite the concrete values that comprise social organizations like the BSA and fraternities, there is still space where members are able to transgress and subvert hegemonically masculine ideologies. Much like Boy Scouts are able to express themselves through the enactment of various ceremonies in the Order of the Arrow, perhaps fraternity members are able to express themselves in the same manner through fraternity rituals. Through critiquing fraternities and the BSA, we are able to not only identify conflicts between what is considered to be normal social order as well as the deviance from that social order. Certainly, much like many Scouts in the BSA have found transgressive space for themselves within the organization, many fraternity members have also found their transgressive space.

In addition to the homosocial nature of fraternities, male sporting organizations are also sources of immense displays of hegemonic masculinity. Through the colossal amount of physical endurance and the stringent requirement to be physically fit, we see these homosocial organizations creating much of the same space as the Boy Scouts and fraternities. Specifically, the purpose of sport, a customarily homosocial sphere like the BSA and fraternities, is seen to naturalize men's domination over women and to naturalize the attachment of masculinity to the male body (Hall; Hargreaves; Messner). Sports have been explained as a site in which hegemonic masculinity is produced, reproduced, established and made credible, as an athlete represents the ideal of what it means to be a man, specifically situated to contrast what it means to be feminine and or gay (Connell; Messner).

The active performance of sport is predicated on the exclusion of women and particular (gay, or perceived to be gay) men in any society (Connell), even if

sporting ideology is subscribed to by men who are particularly threatened by economic and social marginalization (Kimmel). More importantly, as relating to the BSA, sports are an important part of American culture, as a favorite site of admittance into manhood (Messner and Sabo) and as a socially constructed domain of masculinity. Moreover, sports are a rich source of inspiration for the creative minds of young boys in their quest to live up to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Finally, Dempster describes three ways in which sports construct and reinforce ideas of hegemonic masculinity:

First, the media celebrates professional sportsmen's achievements while virtually ignoring those of female sporting figures. Professional sportsmen are held as "exemplars" of hegemonic masculinity and provide examples of the power and authority this form of masculinity is considered to convey. Second, in sport the attributes of strength and achievement are rehearsed, nurtured, and rewarded. Third, the language of sport emphasizes masculinity by employing misogynistic and homophobic discourses both to censure poor performances and intimidate players on opposing teams. Finally, in addition to playing the actual games, there is a "whole package" of sport-related activities which reinforce hegemonic ideals which... include male bonding, initiation rituals, heavy drinking. These activities reiterate the toughness and stamina associated with masculinity and act as further arenas where men can reaffirm their masculine superiority while simultaneously "shutting out" females and males they consider effeminate. (483)

These ways in which sports construct hegemonic masculinity are strikingly similar to activities of the BSA (even perhaps the heavy drinking, while frowned upon by the BSA, does indeed happen frequently), which adds more volume and depth to the display of the BSA's ideological values.

Through this section we see that the primary focus of homosocial organizations is to promote and reproduce ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Moreover we see the harm and damage that these organizations have on particular groups of people. While I am not claiming that these organizations are inherently bad or invaluable, I am claiming that some of their policies and attitudes are clearly oppressive and offensive. So why does this matter? What can we gather from these similarities, why are they important? Through understanding the composition and ideologies of homosocial organizations we are able to explore and critique the ways in which they are able to continue their reign of oppression of specific individuals and prolonging the perpetuation of marginality. Why must these boys-only clubs continue to exist? Why can't these organizations welcome diversity and "others" into their programs? Perhaps the complexity of the answers is more complicated and convoluted than I can reasonably explore in this thesis. However, despite the dense and duplicitous nature of the dichotomous dialogues and discourses that seems to emanate from them, gender and sexuality issues seem to ooze from homosocial organizations.

Through analyzing other organizations that resemble the ideologies and construction of the Boy Scouts of America we are able to see that the issues covered within this thesis are applicable across other organizations and contexts. Ideas of

who can become a member in a homosocial organization, how hegemonic masculinity is disseminated or evidenced throughout the organization, and the treatment of women and gays in the BSA, fraternities and sporting teams needs to be evaluated.

Through the discussion of this chapter, and the preceding chapters addressing the Boy Scouts of America, we can clearly see that individuals who are counter hegemonic can prosper alongside the most masculine, muscle man in the organization. Clearly, the ideologies of these organizations function to maintain power and dominance over people deemed to be "other." Clearly, anyone should be able to hold membership in any organization simply because we are all created equal, right? Sadly, no, not everyone is allowed membership. However, there is a silver lining in this chapter; the deliciousness of the fact that gay Boy Scouts, military officers, fraternity brothers, and athletes can not only exist but also prosper in a homophobic environment brings a sweet smile to any critic's face. Despite the attempt, will, or determination of the hegemonic majority, marginalized individuals will always find a way to create space for themselves through subtle transgression and subversion.

### **Drawn Together**

Through this thesis, I have explored a variety of issues concerning the Boy Scouts of America. Over the progression of chapters, I have explored the various examples of subversion and transgression from traditional Boy Scout policy, regulation, and ideology. But how do all of these arguments fit together? Why should you care about the similarities between the BSA and the US military? Why should



you care about young boys helicoptoring in the Order of the Arrow or why some Scouts wear a dry-clean only uniform? The answer to these questions is very simple: not only do these examples illustrate the polysemous nature of BSA texts, but also that it is possible to subvert even the most rigid and conservative of organizations. Through this thesis we are able to view the ways in which marginalized individuals in an oppressive organization are able to make discursive space for themselves within the organization.

In second chapter, I addressed the ways in which the BSA conceptualizes its mission and ideologies. The BSA is described as a private, conservative, and religious organization that places a high emphasis on hegemonic masculinity. Through the Scout Oath and Scout Law, the BSA situates itself to educate young Scouts in a manner that they deem as being highly moral and values based. Moreover, through living a life that adheres to the Scout Oath and Law, an individual has the opportunity to be selected to become a member of Scouting's National Honor Society, the Order of the Arrow. Through the OA we saw the manner in which the ideologies of the BSA are further indoctrinated into the minds of young Scouts. However, additionally through the OA, we saw the ways in which some Scouts were able to subvert some of the BSA's ideologies, mainly heterosexuality. Through the practice of some of the OA ceremonies, Scouts are able to express themselves in whichever manner they see fit. Additionally, we also saw the way that the practice of these OA ceremonies is highly polysemous. Not only do these ceremonies convey an idea of honor, and pride, but the ceremonies also allow for situations where many Scouts are running almost naked throughout the forest. It is through these OA

ceremonies that we see that transgression from hegemonic masculinity and a potential space is created for marginalized (gay) Scouts to exist. Furthermore, we saw examples of the diversity of subversion and transgression from hegemonic masculinity that exists within the Order of the Arrow. As I have noted, Scouts are able to subvert hegemonic masculinity through their performance of gender and sexuality while participating in the various ceremonies (i.e. painting one another, displays involving the penis, actions, etc. – acts that are clearly not the most heterosexual performances one could make). Even more exciting was the way in which some sections of the ritual texts were very polysemous and could have been read by a gay Scout as to affirm his beliefs, thus making transgressive space for him within the organization.

Moreover, in the second chapter, we see that no matter how fiercely the BSA attempts to control its image, it is always subject to interpretation and ever-present queer Scouts. We saw the ferocity with which the BSA attaches itself to their ideologies and a complete resistance to change through the legal battles and countless position statements reiterating the organization's ideological values. Through the unwavering adherence to strict interpretations of the Scout Oath and Law, the BSA attempts to maintain its traditions and conservatism in an otherwise ever changing world. However, as progress and change urges society forward, and more toward recognizing oppression and eliminating marginalization, perhaps the Boy Scouts of America will follow suit.

The third chapter incorporated visual imagery into the polysemous interpretations of the Boy Scouts of America. Specifically we saw the manner in

which the BSA's visual image plays a key role in the image of the organization and the maintenance of its ideological values. Furthermore, by looking at other images provided by the Boy Scouts of America we see interesting hints and perhaps a wink or nod at homosexuality.

In the beginning of chapter three, aided through the mastery of Norman Rockwell, three different paintings were described which sum up the BSA's image of hegemonic masculinity. Throughout the three paintings, the quintessential Boy Scout was depicted in a variety of situations. The first of Rockwell's paintings described, *The Scoutmaster*, is the epitome of a masculine male, keeping watch like an ever-wakeful sentinel, master of the wilderness and night. Second, *Our Heritage*, depicts Scouts simultaneously paying homage and honor to both our nation's first President and God. Finally, the third painting, *A Scout if Helpful*, portrays the heroism that all Boy Scouts possess, and the sheer determination to be helpful and brave, even in the most difficult of times. While these three paintings illustrated different values of the Boy Scouts, they all had one major thing in common: the emphasis placed on the subjects of the paintings wearing the full and complete Boy Scout uniform. From these paintings, we see the emphasis and importance that the BSA places on its uniform. The uniform represents everything it means to be a Boy Scout: the willingness to submit to BSA ideologies, the willingness to do one's duty to his country, the willingness to acknowledge and worship God, and the demand to espouse hegemonic masculinity in all forms and functions. Moreover, through the paintings we see that the BSA requires the subjects to look a certain way, in complete uniform, and in accordance with BSA rules and regulations. As an example

of the way in which the BSA censored Rockwell was found in *A Scout is Helpful* when the Chief Scout Executive required Rockwell to paint the Boy Scout saving a little girl while in full and complete uniform. Through this we saw the importance placed upon the Boy Scout uniform by the organization.

However, despite the rules, regulations, requirements, and restrictions placed upon the uniform, this cherished, beloved, and hallowed Boy Scout artifact is one of the most polysemous texts from the Boy Scouts of America. Specifically, through chapter three, we saw the various ways in which the Boy Scout uniform could have been interpreted as allowing subversion and transgression from hegemonic masculinity. From the inefficient and impractical dry-clean only poly-wool uniform to the rainbow triangle patch, several deviations from heterosexuality and hegemony were analyzed. Moreover, through the analysis of the polysemy of such a treasured artifact we see that the BSA is unable to fully control the meaning or interpretation of its texts. Therefore, transgressive and subversive space is created for marginalized Scouts.

The two chapters analyzing the text, performance, and image of the Boy Scouts of America establishes an interesting conundrum in the Boy Scouts of America pertaining to its ideologies. Specifically, we see the juxtaposition between strict adherence to ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and the counter hegemonic forces at work within the organization creating a culture of subversion where “others” are able to not only exist, but also prosper.

**Acta est Fabula, Plaudite!**

The Boy Scouts of America: an American institution, recognized from coast to coast and identified by their green shorts, khaki shirts, and knee high socks have become the perfect subject for this thesis. Analyzing an organization that has had and continues to have a great deal of influence on young individuals across America for an entire century can provide valuable insight into some common ideologies seen today. Moreover, through studying oppression and marginalization in social organizations, we are able to view marginality through a different lens. Through viewing the ideologies of the Boy Scouts of America and applying those values to the contexts of other organizations, we can demonstrate a myriad of similarities to those programs and further emphasize the need for more academic criticism and analysis. Establishing the same level of marginalization and reliance on hegemonic masculinity in the Boy Scouts of America as some other prominent hegemonically masculine groups like the US military calls attention and urgency to important issues.

Spending nearly 18 years in an organization inevitably warrants a special fondness for it. Although I may be critical of the Boy Scouts of America, the organization still occupies a special place in my heart that carries warm memories and experiences that I will never forget. Despite an explicit ban on homosexuality, a ban that I hope is lifted in the next few years, I have been able to remain in the organization with the help of some very progressive Scouts who disagree with the ban. Although I occasionally have to put one foot back into the closet to retain my membership in the organization, I never fully reenter that dark closet of oppression

and marginalization. While I “butch” it up a bit when surrounded by my Scouting peers, I still maintain my fight for equality and make my protests in a much more subtle manner. Through wearing my poly-wool uniform, my short shorts, my white belt and gelled hair I am able to complicate and undermine the ideology of hegemonic masculinity, which is deeply ingrained in the Boy Scouts of America. I have been very fortunate in my gay experience with the Boy Scouts of America; my personality and mannerisms afford me a small amount of protection because my peers have come to understand that my flamboyance is just my personality; my gelled hair, the poly-wool uniform, the white belt are all part of my individuality and written off as part of my personality. I have been able to hide in plain sight, challenging the BSA’s idea of hegemonic masculinity. I have been able to stay true to not only myself and my identity but to also appreciate the Boy Scouts’ programs in face of their conservative values and traditions.

The Boy Scouts of America is just one organization in many that has a mission to enhance the lives of young people across the country. This mission is noble and worthy of the time and dedication that thousands of volunteers commit to this organization. The importance of helping young individuals discover their identities as well as serving as a role model warrants thoughtful consideration about what values and ideologies should be taught. Denying young people the opportunity to thrive in an organization that teaches valuable life lessons simply based on the ideology of hegemonic masculinity is one the most heinous forms of oppression. For an organization that is founded upon the pillars of kindness, helpfulness, friendliness, courteousness, and the call to help other people, it seems that the Boy

Scouts of America's good will only applies to individuals who conform to and affirm its ideologies. However, hopefully with more research, more analysis, and more work like this thesis, perhaps the Boy Scouts of America will take notice and reevaluate the importance they hold for hegemonic masculinity.

The BSA is perfectly positioned to be the leaders in the fight against oppression and marginalization. As the widely accepted "moral" organization, teaching the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, surely the BSA is an obvious organization that should include gays into its membership ranks. Few youth organizations in the United States have the power, membership base, and reach as the Boy Scouts of America. Therefore, the Boy Scouts should recognize their responsibility to society, to teach lessons of equality, fairness, tolerance, diversity and the acceptance of all individuals, without objection or exception. The Boy Scouts need to lead by example, rewriting their policies and rules would ensure the equality of many marginalized individuals across the country. Moreover, it is irresponsible for the BSA to turn a blind eye to young gay boys, many of whom may be facing difficulties at their respective homes due to their sexuality; the Boy Scout program could be a refuge for these young individuals. Additionally, if the BSA was to allow young gay boys to become members of the organization, one more step would be taken to ensure that the social stigma associated with homosexuality is diminished, replaced with a more positive image. Finally, if the BSA eliminated its ban on homosexuality, and freely admitted out gay males into its membership, which group would be next?

Further research along this same subject warrants a close look at instances of subversion and transgression in the US military, fraternities and sporting clubs across America. Through further investigation and examining the interesting examples of counter hegemonic masculinities in a strictly hegemonic organization could provide valuable insight into the organization or perhaps even provide for an easier or warmer welcome of homosexuality into the organization. Hopefully at some point we will be able to see marginalized individuals creating space for themselves in other disenfranchised areas. Moreover, through more work, education and criticism perhaps we can even reduce the excessive use of pejoratives that plague the gay community.

Throughout these pages that I have written, I have poured my heart and my soul, the essence of my experience and my passion for this issue into every part of this thesis. However, my dream for my thesis and my wish for its impact may seem slightly convoluted. My dream for this thesis is twofold: first I hope that this thesis will be a source of change. I hope that people will read this and take notice of the complete and utter discrimination that still exists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I want people to realize that hegemonic masculinity is not something that should be celebrated, perpetuated, or even tolerated: it is something that should be fought against until equality exists for everyone. Second, my wish is that in the coming years, this thesis will become moot, a book collecting dust on a shelf, a relic of a time of discrimination, written off as a thesis that discussed issues that have long since been resolved. I hope that this thesis will contribute to the ban on homosexuals in the Boy Scouts and the military being lifted. Through this thesis, an urgent call goes out to



scholars across all disciplines: more research and advocacy for equality is desperately needed. Hopefully in the coming years the countless expatriated gay Eagle Scouts will be able to return to serve the Boy Scouts of America. Gay Eagle Scouts, whose knowledge of navigating and transversing a marginalized world can be put to good use to help other people, to add their voice in the fight against marginalization and oppression. Maybe those Scouts will return to the organization and help other Scouts through their journey through life. Perhaps the military will allow citizens who are passionately patriotic and want to serve their country to do so without fear of stigmatization, harassment, violence, or dishonorable discharges.

This thesis only hints at the immense amount of discrimination, oppression and marginalization that people face every day. A great deal of emotion has been relived throughout these pages; memories of times long since past. Times of trial and tribulation, times of heartache and pain, but also times of joy and celebration; the Boy Scouts of America has provided me with a long list of life long friends, friends that I can rely on for anything. As I am writing this final paragraph, I am reminded of the many great memories that I have had throughout Scouting, memories that I wish other people could experience in the organization. Writing this thesis has been a wonderful and emotional experience; reliving not only the great memories, but also the hate that accompanies homosexuality in a heteronormative society, reinforced by a hegemonic masculine organization. This thesis takes a stand against oppression and marginalization in the hope that one day, everyone can experience joining an organization or serving in the military without being worried about the implications of revealing their sexuality.

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