

## CROSSING THE LINE: SEX, POWER, JUSTICE, AND THE U.S. NAVY AT THE EQUATOR

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### I. INTRODUCTION

When my father came home from a seven-month Gulf War cruise in 1991, he told me about his participation in a bizarre ceremony when his ship crossed the equator. He talked of men receiving unusual haircuts, being paddled and insulted, being smeared with garbage and old food, and, most curiously, of a number of the men on the ship dressing up as women for a beauty pageant. He showed me photographs of men covered from head to toe in filth and being beaten with pieces of fire hose, and other pictures of men flashing massive false breasts to a crowd. As intrigued as I was, I was not surprised at the content of the ceremony. Having grown up a Navy brat, living near or in large Navy communities my entire life, I had grown used to the antics of Naval personnel. I had no problem picturing many of the Navy sailors and officers whom I knew participating in and laughing at the abuse and delighting in the garbage. And despite, or perhaps because of, many of the men's beliefs that women and homosexuals had no place in the Navy, I was not at all surprised at their amusement and willingness to participate in the transvestite pageant. Inexplicably, it just seemed to fit.

Yet, considering the accusations of homophobia, sexism, and sexual harassment that have arisen over the past twenty years, how and why would these same men willingly submit to being spanked and straddled by other men? What was so important about this ceremony that would make sailors shave their legs and don false breasts and teddies? More importantly, why did I automatically interpret these actions as being normal for this group of people?

The Navy's resistance to women in its ranks is second only to its resistance to homosexuals. Until 1991, women were denied the opportunity to fly fighter jets in the Navy, and only within the past few decades have women been able to sail on ships previously staffed only by men.<sup>1</sup> Where other militaries have found ways to accommodate women and homosexuals in their ranks, it has

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1. See, e.g., JEAN ZIMMERMAN, *TAILSPIN* (1995) (describing women's struggle for the right to fly fighter jets in the U.S. military and the military and social responses).

been a slow and violent process in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> There seems to be no strong logical argument behind the extreme reluctance of the Navy to permit women equal rights, or to permit homosexuals any rights at all.<sup>3</sup> As one gay comedian stated in response to military concerns over the ability of gays to serve, “. . .what does the military think? That the gays are so sexual that they can’t be trusted? What? In the heat of battle they’re going to want to have sex with the enemy? ‘I couldn’t shoot him, captain—he was gorgeous!’ I don’t think so.”<sup>4</sup>

In examining the Crossing the Line (or “Shellback”) ceremony, it becomes more apparent how intimately these issues are interwoven in the ritual. Through ritual play, ideas about gender, sexuality, and power are acted out. Although this is only one ritual, and one that not all Navy personnel participate in, it does offer one view into how political issues in the Navy are played out and resolved.

### A. The Great Fraternal Order of the Raging Main

The Navy ceremony of “Crossing the Line” is a tradition which originated over four hundred years ago, and which continues in strong form today.<sup>5</sup> It is a vivid and unexpectedly sanctioned Naval event in which the uninitiated Naval personnel who have never crossed the equator pass through a series of tests which induct them into the realm of the initiated. It is a brutal and sometimes dangerous transformation. Members are beaten, yelled at, covered in garbage

2. The Israeli military mandates that both men and women perform military service. Other European militaries such as those of The Netherlands and Greece have found ways to officially or unofficially accept open homosexuals (or at least openly homosexual behavior) in their militaries, particularly in their navies.

3. See discussion *infra* Parts V-VII.

4. Quote from comic Jimmy Tingle on gays in the military. *Larry King Live: Rich Little Tackles the Presidents* (CNN television broadcast, Nov. 27, 1993) (transcript # 977).

5. See discussion *infra* Part II (regarding the origins and history of the ceremony).

In piecing together more recent versions of the ceremony, a wide variety of resources were consulted. A major source was cruise books, which serve as yearbooks for many ships’ long cruises, with posed photographs of all the crew, various events, places visited, and random photographs of the crew at work or play, often narrated with informative or humorous text. Also used were log-books, specifically written to describe the ritual on a particular ship and providing a great deal more information. Included are details such as characters, punishments, and other information, but actual ritual detail is often lacking. By contrast, the cruise books usually have a small section devoted to the ritual, with few words and no lists, but with a revealing layout of photographs. The log and cruise books which were consulted for this project range in terms of sail date, purpose of cruise, and size and type of ship. A number of sources are from World War II, as dozens of U.S. ships and boats dipped beneath the equator in both the Atlantic and Pacific, creating a sort of revival of this ceremony.

The data in these books are by no means complete, however, and it is taken into account that there are many more parts of the ritual which are neither seen nor described. To circumvent this weakness, the data were supplemented with a wide variety of written and verbal accounts. Additionally, several informal interviews were conducted with officers and enlisted sailors who had crossed the equator, all of whom aided invaluablely in piecing together this ritual. Drawing on all of these sources, a general but malleable outline of the ritual can be established. See discussion *infra* Parts III and IV. The data range from 1912 to the present, but because of recent changes (beginning in 1991) in U.S. Navy policy that have directly and indirectly affected the ritual, this note focuses on the time period between 1965 and 1990. See discussion *infra* Part VII regarding these changes and their effects on the ritual.

and filth, and made to perform denigrating tasks. Yet the ceremony not only continues, but is fiercely defended by many of its participants, including all the Navy members whom I interviewed.

What is so fascinating about the ritual is the power that it wields. This power comes in several forms. Internally, the drama of the ceremony aids in the manifestation and affirmation of deeply rooted beliefs about gender roles, sex and domination. The drama itself contains much power, as the brutality, beatings and humiliation are not only permitted, but encouraged as tools of transformation. Finally, the ceremony itself is of such importance that men in the stringently hierarchical Navy would deliberately disobey orders in order to ensure its continuance.<sup>6</sup>

The ceremony is complex and varied enough to be considered a ritual. There are two groups of participants, the initiated and the uninitiated. The two groups are distinctly characterized, placed in opposition to demonstrate the difference between the undesirable qualities of the uninitiated and the desired qualities of the initiated. The uninitiated are physically and psychologically tested by the initiates until they are proven acceptable. Throughout the ritual, the initiated take the male position and the uninitiated take the female position. As uninitiated become initiated, they assume a masculine identity that is defined in relation to the feminine characters which they just portrayed. At the end, all participants embody the particular positive, male qualities of the initiated and become members of the "Great Fraternal Order of the Raging Main," under the great leader, King Neptune.

## B. The Players

The two groups of participants in the ceremony are the "shellbacks," who have been initiated into the Great Fraternal Order of the Raging Main, and the "pollywogs," who are uninitiated. The uninitiated name can be spelled either "pollywog" or "polliwog," or shortened to "wog." All three names are used interchangeably in the ceremony and in this text. The image associated with shellbacks is that of a turtle, while the meaning of pollywog is that of an infant frog, before metamorphosis.

Women's roles, both as characters and as participants, are important in the ritual. As characters, they work in the ceremony to illustrate ideas about women's social positioning in relation to each other and to men. As participants, women break the previous all-male discussion of gender. In this sense, a comparison of the ritual with and without the presence of women is revealing of how the men in the ceremony understand gender, and how they are forced to change that understanding when women are present.

As more women are introduced to this ritual, the meaning and form of the ceremony continue to change. The U.S. Navy is a male-dominated organization, and, until recently, women were not permitted to serve on ships or submarines. The first exceptions to this ruling were small ships called "tenders," which tended the needs of larger ships such as battleships or carriers. These ships are responsible for repairing and supplying the larger ships or submarines. Three

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6. See John Burlage, *High Cost of Hazing: Four Sailors Discharged*, NAVY TIMES, July 28, 1997, at 8.

cruise books of one of these ships, the USS Samuel Gompers, were reviewed and compared to other, entirely male-staffed ships and the differences and similarities are discussed later in this note.<sup>7</sup> Because of the rarity of female-staffed ships, however, the ritual is reviewed and analyzed in the context of an all-male setting. Historical and contemporary issues of women's participation in this ritual will be addressed, but until recently they have played a minor role in this ceremony. As the dynamics of the Navy change, with more and more women serving on larger ships as seamen, officers and pilots, the ceremony will no doubt change with it.

### C. Organization

Part II of this note establishes the background of the crossing the equator ceremony. It will discuss the origins, development, and meaning of the European ritual as it grew over four centuries. Part III will examine the current day ritual, outlining the passage of the pollywogs from days before the crossing until they receive their shellback certificates. Part IV will follow the pollywog through the ritual process. The life, death and rebirth of the pollywogs as shellbacks will be discussed within the ritual, along with the impact this transition has on the participants' understanding of relations of gender and sexuality. Parts V and VI will delve more deeply into these relations, with the former examining the ritual's understanding of women and of male/female relationships, and the latter examining the ritual's understanding of homosexuality and of heterosexual/homosexual relationships. Part VII will view the ritual in its entirety, and will examine masculine identity in the ritual and in the Navy.

Much of the contestation over women and gays in the military stems from the understandings of gender and sex that exist in the military today and that are expressed through the ceremony. This note attempts to examine how ideas of gender, sexuality, hierarchy and power are played out in the ceremony, and to explore how these ideas impact the development of military legal policy.

## II. THE HISTORY OF "CROSSING THE LINE"

The first documented ceremonies at the equator were found in accounts of journeys of French ships in the early sixteenth century. The expansion of trade routes and the funding of exploration of foreign lands at that time allowed European vessels to regularly cross the equator. Regular crossings of the equator, a location marked as "0" degrees latitude and conceptualized as the dividing line between north and south, set the stage for the development of a rite of passage.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after a regular route across the equator was established, vari-

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7. USS SAMUEL GOMPERS (AD-37), "THE GREAT ADVENTURE," WESTERN PACIFIC CRUISE: JUL 17, 1986 - JAN 17, 1987 (1987) [hereinafter 1987 USS SAMUEL GOMPERS]; USS SAMUEL GOMPERS (AD-37), WESTPAC CRUISE (1988) [hereinafter 1988 USS SAMUEL GOMPERS]; USS SAMUEL GOMPERS (AD-37), WESTPAC CRUISE (1981) [hereinafter 1981 USS SAMUEL GOMPERS].

8. This was compounded by dangerous conditions at the equator, including the intense heat and the belts of calm water called the "Doldrums" situated on either side of the equator, a windless area that has often trapped ships in the past. HENNING HENNINGSSEN, CROSSING THE EQUATOR: SAILORS' BAPTISM AND OTHER INITIATION RITES, WITH A DANISH SUMMARY 51 (1961).

ous accounts of ceremonies at the line began appearing.<sup>9</sup> These early ceremonies were comprised chiefly of two parts: a religious ceremony of thanksgiving for having passed a certain point, and an initiation (baptism) symbolizing the passing from one stage to the next.<sup>10</sup> By the mid-sixteenth century, sailors had begun to regard it as an ancient right that they baptize those who had not been over the equator before, and they did so by blacking themselves and dressing up in costumes.<sup>11</sup> The equator initiation ceremony soon spread to other European ships and quickly became more complex in form.

To the Europeans of this era, crossing the equator literally inverted their world. The equatorial line was present on world maps before the time of the first accounts of the ceremony, and there were many superstitions about the world and people below the line. It is especially interesting to note that a popular belief at the time was that “anyone of another race who crossed the equator would become a Negro.”<sup>12</sup> Hints of this belief can be seen in the use of black-faced police characters who controlled the movements of the uninitiated, in the placing of “Negroes” in positions of power, and in the application of shaving substances so that the man’s face was half white and half black.<sup>13</sup> This clearly illustrates the position of the man on the line of inversion.

Although the ritual’s purposes are difficult to ascertain because of lack of first-hand information, one can picture the ritual as a testing of new or young shipmates. The crew had only each other to rely on for months at a time. Thus it became absolutely necessary to be able to depend on one’s shipmates. The ritual could therefore be viewed as not only the testing of inexperienced shipmates, but also as the remaking of the crewmember in the ship’s image. The uninitiated (greenhorns) were literally and figuratively put on trial - literally in the ceremony with a mock trial, and figuratively because the ritual tried the strength and character of the inexperienced. The greenhorn then effectively gave his body over to the initiated to be recreated. Different ceremony characters performed numerous invasive “operations” to heal and “clean” the greenhorn, and to bring the greenhorn back to a newborn state: shaven and covered in blood. Afterwards, the greenhorn was baptized and was given a new name or a password. Thus, the ritual produced a man who had stood trial, passed the tests, and emerged as a new man and as part of the brotherhood of the crew.

Although the first accounts described a fairly simple ceremony, usually involving dunking new crew members and feasting afterward, the British, and later American, Crossing the Line rituals developed into complex rituals. As the social context changed, so did the shape of the ritual, and so did its meaning.

### III. PIECING THE RITUAL TOGETHER

The most striking thing about the Crossing the Equator ceremony, as it has been performed over the past 30 years, is a fluidity of style around a distinctive infrastructure. When piecing together the ritual today, it is difficult to find one

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9. *Id.* at 16.

10. *Id.* at 52.

11. *Id.* at 64.

12. HENLEY E. COMBS, SHELLBACKS: SONS OF NEPTUNE 7 (1951).

13. HENNINGSEN, *supra* note 8, at 66, 74.

format that all ceremonies follow exactly. Traces of the historical rituals appear in much of the current ritual, but they have metamorphosed into a form which is meaningful to the contemporary participants.

#### A. Setting Up the Crossing

For several days or even weeks before the ceremony, menacing cartoons and flyers are posted around the ship by shellbacks. Some of the flyers are targeted at specific people (usually chiefs or officers), but many address pollywogs in general.<sup>14</sup> Shellbacks assail pollywogs with threats and stories of past horrors, attempting to create a feeling of dread for the next day's proceedings.

The day before the ceremony is marked by two major events: Davy Jones' visit and the wog queen ceremony. Davy Jones is a character whose origins are unclear, but who in the eighteenth century was believed to be an evil spirit of the sea. His first name is thought to be a corruption of "duffy" or "duppy," West Indian words for devil, and his last name is thought to be derived from the biblical character Jonah, who was swallowed alive by a whale and who symbolizes death and misfortune.<sup>15</sup> "Davy Jones Locker" is a sailor's term for the depths of the sea—a repository for drowned sailors.<sup>16</sup> In this situation, he works under orders from King Neptune and delivers announcements which are necessary in setting up the ritual.

In a small ceremony, Davy Jones (a disguised shellback) "arrives" on the ship to warn the captain "that he [is] trespassing into the Royal Domain" with slimy pollywogs aboard.<sup>17</sup> Accompanied by a small entourage, Davy reads a formal message from Neptune regarding his impending visit and then outlines what must be done to prepare for it. On behalf of King Neptune, he outlines special watches and dress codes for both shellbacks and pollywogs. The watches are absurd creations such as Coriolis Swirl watch, Bow watch, or Chief of the Smoke watch, the purpose of which was to "make sure that the ship does not make smoke in excessive quantities which might offend King Neptune."<sup>18</sup> There are always, of course, special lookout watches for the "Line." The men on duty for these watches must wear bizarre outfits and are often equipped with silly instruments, such as binoculars made of two rolls of toilet paper, and have to follow strict rules of conduct.

The subpoenas that were delivered to the pollywogs are also farcical in nature. Filled with ridiculous accusations and insults, they are often printed as formal certificates. Any sailor who does not have a shellback card receives a subpoena, regardless of rank. The following are sample pollywog subpoenas from the USS America crossing in 1968 and the USS Bainbridge crossing in 1980:

In the highest court of the raging main, the domain of Imperium Neptuni  
Regis sends greetings to all slimy pollywogs. You are commanded to appear be-

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14. See *infra* notes 70-72 and accompanying text.

15. GERTRUDE JOBES, DICTIONARY OF MYTHOLOGY, FOLKLORE AND SYMBOLS 418 (1961).

16. LAROUSSE DICTIONARY OF WORLD FOLKLORE 137 (1995).

17. USS BROOKE (DEG-1), WESTPAC CRUISE (1968).

18. USS BELKNAP (DLG-26), WESTPAC CRUISE: 1969-1970 (1970); see also USS ORION & USS KITTIWAKE, CROSSIN' THE LINE, 29 SEPTEMBER 1947: U.S.S. ORION AND U.S.S. KITTIWAKE (1947).

fore the royal court on April 24, 1968. A complaint has been filed with the government of the domain of Imperium Neptuni Regis, state of the Raging Main, against you. You are charged with the heinous crimes of brown baggery, mopery, doping off, chit requesting, apple polishing, sympathy seeking, gun decking, procrastination, gold bricking, liberty hounding, and reveille neglecting. You have conspired to enter the royal domain without visa, passport, or proper authority. Davy Jones, Royal Scribe.<sup>19</sup>

Here ye, here ye! It has been brought to his royal highness, Neptunus Rex, through his trusty shellbacks, that certain of ye boxcar tourists and park bench sitters, hay makers and other landlubbers attached to the good ship and soon to enter my domain, are treating his royal highness with contempt, and are committing acts of insurrection and sedition.

Know ye, and take dire notice accordingly that such words and such acts meet with his royal majesty's profound displeasure and will be punished by eternal pickling or such other torment as this royal highness may deem appropriate.

The beginnings . . . a message from the royal scribe, Davy Jones.<sup>20</sup>

Each shellback, to prove that he is truly a shellback, and not a pollywog in disguise, must present his shellback card, which is received, with a certificate, at the end of the ceremony. In several unfortunate cases, a shellback has lost or forgotten his shellback card, and so must go through the ceremony all over again.

Before, during and after Davy Jones' visit, harassment of pollywogs continues in many forms. Pollywogs are often dressed as dogs, with eyes and noses blackened, leashes and dog collars attached, and signs worn which attest to their status. There is even a "wog dog auction" to raise money for events or causes. Shellbacks may purchase or select wog dogs and order them to crawl on hands and knees, bark, and attack or hump other wog dogs.<sup>21</sup> One account describes it as such:

[W]e always had—we called them wog dogs. When you're a shellback you can pick one or two wogs as your personal wogs; you put them on a leash and run them around the ship. And I had this guy . . . I often had him screwing or getting screwed by other wogs . . .<sup>22</sup>

19. USS AMERICA (CVA-66), WESTPAC CRUISE (1968).

20. USS BAINBRIDGE (CGN-25), WESTPAC CRUISE (1980).

21. 1988 USS SAMUEL GOMPERS, *supra* note 7.

22. STEVEN ZEELAND, *SAILORS AND SEXUAL IDENTITY: CROSSING THE LINE BETWEEN "STRAIGHT" AND "GAY" IN THE U.S. NAVY 158* (1995). This book has been a valuable resource in piecing together and understanding this ritual. It contains a collection of interviews of sailors, many of whom have crossed the equator. Most of the sailors or officers interviewed consider themselves homosexual, but a few are bisexual or heterosexual. Zeeland discusses at length their homosexual, homoerotic or transvestite experiences in the Navy, as well as those same elements in the Crossing the Line ceremony. The book yields first-hand descriptions of the ceremony from both shellback and pollywog perspectives. The open testimonies of these men about the dramatic sexual content of the ritual shed an interesting light not only on the ritual, but on descriptions of the ritual made by heterosexual sailors or officers whom I interviewed, which were conspicuously devoid of any sexual content.

Other wogs can be seen in photographs as sweeping or cleaning the ship while tied to a leash, or shining the shoes of a shellback.<sup>23</sup> There are also accounts of pollywogs receiving unfortunate haircuts, pollywogs being painted like “Indians on the warpath,” and groups of pollywogs being made to sing songs or recite prayers. Certain pollywogs are given strange tasks such as aboard the USS Cutlass, a U.S. submarine:

During all this, three pollywogs were disturbing the peace, on orders. One of them ran through the boat carrying a beer tray and an ash tray and yelling ‘I’m a trash can,’ another following close behind with a bell and announcing that he was a fire engine; while the third paraded with an inflated ‘safety,’ yelling at the top of his lungs, ‘I’m a prophylactic!’<sup>24</sup>

In many accounts, shellbacks stand by, armed with paddles or pieces of fire hose, to punish pollywogs who do not do exactly as they are told. If hungry, the wogs are allowed to eat food off the deck or are served supper in a trough from which they must eat without silverware and often without hands. The latter tactic is also used for wog breakfasts on the day of the ceremony.

A “pollywog prayer” was mentioned in several cruise books and sources as a plea to God (or King Neptune) for support during the upcoming initiation ceremony. Oftentimes, pollywogs are forced to memorize the prayer and to recite it early in the morning of the day of the ceremony. Some appeal to King Neptune for forgiveness:

Oh King Neptune. As we lowly pollywogs gather this morning we pray that today you will have mercy upon our poor souls and very weak bodies and minds.

Please, Oh King, forgive us our many trespasses as we forgive shellbacks who trespass against us. Guide us through the night and keep us from going into passageways and by-paths of the unknown.

Please, Oh, King, forgive us our landlubberly sins and we shall follow you and your loyal subjects.<sup>25</sup>

Still others are written in response to the shellbacks’ threats, and appeal to the Christian God, who is presumably not a shellback.

Our Father, who is not a shellback, please look over us “wogs” through this upcoming humiliation and torturous initiation. Forgive the shellbacks, our Father, for they know well what they are about to do. As we enter the land of Neptuneus Rex, may your “anti-shellback presence” be with us and guide us with dignity to endure the tortures of flogging, volleys of garbage and pools of foul seaweed. Let us fear no shellback, knowing you truly rule the equator.<sup>26</sup>

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When I confronted these men with the sexual descriptions provided by Zeeland, they reluctantly affirmed his descriptions.

23. USS AMERICA, *supra* note 19; USS HORNE (CG-30), WESTPAC CRUISE (1983).

24. COMBS, *supra* note 12, at 17. In naval lingo, a submarine is often referred to as a “boat,” as distinct from a “ship.”

25. USS ORION & USS KITTIWAKE, *supra* note 18 (from USS KITTIWAKE).

26. 1988 USS SAMUEL GOMPERS, *supra* note 7.



Great God in heaven, you are our life, our strength, and our joy—an ever-present helper and defender. Look with loving mercy upon this ship. Guide us into a better knowledge of your will and of the beauty of your holiness. May your servants of this great navy, and especially upon this ship, make choices of spiritual integrity and show forth the spirit of him who gave himself for the world, Jesus Christ, your son, amen.

Oh, and one more thing, Lord: hold back your wrath from the despicable shellbacks and have pity on their sad estate. With their lice-infested bodies, perverted and fermented minds, their unintelligible language, repulsive habits and otherwise rebellious spirit, they are indeed at the nadir of life, yeah in its darkest shadows. Forsake not the selfish shellback, but have mercy on them for they know not what they do.<sup>27</sup>

The latter two examples are also part of the “pollywog uprising,” a part of the ceremony which is found in numerous instances.

### B. The Pollywogs’ Revenge

The “pollywog uprising” is a sometimes-successful attempt by the pollywogs temporarily to refute the authority of the shellbacks. If successful, the pollywogs capture hapless shellbacks for a short period of time and perform the same initiation procedures as will be performed the next day by the shellbacks. Sometimes the uprising is merely a subversive tactic, such as a pollywog chef serving old pork disguised as breaded veal to shellbacks while reserving the veal for the pollywogs.<sup>28</sup> Other times it is much more violent, involving the capture and humiliation of shellbacks. Shellbacks are sentenced to

...dance ring around the rosy; [are] lashed to the rail and wet down; dance, sing and tell sea stories; run a paddle-wheel gauntlet and be dumped into a pool; be lashed to the deck or to stretchers; be given an egg shampoo; give an exhibition of trucking; furnish sandwiches to the pollywog court.<sup>29</sup>

Still other attempts aim at undermining the shellbacks’ plans for the next day by putting pepper into vents leading into shellbacks’ quarters or by trying to destroy initiation equipment.<sup>30</sup> A fairly universal trait of the uprising is the creation of and attempted flying of the pollywog flag. There are also poems and songs written by pollywogs that threaten King Neptune and declare the supremacy of pollywogs.<sup>31</sup> The uprising is ultimately futile because it never succeeds in overturning the next day’s events, but it is nearly always attempted. Regardless of the measure of its success in being carried out (sometimes shellback spies discover the uprising plans and stop them before their fruition), whoever is discovered to be directly involved in the operation is given twice the harassment the next day.

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27. 1987 USS SAMUEL GOMPERS, *supra* note 7.

28. COMBS, *supra* note 12, at 18.

29. VIRGIL A. COWART, USS MISSISSIPPI, CROSSING THE LINE: A STORY OF THE CEREMONIES ATTENDING THE CROSSING OF THE EQUATOR: THE UNITED STATES SHIP MISSISSIPPI EN ROUTE AMERICAN POLYNESIA, JULY 19-29, 1940 (1940) [hereinafter USS MISSISSIPPI].

30. USS ORION & USS KITTIWAKE, *supra* note 18 (from USS Orion).

31. See *infra* notes 83-85 and accompanying text.

### C. Wog Queen Pageant

Another event that is crucial to the ceremony and which often occurs the day before the crossing of the equator is the “wog queen pageant.” It is ordained by Davy Jones that the best looking pollywog shall be crowned “wog queen” and may sit on King Neptune’s court—the only wog with that privilege. In this pageant, a group of pollywogs, usually consisting of a pollywog from each department, is selected to participate in a fashion and talent show for the shellbacks. These male pollywogs dress as women and perform seductive or funny dances, songs or acts.<sup>32</sup> The wog who is crowned queen is the one who most convincingly portrays a woman. Photographs of these men show a range of portrayals, wearing everything from see-through lingerie with long blond wigs and spike heels to classy dresses and sophisticated wig styles to short skirts and ridiculously massive plastic breasts.<sup>33</sup> Almost all of the men wear large fake breasts, makeup and high heels. An interesting twist that occurs on some ships staffed with significant numbers of women is dual cross-dressing, where men and women are paired up and must dress in clothes of the other sex. Davy Jones’ orders in this case are quoted in a cruise book:

‘For you must know that any craft who fain cross the great sea lord’s special domain must pay the tribute that King Neptune wishes and will be received by mermaids, bears and fishes.’ We had no choice; Davy Jones demanded that we pick our fairest queen and handsomest king to sit on King Neptune’s court. Oh, but there is a twist to this selection process: men must be “queens” and women the “kings.”<sup>34</sup>

The photographs in these cruise books showed the women with a variety of personas: cowboy, “Buckwheat,” rock star, Don Johnson, and a businessman in three-piece suit.<sup>35</sup>

### D. The Big Day

The day of the equator crossing begins with a very unpleasant awakening for the pollywogs. The shellbacks arise early to set up the equipment needed. Sometimes the pollywogs are awakened at two or three in the morning and must perform degrading or unpleasant tasks. In one case, the men had a “mixture of nastiness” shoved down their throats.<sup>36</sup> Another ship’s shellbacks woke the pollywogs by banging garbage cans and turning on all the lights. They

32. See, e.g., USS BAINBRIDGE, *supra* note 20; USS BELKNAP, *supra* note 18; USS HORNE, *supra* note 23; ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 158, 207 (describing wogs dressing in drag and performing simulated sexual acts on executive and commanding officers).

33. The men, in anticipation of this ritual, buy and store these items on board before the ship departs. Sometimes these items are kept for 5 or 6 months before the ritual. Phone interview with Naval Officer 1 (Feb. 21, 1998) (To preserve the anonymity and privacy of the officers and sailors interviewed, because of the sensitive nature of the discussions, they will be referred to only as “Naval Officer” or “Sailor.”). On a turn-of-the-century British ship, sailors actually sewed the costumes on board. See *The Terrors of the Line*, THE NAVY AND ARMY ILLUSTRATED, Dec. 16, 1899, at 342.

34. 1988 USS SAMUEL GOMPERS, *supra* note 7.

35. See discussion *infra* Part V (for a discussion of women’s impact on the ceremony and its meaning).

36. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 206.

made the wogs crawl around the room on their hands and knees with their eyes on the ground. Occasionally, they would pull a wog aside and demand that he simulate anal sex with another wog, beating him from behind if he didn't do it adequately.<sup>37</sup> At breakfast, the wogs are harassed even more. Occasionally the wog breakfast is served in a giant trough, from which they all must eat without utensils. Other times, the breakfast is served on the floor, where it must be eaten without the use of hands.

The "Jolly Roger," a flag with skull and crossbones on it, is flown by the shellbacks, announcing the ship's take-over by Neptune and his followers. Shellbacks are dressed for the day in pirate costumes, and are assigned various tasks around the ship. It is announced that the Royal Party has joined the ship, and the wogs are brought on deck, where they have to dress appropriately: wearing their underwear on the outside of their clothing, wearing special "wog t-shirts" or signs, or simply stripping down to their underclothes. At this point, they are hosed down with powerful fire hoses and forced to begin crawling around the ship on their hands and knees, continually "encouraged" by shellbacks yielding shillelaghs (pieces of fire hose) and paddles. Along the way, and throughout the rest of the ritual, shellbacks beat the pollywogs, cover them in garbage and rotten food, place them in submissive or humiliating sexual positions, and scream insults at them.

If a pollywog lifts his head, struggles, or is generally disfavored by the shellbacks, he is pulled aside for special attention. Usually the punishment is for the wog's head and hands to be put in the stocks (or pillory). He is asked ridiculous questions and is paddled or shocked with a hand driven generator when (inevitably) the answers are incorrect.<sup>38</sup> Pollywogs who are disliked, or who are suspected of being gay, receive especially harsh treatment, while favored wogs or high-ranking wogs are often pulled out of the ritual early, or are permitted to go through it without too much harassment.<sup>39</sup> For the disfavored, the stocks are especially difficult because they are in such a vulnerable position. One gay sailor recounts his experience:

Eddy: Everyone thought I was going to break down. Everyone. All the straight people. "We're going to break you." I never did, and they just kept walking me through it again and again. I mean, you can be there all day. Everyone else just went straight through and was done with it. But me, they kept on sending me through it, and I never got upset about it . . . The only time I got really upset—not upset, but mad—I was in [the stocks] on my hands, and my head was locked in there, and I was bent over, and someone was behind me pretending they were having sex with me. And another guy was pouring three-week-old food on top of my head, and it was dripping all over my mouth. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't wipe my face.

Zeeland: What do you mean, pretending to have sex with you?

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37. *Id.* at 192.

38. COMBS, *supra* note 12, at 20.

39. As one naval officer pointed out, despite the play atmosphere of the ceremony, the hierarchy of command is in place the next day, and high-ranking personnel can revenge themselves on people who abused them during the ceremony. Interview with Naval Officer 1 (Feb. 21, 1998).

E: He was behind me going like this [gets up and demonstrated], humping me.<sup>40</sup>

Garbage, sewage, and rotten food are poured over the wogs and into every orifice of their bodies, including their anuses.<sup>41</sup> Photographs of the ritual show men in the stocks with eggs crushed in their hair, shellbacks with their paddles poised to strike the back or buttocks of a pollywog, and huge groups of men with their underwear on the outside of their clothing, crawling uniformly on their hands and knees.<sup>42</sup>

A great deal of simulated sexual activity is also involved in the humiliation of the pollywogs. As mentioned previously, men labeled as wog dogs are forced to simulate sex with other wogs while leashed or chained. Wogs at any time may be ordered to simulate anal or oral sex with other wogs. They may also be ordered to form chains with pollywogs pressed up behind one another in long rows.<sup>43</sup> Pollywogs may have substances such as Crisco (vegetable shortening) placed in their anuses and in some cases must retrieve objects from the anuses of other wogs, simulating anallingus (or "rimming").<sup>44</sup> In kissing the royal baby, wogs are positioned in submissive sexual situations similar to performing oral sex. In all possible ways, the shellbacks seek to humiliate and degrade the pollywogs, especially sexually.

The order of the day's events varies from ship to ship, but the events themselves remain fairly consistent. Because of this, the following section will describe the events and their tentative placements in the ceremony individually rather than describing them in outline form.

#### E. The Royal Court

The entrance of the Royal Court marks the official start of the ceremony. The Royal Navigator first announces that "the ship is on the line," and Davy Jones appears to report to the Commanding Officer (CO) that "Neptunus Rex and party have arrived."<sup>45</sup> Neptune and his party arrive on deck and are greeted by the CO. Neptune pledges to be as severe as possible in converting the pollywogs to shellbacks. The CO relinquishes control of the ship to King Neptune, who thanks the CO, and the Royal Party is escorted to the throne.<sup>46</sup>

The members of the Royal Court depend on the number of shellbacks on the ship and the width of their imagination. Present on almost all ships, however, is a core group of characters. These lists of characters were compiled using

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40. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 57.

41. *Id.* at 206.

42. See Photographs of USS Camden crossing in 1991 (on file with author); see also USS BELKNAP, *supra* note 18; EQUATOR CROSSING: USS SHANGRI-LA (CVW-8), MAR. 11, 1970 (1970) [hereinafter USS SHANGRI-LA].

43. Photographs of USS Camden crossing in 1991 (on file with author).

44. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at figs. 13 & 16.

45. VICE ADMIRAL LELAND P. LOVETTE, NAVAL CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, AND USAGE 304 (1939).

46. An excellent example of the formal intercourse between these members is the Crossing the Line manual from the U.S.S. Camden, which crossed the equator in 1991. The manual contains the plan for the ceremony, formal notices and discussions, and instructions for participants, positioning and safety. DEP'T OF THE NAVY, CROSSING-THE-LINE CEREMONY, USS CAMDEN (AOE-2) NOTICE 1610 (July 19, 1991).

the aforementioned sources, but mainly concentrating on the logbooks, and other detailed accounts. King Neptune, or Neptunus Rex as he is often called, is the central figure in the ritual. Many modern and ancient fables have developed Neptune into a very distinct character. He is said to reside at the equator, where all who pass must pay tribute to him. He insures that the pollywogs, those who have not yet crossed the equator, will be severely tested until it is proven that they deserve the name "shellback." He rules with his wife Queen Amphitrite, who today has very little to do during the ritual.<sup>47</sup> Both of them dress dramatically in character, with wigs, beards, clothing decorated with shells and netting, and a trident for Neptune. With them is their son, the Royal Baby. Today, the Royal Baby is often the fattest shellback on the ship and is always dressed in a very large diaper, bonnet, and pacifier, and sometimes has a nurse. Occasionally there is a Royal Princess as well, whose role, like Amphitrite's, is indistinct.

The Royal Navigator is a necessary character, as it is he who announces when the ship has reached latitude zero. Davy Jones, of course, is necessary to the proceedings as well. The Royal Scribe records the day's proceedings, as well as the names of those who become shellbacks. The Royal Chaplain offers blessings and prayers for the Pollywogs. There are always characters called Royal Bears, although they take different forms. The Bears are the shellbacks who form the gauntlet through which the wogs must run, and they are responsible for disciplining the pollywogs throughout the ceremony. Their jobs include forcing the wogs underwater when they are dunked, placing wogs in the stocks when they do not exactly obey orders, paddling and insulting wogs, sitting on wogs in the tunnel, and various and sundry tasks. They sometimes dress as pirates, although the pirates may be an entirely different group. Occasionally, there are Royal Police forces which are responsible for disciplining the wogs, and they may or may not take the place of the Bears. Other important characters include the Doctor, the Dentist, the Barber, and the Judges.<sup>48</sup>

These characters are only the most popular, however, and the Royal Party is not limited to just them. Many other characters have associations with death or pain, such as the Hangman, the Pallbearer, the Electrocuter, the Brander, the Cannibals, the Executioner, the Skeleton, the Torturer, and the Undertaker.<sup>49</sup> Some characters are very specialized, like the S.C. for O.P.P (the Special Counsel for Outstanding Pollywog Pests) or the S.C. for Capt. (the Special Counsel for the Captain).<sup>50</sup> Still others are just unexplainable, either in name or purpose, like Bay Blahnpipple, Columbia, and Peg Leg.<sup>51</sup>

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47. See *infra* notes 92-93 and accompanying text.

48. W.H. RAFFERTY ET AL., THE CRUISE OF THE U.S.S. RANGER TO PERU: A SOUVENIR OF THE GOODWILL CRUISE, SEPT. 4 - OCT. 5, 1937 (1937) [hereinafter USS RANGER]; see also USS MISSISSIPPI, *supra* note 29; USS ORION & USS KITTIWAKE, *supra* note 18 (from USS Orion); USS SHANGRI-LA, *supra* note 42.

49. *Id.*; see also USS MARYLAND (BB-46), UNITED STATES ARMORED CRUISER "MARYLAND" EN ROUTE FROM HONOLULU TO ECUADOR, JAN 31, 1912 (1912).

50. USS MARYLAND, *supra* note 49.

51. *Id.*; USS SHANGRI-LA, *supra* note 42.

## F. The Trial

The focus of the ceremony is the trial of the pollywogs. The make-up of the court varies from ship to ship, with Neptune or a judge presiding sometimes with the assistance of a jury or other judges. Each pollywog crawls before the court and must wait on hands and knees while the Royal Judge reads the charges against him. The charges are farcical, and each man is found guilty, regardless of his plea. As one man reports, entering a plea of “not guilty” would “just about double the punishment. In a Court of Law a man is innocent until he is proven guilty—but in the Court of Neptunus Rex, a man is guilty until it is proven he can ‘take it.’”<sup>52</sup> The Royal Judge (or Jury) pronounces the verdict and the punishment. The punishments vary greatly and are usually very humorous, such as: kiss the belly of the Royal Baby (discussed later), wrestle with temptation in front of the Royal Party, do a whirling dervish or hula dance for the King, bounce like a rubber ball for the Baby, stage a love scene with the Queen, try to make the King laugh, or sit on the Baby’s knee and sing a lullaby.<sup>53</sup>

## G. The Tests

The Doctor’s visit is highly variable as far as its placement in the ceremony. In one instance, the pollywogs visit the Royal Doctor, who examines them and pronounces them fit to stand punishment.<sup>54</sup> Another description lists the Doctor as giving Pollywogs a “truth serum,” a mixture of Kool-Aid and Tabasco sauce shot through a syringe into the wog’s mouth, before addressing the Royal Court. If the Doctor likes the wog, he might give something less powerful, but if he doesn’t like the wog, he’ll give a dose of the “nasty stuff.”<sup>55</sup> In other cases, the Royal Doctor is one visit in a line of shellback stations which all wogs must visit. He examines the patients with bizarre utensils, and often swabs their throats with horrible tasting potions.<sup>56</sup> Sometimes there are also Royal Surgeons who must “operate” on the pollywogs. There are several pictures of Doctors using giant tools to “remove” organs or genitals.

Found in every account of the ritual, the kissing of the belly of the Royal Baby is a major part of the ceremony. It is sometimes a station at which all must stop and sometimes a particular punishment which some wogs are assigned. The Baby is usually a very large member of the ship who sits in a chair on deck. The wogs must place their mouths on the Baby’s stomach, either swallowing slimy materials like raw oysters, kissing the belly covered in mineral grease and egg shells, or retrieving items (olives, cherries, etc.) from Crisco, which permits the royal baby forcefully to push the wog’s face into the Crisco, forcing it between his teeth and into his nose.<sup>57</sup>

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52. COMBS, *supra* note 12, at 19.

53. USS ORION & USS KITTIWAKE, *supra* note 18 (from USS Kittiwake).

54. USS MARYLAND, *supra* note 49.

55. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 206.

56. COMBS, *supra* note 12, at 20.

57. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 206 & fig. 15.

Another stop in the ritual is a visit to the toilet on deck. The pollywog must retrieve something (e.g., a cherry) from a toilet using only his mouth.<sup>58</sup> When the wog's face is deep in the toilet, a shellback presses a button and salt water hits the wog in the face.<sup>59</sup> There are many photographs of this on different (but not all) ships, but it takes place at varying times in the ceremony.

Two more stops along the way, which are not present in all versions of the ritual, are the visits to the Royal Dentist and the Royal Undertaker. The Dentist examines the mouths of the pollywogs, smearing unpleasant substances on the teeth or squirting unpleasant substances down their throats.<sup>60</sup> The Undertaker is responsible for nailing the dead pollywogs into coffins, a horrifying experience for claustrophobic wogs.<sup>61</sup> Other stops include a visit to the guillotine with the Royal Executioner or to the noose with the Royal Hangman.<sup>62</sup>

Probably the oldest of the traditions in the ceremony is the visit to the Royal Barber, which is not seen as often as in earlier times. The trip to the Barber has many possible activities involved. Hair is shaven or trimmed haphazardly. Scalp massages are often given, with solutions containing items such as grease, wood shavings, eggs, and tetral, a thin rust preventative compound.<sup>63</sup> The pollywogs are often shaved, lathered with such solutions as asphaltum, molasses, lubricating oil and tar. On many ships, the Barber's chair is set up so that, after the trim and shave, the pollywog is dumped backwards into a vat of water.

The gauntlet is another challenge which is found in different places in the ritual, and is not part of every ship's ceremony. It is occasionally placed in the middle, before the visit to the Royal Baby, but is more often an opening or final challenge. To form the gauntlet, shellbacks armed with shillelaghs and paddles form two lines, between which the pollywogs must crawl as fast as they can. The shellbacks attempt to get in as many blows as possible to each pollywog.

#### H. The Wog Pool

On ships where the Barber's chair is not set up, there are usually slides or steps leading to pools of nasty content. The pools are large vats containing water and a green liquid resembling anti-freeze.<sup>64</sup> The wogs are dumped unceremoniously into the liquid and are dunked thoroughly by shellbacks. This part sometimes marks the end of the pollywog's journey, as they receive a final test in the pool:

Joey: Then at the end, when we jumped in the shit—it's a big-ass vat and it's disgusting. You're supposed to be underneath the water, so I just swam and pulled up out, and they go, "What are you?" And if you say you're a shellback,

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58. USS SHANGRI-LA, *supra* note 42.

59. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 206.

60. *See, e.g.*, USS SHANGRI-LA, *supra* note 42; USS MISSISSIPPI, *supra* note 29.

61. *See, e.g.*, USS RANGER, *supra* note 48; USS MISSISSIPPI, *supra* note 29.

62. *See, e.g.*, USS SHANGRI-LA, *supra* note 42.

63. COMBS, *supra* note 12, at 21.

64. Jeff Kramer, 'This is Navy Hazing': Garage Sale Patron Finds Scandal at Sea, HOUSTON CHRON., June 21, 1997, at 10.

you're done, but if you fuck up and say "I'm a wog," then you gotta go back. [Laughs.] I knew what was coming so of course I had the right response.<sup>65</sup>

Sonny: . . . you go over and they try to teach you something. "Shellbacks can't swim." Until you understand what they're saying they hit you with a shillelagh. You get into this makeshift swimming pool, and the guy standing there tells you, "OK, swim over to that corner and tell the master chief you're a shellback." So obviously he said swim, and all along you've been doing what everybody tells you so you swim. He tells you "You did something wrong! Swim back and figure out what you did wrong!" And this water's nasty, it's had people swimming through it all day. With people's puke and hot dogs and everything. So you swim back, and they try to teach you again. "Shellbacks don't swim. Shellbacks don't swim." Ahhh! That's right, I'm supposed to be a shellback now! So you walk over.<sup>66</sup>

### I. The "Chute"

A nearly essential part of the equator ritual is the passage through the garbage chute. Found usually at the very end, the chute is a long piece of canvas sewn together to form a tunnel, in which large amounts of garbage and sewage are placed. The pollywog must crawl through the tunnel while shellbacks beat it and sit on it. In the following instance, it preceded the pool:

S: There you have to crawl through this cloth tube that is enclosed and full of nastiness. People's puke, noodles, leftover food, eggs—you name it, it's in there. When you're halfway through it they sit on the damn thing and tell you to roll around in it.<sup>67</sup>

Another account, which placed the journey through the chute at the very end of the ordeal, detailed a similar situation:

[T]he bruised and battered man was then paddled in the direction of the 'Chute.' It was a piece of canvas about ten feet long, sewed together to make a bag, open at both ends and about two feet in diameter. In this unpretentious and innocent looking cylinder was more garbage than could be collected in the City of New York in a week. The Royal Policeman started the victim through the Chute, then sat on it so he couldn't get through, and then paddled him because he couldn't. After a few whacks, the poor unfortunate was forced flat upon his stomach, and was made to wiggle his way through the best he might, all the while receiving encouragement of a lusty nature until he reached the other end.<sup>68</sup>

In other cases as well, the wogs crawling through the chute are beaten or sat upon.

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65. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 282.

66. *Id.* at 206-07.

67. *Id.* at 206.

68. COMBS, *supra* note 12, at 21.



## J. The End

After the final test has been passed, the pollywogs strip off their garbage-soaked clothing and are hosed down by shellbacks, who embrace them and help them clean themselves. Several days later there may be a formalized finale in which the new shellbacks journey around the ship together. The true conclusion, however, is when the pollywogs receive their formal certificates which declare them members of the “Fraternal Order of the Raging Main.”

The structure of the ritual is remarkably similar from ship to ship, despite differences in characters and orders of events. Almost all recent accounts of the ritual (from 1960 to 1990) include descriptions of wog night, the proceedings of the Royal Court, the trial, the tests and punishments, and the final test, either through the pool or tunnel. This similarity across different ships suggests that the ceremony is expressing ideas that are commonly held by the members of these ships. The ceremony is ritually coded to indirectly speak of issues and people which are relevant to the officer and sailor participants. As will be seen in following sections, the sculpting of a shellback from a pollywog is simultaneously the sculpting of the ideal sailor from the general public. The next section will outline the participant’s process through this ritual passage.

## IV. THROUGH THE RITUAL PROCESS

The transition from a pollywog to a shellback is more complicated than it first seems. Through the ritual, the pollywog is tested, tried, put to death and reborn in the image of a shellback. The impact of the ritual on the participant is that he begins in one place, with distinct characteristics, and ends somewhere completely different, with completely different attributes. Pollywogs are not just renamed; they are redefined.

This section will examine that process of redefinition as it occurs through the ritual. It will demonstrate how the characters of the pollywogs and shellbacks are established in opposition to one another; how the ritual process continues this opposition and symbolically reforms the pollywogs; how the process is used to build a larger sense of community and identity; and finally, how the two identities, through their positioning contrary to each other, are used to speak of relationships between participants in the ritual and people outside the ritual.

### A. Naming the Participants

In the ritual, the traits of the pollywogs are expressed through names, descriptions and events. Before the ritual even begins, simply looking at the names and animals associated with the categories of initiated and uninitiated reveals a great deal of the supposed difference in character. The uninitiated, the pollywogs, are infants (yet to develop into frogs), vulnerable, soft, dependent upon and restricted to water, slimy (a much favored adjective) and weak. Contrariwise, the initiated shellbacks are protected by a thick, hard shell, are adult, can move freely from land to water and back, have the ability to be clean and dry (but may choose not to be) and are strong. They are in control, both of their appearance and their habitat. At the same time, a shellback is obviously a turtle, which is not a very aggressive animal. Rather than acting as predators or pene-

trators, they draw their heads *in* when attacked. The focus seems to be one of stoicism: the ability to deal with hardship and survive, exactly what pollywogs must do to prove themselves. The transition is further emphasized by the fact that the pollywogs do not transform into the expected form of a frog; rather, they become something completely different, something that embodies their stoicism throughout their transition.<sup>69</sup>

The characterization of pollywogs and shellbacks can also be seen in the several days before the ritual, when threatening and foreboding flyers and cartoons are posted around ships by shellbacks. In several flyers which were posted around one ship, the USS Camden, wogs were described in various unflattering ways. One flyer showed a “typical shellback” as a pirate with a dagger between his teeth, and “typical slimy wogs” as shapeless, newly hatched creatures and as goldfish.<sup>70</sup> Another flyer attacked the senior wog who, in this case, was the CHENG (the Chief Engineer). The flyer stated:

To those wogs, those sorry dogs,  
 Those slippery, slimey [sic] sluts,  
 Where between their thighs,  
 No manhood lies,  
 Their breath like that of their butts!  
 We wonder why they even try,  
 To fight with a lack of tact,  
 While we all know the way to go  
 Is to be a trusty SHELLBACK!

In one statement, pollywogs become lower animals (dogs, as opposed to lions or eagles), are endowed with feminine sexual promiscuity (sluts), are demasculinized (no male genitalia) and are declared filthy.

From the same ship comes a message from King Neptune, describing the USS Camden as carrying:

[A] large and slimy cargo of land lubbers, cargo and bilge rats, sea lawyers, lounge lizards, parlor dunnigans, plow deserters, park bench warmers, chicken chasers, hay tossers, sand crabs, four flushers, rubic cube puzzle bugs, gold brickers, scavengers, and all other living creatures of the land, and last but not least, the vamps, liberty hounds, and drug store cowboys falsely masquerading as seamen and man-o-wars men of which all pollywogs are members.<sup>71</sup>

The pollywogs are sometimes described ironically, as they are said to be land-lubbers, restricted to land only, even though their name would indicate that they are limited to water. In the same fashion, they are called sand crabs—an animal associated with water (crab), but restricted to land. They are depicted as sleazy and sneaky (sea lawyers, lounge lizards), as stupid farmhands (chicken chasers, hay tossers) and as lazy and nerdish (plow deserters, park bench warmers, rubic cube puzzle bugs). They are untrustworthy (indicating a need to build

69. Thanks to Dr. Peter Metcalf for his discussion of this point. E-mail from Peter Metcalf, Professor of Anthropology, University of Virginia, to author (May 11, 1998, 11:04:31 EST) (on file with author).

70. Flyers, Dep't of the Navy (reprinted in DEP'T OF THE NAVY, CROSSING-THE-LINE CEREMONY, USS CAMDEN (AOE-2) NOTICE 1610 (July 22, 1991) (on file with author)).

71. *Id.* at encl. 4 (sample message from “King Neptunus Rex” to “USS Camden”).

trust through the ritual), non-male and sexually promiscuous (indicating a feminine sexuality) and falsely claiming masculine strength (drug store cowboy - indicating weakness and an envy for those who have true strength.)

In one poem on a flyer, “The Shellback’s Last Laugh,” the shellbacks describe themselves as noble, authoritative, wise, knowing, truthful, just and powerful.<sup>72</sup> Because the pollywogs are described both negatively and in opposition to shellbacks, the definition of shellback character can also be derived from the statements they make about the pollywogs. Shellbacks are self-proclaimed as trustworthy, upright, strong, powerful, and overwhelmingly male. More than just male, the shellbacks are sexual and powerful men. They have male genitalia and have no use for drug store cowboys—the shellbacks are the real thing. While these descriptions are all derived from the descriptions of the pollywogs, they hold true, and become more elaborate, throughout the ceremony.

#### B. The Life and Death of a Pollywog

The descriptions of pollywogs as powerless and weak set the stage for their acceptance of submission to the shellbacks on wog night. The day before the Crossing the Line ceremony, several events cultivate this submission. Pollywogs from all over the ship are ordered to take part in the wog queen pageant, where they dress as sexually promiscuous women and perform songs and sexy dances for the shellbacks. At the wog dog auction, pollywogs dress as dogs and are auctioned off to shellback masters. Wogs are leashed and ordered to crawl around the ship, beg, bark, growl or bite for their shellback owners. Wog dogs are even ordered to attack or simulate sex with other wog dogs. Other wogs (with or without leashes) are ordered to shine shellbacks’ shoes or sweep the deck in front of the shellbacks. In all of these events, pollywogs are placed under the control and authority of shellbacks. Shellbacks gain the greater social (and biological—male/human/master) positions and begin the degradation of the wogs and the taking over of the wogs’ bodies, which will culminate in the ceremony the next day. At the same time, the negative descriptions of the pollywogs, which are circulated before and during wog night, increase the antagonism between the two groups, with the shellbacks becoming increasingly vicious in the taunting of this unwanted group, and the pollywogs becoming increasingly defensive.

The day of the ceremony, the shellbacks’ control over the pollywogs continues. Shellbacks awaken pollywogs before dawn and serve them an unpleasant-sounding breakfast.<sup>73</sup> The shellbacks tell the wogs when to wake, what to wear, and what to eat. As the ceremony begins, wogs renounce all claims to their bodies or dignity. They are ordered to crawl around the ship with their heads down, on their hands and knees, often with their underwear on the outside of their clothes, emphasizing their vulnerability. They are soaked with fire hoses and are made filthy. They have garbage and human waste thrown on them or rubbed in their faces or hair. They are paddled and beaten, and if they

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72. *Id.* at 9 (*The Shellback’s Last Laugh*).

73. *Id.* at 8 (*The Pollywog Breakfast Menu* from the USS Camden listed Petrified Pelican Poop on a Whale Scab, Grilled Pollywog Ear Lobes to Order, and Candied Sea Slug Filled with Slimy Jellyfish Eggs. ).

so much as raise their head, they are dragged out of line for “special treatment”—usually to be locked in the stocks and be paddled and humped. This image is one of humility, submissiveness, and humiliation. Adult men can be seen crawling en masse and being spanked, completely submissive to shellback control.<sup>74</sup>

After the pollywogs have been properly humbled, they submit to a series of penetrations. Their bodies are invaded by doctors and dentists who examine them, pronounce them very ill, and treat them with oral injections of Tabasco sauce and Kool-Aid. They have Crisco shoved between their teeth at the belly of the Royal Baby, and they are squirted in the face with seawater when they bob for cherries in the toilet. In some pictures, pollywogs have their pants pulled down and Crisco shoved in their anuses.<sup>75</sup> These physical penetrations emphasize the powerlessness of the pollywogs (the penetrated) and the control which the shellbacks (the penetrators) have over them.

This type of control can also be seen in the simulated sexual penetration in the ritual. Throughout the ceremony, shellbacks simulate anal or oral sex with the pollywogs.<sup>76</sup> This sexual penetration translates into sexual dominance, reaching beyond shellback-pollywog encounters. Shellbacks dominate all aspects of pollywogs’ sexuality, and in several accounts shellbacks ordered pollywogs to simulate oral and anal sex with each other.<sup>77</sup> In these cases, the power of having control of the pollywogs’ sexuality outweighed the power of the status of “penetrator.”

It might also be noted that shellbacks, as they are never penetrated, can easily be imagined as the male partner in heterosexual encounters, especially as the pollywogs have otherwise been deemed feminine. The pollywogs, on the other hand, are the penetrated. They are not only seen as taking the feminine position in these “heterosexual” encounters, but can easily be seen as participating in a homosexual, sexual relationship.

Amidst, or directly following these penetrations is the trial of the pollywogs. Kneeling in front of the ultimate shellback authority figure, King Neptune, wogs are tried for ridiculous crimes. Regardless of the plea or of the absurdity of the crimes, the pollywogs are found guilty and are sentenced to silly and embarrassing tasks (hula-dancing, singing lullabies to the baby, etc.).<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, the pollywogs are tried, not for what they have done, but for who they are. Their status as pollywogs is all that is needed to try, convict, and sentence them.

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74. Photographs from USS Camden crossing in 1991 (on file with author).

75. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at fig. 13. Many ships do not allow physical penetration of the pollywogs’ orifices, but enforcement of such rules is difficult during the ritual. See Dep’t of the Navy, *General Safety Guidelines*, CROSSING-THE-LINE CEREMONY, USS CAMDEN (AOE-2) NOTICE 1610 pt. 6c (July 19, 1991) (“No foreign matter of any kind shall be introduced into the eyes, ears, nose, or other body cavities of pollywogs.”).

76. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 157, 191, 282; Phone interview with Naval Officer 1 (Feb. 21, 1998).

77. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 157, 191, 282; Phone interview with Naval Officer 1 (Feb. 21, 1998).

78. USS ORION & USS KITTIWAKE, *supra* note 18 (from USS Kittiwake) (Lists “some of the various punishments meted out to pollywogs by the Court of High Justice).

After the trial, the pollywogs are figuratively killed by executioners, hangmen, or electrocutionists, among others, and they often are nailed into coffins by the undertakers.<sup>79</sup> After the death of the pollywogs, all that remains is their rebirth. Sometimes in preparation for the final stage their heads or faces are shaved, bringing them back to a pre-pubescent stage.<sup>80</sup> The wogs are then ready for their final challenge.

The rebirth of the wogs can be found in two forms: either the pool or the tunnel. In the case of the pool, pollywogs pass first through the garbage chute or tunnel and are thrown or pushed into a pool of water and garbage. The wog's task is usually to swim to the other side and answer a question or follow a direction from a shellback. In one example, a shellback asked, "What are you?" to which the pollywogs replied "pollywog," as they have been drilled to do the entire ceremony.<sup>81</sup> As this is the final test, the correct answer is "shellback," and if it is not properly answered, the wog must swim to the other side and back and answer again.<sup>82</sup> Another example is when the shellbacks state that "shellbacks don't swim," then demand that a pollywog swim across the pool. If the wog swims, he is told that he did something wrong and must swim back. It isn't until the wog walks across the pool that he is allowed to exit as a shellback. In both examples, the participant must prove that he is a shellback before he may leave the pool. The double image that occurs here is both the image of a pollywog restricted to water until he has proven that he is a true shellback, and the image of a fetus restricted to the womb and amniotic fluid until he is ready to be born.

The birth imagery is also present when the participants pass through the garbage chute. The chute is similar to a birth canal through which the pollywogs must pass before being born again as shellbacks. The shellbacks are certain to make this passage difficult by beating the wogs who are in the tunnel, or by sitting on them, forcing them to squirm out of the restrictive place on their stomachs. Whether the final test is marked by a trip through a pool or a tunnel, it is always a passage, and at the end the new shellbacks strip off their clothing and are cleaned off with the help of the other shellbacks.

When the visit to the pool is before the visit to the garbage chute, the pool's liquid could possibly be seen as amniotic fluid, which they must experience before passing through the birth canal (the tunnel). The hosing off at the end would be symbolic of the first cleansing of the baby, removing all vestiges of death and rebirth. When the visit to the pool is after the visit to the garbage chute, the dunking in the pool could be seen as the baptism of the newborn. Regardless of the specific interpretation, the pollywogs, recently dead, emerge from this last passage with an entirely different identity. The subjugated suddenly become the subjugators, never to be put in the reverse situation again.

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79. See *supra* notes 61-62 and accompanying text; see also USS AMERICA, *supra* note 19; USS ORION & USS KITTIWAKE, *supra* note 18 (from USS Kittiwake).

80. HENNINGSSEN, *supra* note 8, at 70.

81. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 282.

82. *Id.*

### C. A Pollywog. . . Rebellion?

One part of the ritual which seemingly does not fit with the rest, but whose presence is crucial, is the pollywog rebellion. By the end of “wog night,” pollywogs have submitted to dressing as women, to acting like dogs, to simulating sexual acts with shellbacks and other pollywogs, and to performing menial tasks such as shoe shining or sweeping the deck. After allowing all this, the pollywogs perform a somewhat uncharacteristic act: they rebel. More than rebel, they often rebel *successfully*, torturing the shellbacks in the ways in which the wogs are going to be tortured the next day. In one example, pollywogs made a “Wog Proclamation of War.”<sup>83</sup> The wogs in this instance, while submitting to their defined identities, refute the authority of the shellbacks, deliver the name of a spokesperson, the “Senior Wog,” (in this case the CHENG—Chief Engineer) and declare an onslaught of destructive resistance.

[A]ll of the most wet behind the ears, mewing, seasick, unwashed and unkempt landlubbers that ever sailed the Brimny Blue, a.k.a. “Wogs,” will have it known that they take great exception to the fact that a bunch of broken-down two-bit slimy old sea dogs are going to attempt to indoctrinate them into the secrets of Neptune’s ways.

. . . We elect our honorary representative and spokesman: the CHENG. His exemplary manner and outspoken hatred for all Shellbacks and anything to do with them serves as a true example for us all.

. . . Commencing today, an elite team of WOG commandos is now officially formalized. Their duties will be to cheerfully create mayhem and destruction for all shellbacks, destroy the pitiful tokens of the rights of passage, steal the skull and crossbones flag.<sup>84</sup>

Another proclamation declares that the Senior Wog will:

. . . cast down the *upstart* Neptune and his *boot licker* Davy Jones, and all of the misbegotten, slack brained, limpwristed *vermin* knowen [sic] as **Shellbacks**.<sup>85</sup>

It continues on to mention that if the shellbacks persist in the abuse of the pollywogs, “Wog Rangers” will be released to enact revenge upon the shellbacks. What is striking about the uprising is that it never attempts to rescue the wogs from mistreatment on the day of the ceremony. It seems to be merely an advance payback from the uninitiated. If this is so, why is it so important as to be found in virtually every example of the ritual?

The answer may lie in the fact that although the ship’s crew is divided into the categories of pollywog and shellback, they are still members of the crew, and more importantly, of the Navy. Part of what binds the men together at the end of the ritual is a similar reaction to adversity and to an enemy. The Navy’s credo includes the sworn duty to “protect and defend the U.S.” against alien attacking groups, and in this case, the pollywogs are being attacked by the alien

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83. Chief Engineer “Cheng,” USS Camden, *POD Note: Wog Proclamation of War* (Apr. 1, 1991) (on file with author); see also USS ORION & USS KITTIWAKE, *supra* note 18 (from USS Orion) (where pollywogs posted “The Shellback Lament,” a poem threatening King Neptune).

84. *Id.*

85. Chief Engineer “Cheng,” USS Camden, *Hear Ye, Hear Ye* (Apr. 1, 1991) (on file with author).

shellbacks. The proper response would be a strong defense and pride in their group. This is exactly what occurs in the uprising. What makes this situation differ from a true attack by an alien group is that the attacking shellbacks epitomize the qualities which the Navy holds valuable. Thus, the division within the Navy invokes the proper response on the part of the defendants, but this response is merely part of the transition. The defendants prove themselves worthy of group pride and resistance, but still have much else to prove, such as the ability to withstand beatings and sewage in a submissive position without breaking down psychologically or physically. Eventually, they will demonstrate all the values of the shellbacks, and the more ideal group in the division will encompass the other.

#### D. Creating "Self" from "Other"

The Crossing the Line ceremony does more than just produce numerous shellbacks. The transition from pollywog to shellback involves the discarding of all of the characteristics of the pollywogs, and of all the people represented by those characteristics. The ritual succeeds first in separating the two groups into pollywogs and shellbacks. It then establishes the pollywog in a position of liminality: his gender and place in the animal hierarchy are inverted, his previous dominance as a Navy member/human/male is transformed into submission, and he is stripped of all distinction and individuality as he is herded submissively around the ship with fellow wogs. In the end, the pollywogs experience a rebirth, or reaggregation, in which they join the other shellbacks and adopt their superior characteristics. Their experiences in the inferior group reinforced the distaste for all which is represented in that category, while at the same time affirming their desire to be part of the shellback community, with all positive benefits, namely power and control, included therein.

As Victor Turner discusses in *The Ritual Process*, the experience of liminality creates or reminds the participants in a ritual of the general social bond among them.<sup>86</sup> Rituals like the Crossing the Line ceremony nurture a feeling of "self," a group identity, against the liminal "other." Throughout the ceremony, the position of shellback is normalized, leaving the position of pollywog in the position of "other." The shellback character, by virtue of being the end result of the transformation, is the character which embodies all that is positive, while the pollywog, juxtaposed with the shellback, embodies all that is negative. Just as liminality "implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed," it implies that the mighty shellbacks would not be mighty shellbacks if they weren't juxtaposed with lowly pollywogs.<sup>87</sup> The inferiority of the pollywogs is extremely important in cultivating and maintaining the superiority of the shellbacks.

Turner also states that one model of society "which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *communitas*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the

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86. See VICTOR TURNER, *THE RITUAL PROCESS: STRUCTURE AND ANTI-STRUCTURE* (1969).

87. *Id.* at 97.

ritual elders.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, across age, rank and racial lines, the veteran and new shellbacks together emerge from the ritual with feelings of group identity and familiarity. One World War II veteran who crossed the equator in the Navy stated that the ceremony was “an experience I’ll never forget . . . . We were all equals afterwards. It was like a big brotherhood.”<sup>89</sup>

#### E. Pollywogs in the Real World

But at what expense is this big brotherhood? The end of the ritual finds a group of men who have bound together under a common, desired identity and discarded an undesirable identity. But what happens to the discarded characters? If the Navy wants only shellbacks and people who embody the characteristics of the shellbacks, anyone with the traits of a pollywog will be terribly misplaced.

In looking at the characterization of the pollywogs, three main identities emerge: feminine, animal, and homosexual. As there are (presumably) no animals in the Navy, especially none that are currently fighting for equal rights, they do not need to be discussed at length. Issues surrounding the rights and abilities of women and homosexuals, however, continue to plague the U.S. Navy today. The Crossing the Line ceremony uses its ritual framework to talk about issues of sex and gender. Within the ritual, the relationships between men and women, as well as between heterosexuals and homosexuals, are modeled and discussed. The next two sections will discuss at length the imagery used in constructing these relationships, and what the relationships in the ritual mean to the people in the Navy.

### V. A RITUAL AFFIRMATION OF FEMININE INFERIORITY

If the Crossing the Line ritual places the pollywogs completely under the control of the shellbacks, it does so in a way that codes dominance and submission in gendered terms. The pollywogs are first characterized as feminine and sexual, and then this feminine sexuality is controlled by the shellbacks. While this outright sexual dominance is performed within the ritual, the implications extend to all male/female relations in the Navy.

#### A. Good Women or Bad Women?

There are many ways in which pollywogs are categorized as feminine. As already noted, wogs are described as sluts and as being non-male. Pollywogs are the “penetrated,” and thus the females, in sexual encounters with shellbacks. Perhaps most obviously, the pollywogs put on a great display of female sexuality in the wog queen pageant.

The pageant is very similar to a strip club scene, with the shellbacks encouraging the dancing, stripping and erotic play of the pollywog transvestites. Pollywogs often wear massive plastic breasts, which they expose at some point in the pageant, and may also reveal shaven legs or bikini underwear or both.

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88. *Id.* at 96.

89. Interview with Sailor 1 (Aug. 15, 1997).



The pageant is a mix of humor and sexuality, but it is also a competition that is often taken quite seriously by its participants, who can become incredibly graphic trying to outdo one another in simulating sexual acts. These “women” express a certain amount of power, albeit feminine sexual power, in their abilities to do things which otherwise would be grounds for a court-martial. Accounts of the pageant describe the contestants sitting on the captain’s lap, pretending to perform oral sex on senior officers and doing elaborate strip teases in front of groups of men.<sup>90</sup> Despite apparent expressions of sexual power (performing simulated sexual acts on superior officers, and controlling the attention and sexual arousal of the shellbacks), shellbacks ultimately control the situation. The wog’s sexual power is power meant to glorify the sexual organs and abilities of the feminine partner (the wog), who ultimately sexually serves the masculine controller, the shellback. The wog’s role is seen both as sexually empowering (female sexuality) and demeaning, but in the end he has no real power or control over the shellbacks. Wogs may have the power to amuse the shellbacks, but they could not, in the context of the pageant or the larger ritual, ever make the shellbacks do something they did not want to do. The shellbacks, on the other hand, have, in the course of one day, forced the wogs into roles of over-sexed females, obedient dogs, and submissive servants.

Shellback transvestites are rare but revealing. The two most prevalent examples of shellbacks cross-dressing are Queen Amphitrite and her daughter the Royal Princess. Historically, the Queen has been cruel, powerful and majestic, while the Royal Princess has been sexually powerful, yet in control of her sexuality. Amphitrite was often dressed with large false breasts and a sign reading “Keep away!” or “Only look, Don’t touch!” attesting to her unavailability to crew members.<sup>91</sup> Although she and the Royal Princess were not assigned large roles, they were perceived as powerful and delivered harsh punishments. The uninitiated were often assigned by the “court” to kiss Amphitrite or smell her smelling salts, both of which resulted in the uninitiated getting pricked with numerous needles, either strapped to Amphitrite’s chin or stuck in the cork of her bottle.<sup>92</sup>

Other cross-dressing shellbacks include nurses (for the Royal Baby) and mermaids. While the female shellback characters are sometimes characterized as sexy or matronly,

...[t]he Queen is regally robed in merichrome taffeta, and ascends the throne as gracefully as her royal waistline will permit, the King benignant, is at her side. The Royal Princess, snaky, voluptuous, graceful as a reed in a gale, follows with designing feminine wile.<sup>93</sup>

Although the female characters, especially the Queen and Princess, are nearly always present, they are not often discussed or characterized today. It is important, however, that when they are described, they are given a certain power. The sexuality of the Princess becomes sexual power, and the Queen as matriarch

90. See, e.g., ZEELAND, *supra* note 22 and accompanying text (interview with Sonny).

91. HENNINGSEN, *supra* note 8, at 75-77.

92. *Id.* This also reinforced the unavailability of her sexuality, as the pollywogs were injured when forced to “kiss” her.

93. USS RANGER, *supra* note 48.

is given all the implied power of her position. As females, they are untouchable by pollywogs and even other shellbacks. None of them are under the command of other shellbacks, except for King Neptune, and none of them are expected or commanded to perform sexual or erotic acts. The transvestism of the shellbacks does not compromise their masculinity because just as the men in the ritual are divided into masculine and feminine (shellbacks and pollywogs), so are the women divided into transvestite shellbacks and transvestite pollywogs. The powerful, controlling women characters are the shellbacks, and the lustful, man-serving, weaker women are the pollywogs.

While the shellback women seem liberated, a deeper statement is being made about women's roles. The pollywogs make "bad" women because of their rampant sexuality, while shellbacks make "good" women because their sexuality is controlled—protected by husband or father, King Neptune. Also, rather than being defined through their female sexuality (as pollywogs are "sluts," "bitches," and beauty pageant contestants), shellback women are defined through their relationships to men. Amphitrite is "Neptune's queen." The Royal Princess is "Neptune's lovely daughter." They derive all power through him, and he keeps them "good," "chaste" women. Contrasting with the pollywogs, these shellbacks are "safe" women; they are not threatening because they are already under the control and protection of men. The fact that they are under the control of men (husbands and fathers) demonstrates that, as women, they can be categorized positively or negatively, but they still are not equal in power to men. The final assessment is that the quality of a woman depends on how much her sexuality is controlled by men. As only the sexuality of married women (and young daughters) is controlled and untouchable, single women are seen as sexual and available to be dominated by men.

The rampant female sexuality of these unattached, uncontrolled women needs to be dominated because, as noted before, it involves a certain amount of power over men. The way in which these men deal with the threat, as witnessed in the portrayal of the wog pageant, is to subordinate the women and contain their sexuality. The men literally put the women on stage to perform for them. In one account of the wog pageant, a wog queen contestant approached the two highest-ranking officers (the commanding officer, and the executive officer) and pretended to have sex with each of them.<sup>94</sup> Sexuality is no longer a threat to the men, who fear its manipulative use by the women (who have what the men want: sex), but instead becomes a tool to service the men. The wogs are put on stage to compete with one another to be chosen as the sexiest wog by the shellbacks. The shellbacks have effectively turned the tables. Wogs are now forced to use their sexuality, not to hold power over the shellbacks, but to submit to the shellbacks' scrutiny.

#### B. Women as Men ≠ Men as Women

Just as ideas are being played out when men dress as women in the ritual, they are when women dress as men as well. As mentioned previously, some ships with a large number of women have pageants in which both the men and

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94. See, e.g., ZEELAND, *supra* note 22 and accompanying text (interview with Sonny).

the women cross-dress.<sup>95</sup> As discussed earlier, when the women in the wog pageant cross-dressed, they chose a wide variety of personas: a cowboy, “Buck-wheat,” a rock star, Don Johnson, and a gentleman in three-piece suit.<sup>96</sup> Rather than being overtly sexual (with the possible exception of Don Johnson), the women dressed as powerful or comical figures. The women did not draw attention to men’s sexual body parts, or put on a seductive show or dance for other women on the ship. In this case, the reversed situation of women dressing as men works to illustrate the imbalance in men’s and women’s perceptions of the sexuality of the opposite sex.

One cruise ship picture depicts a woman dressed as a male sailor with a white shirt, bell-bottomed pants and hat, pinching the buttocks of a man dressed in a mini-skirt and high heels.<sup>97</sup> The woman’s cross-dressing is exceedingly less effective than the man’s at creating a sense of displacement or mixed genders, because she becomes an image of what she was to begin with: a sailor! Rather than becoming a caricature of a man, emphasizing one or several masculine qualities, she became a normal figure since sailors are expected to be on ships. Included with this is the image of the male figure sexually advancing upon the female figure. This image is doubly revealing, as the sexually advancing figure is not just a male, but a sailor. This is entirely congruous with previously-discussed ideas of gender in the Crossing the Equator ceremony. The sailor character is reaffirmed as male and is given sexual dominance over the female character, while the female character is depicted in a manner which is revealing, reaffirming her foremost characteristic: her sexuality.

The crucial point to be taken from these reversals is that when the women cross-dress, they portray normative roles, where there are no exaggerated characteristics. By contrast, when men cross-dress, they portray women as sexually subordinate—not only to the male shellbacks but to the women who are dressed as men. The ritual thus normalizes the male position at the same time that it portrays women as sexual objects to be controlled, dominated and transcended.

### C. Sexual Submission = Social Submission

Public perceptions about the sexual role of women directly impact public understanding of the social role of women. Many feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin, argue that pornography is sexually explicit subordination of women and, as such, can and should be considered sex discrimination under the law.<sup>98</sup> Their argument is that through sexual inequality, objectification, submission, and violence, it puts women in a position of inferiority and subordination sexually, and therefore socially.<sup>99</sup> Under this perspective, the wog pageant does not just comment on the status of the wogs as subordinate sex symbols who are

95. See discussion *supra* Part III.

96. 1987 USS SAMUAL GOMPERS, *supra* note 7.

97. *Id.*

98. See Andrea Dworkin, *Against the Male Flood*, 8 HARV. WOMEN’S L.J. 1 (1985).

99. *Id.* at 13-15. See generally CATHARINE MACKINNON, *FEMINISM UNMODIFIED* (1987) (arguing that women’s position in society is subordinated, and such subordination is reinforced through gender expressions such as pornography).

available for the pleasure of the male shellbacks, it comments on the sailors' attitude toward the feminine position.

The wogs are put in the same sexual positions as women in pornography. They are unequal sexually, as they are always in the bottom, *receiving* position of a pollywog-shellback sexual encounter. They are objectified sexually through the wog pageant and through commands such as "fuck him like the *bitch* he is."<sup>100</sup> They are submissive, both during and outside of the sexual encounters, and are forced to obey the shellbacks by submitting to their sexual advances or by being ordered to sexually molest another pollywog. They are in a continually submissive position, on their hands and knees, while kissing the belly of the royal baby or while receiving simulated sex. Finally, they are victims of violence. If they do not perform to the satisfaction of the shellbacks, they are beaten or covered with filth. They are beaten during the simulated raping of another pollywog and have filth covering their faces while they are being raped in the stocks.

This portrayal of women's sexuality jointly portrays women's "natural" position contrary to men as inferior and submissive. The sexuality of the wogs is completely controlled by the shellbacks. Whether the shellbacks are "having their way" with pollywogs, or forcing pollywogs to perform together for them, the wog's sexuality is under the control and direction of the shellbacks. Although the pollywogs may be penetrated or penetrators in the simulated sex, the shellbacks direct their actions. Furthermore, the shellbacks penetrate, but they are never penetrated. They always remain on the masculine side of the male/female sexual relationship. Even Queen Amphitrite penetrates with her pins.<sup>101</sup>

#### D. Sex and Power: Penetrating Women and Enemy Lines

Outside of the ritual, the connections between men, power and feminine sexual subordination can be seen everywhere in the military. As Carol Cohn states, "Both the military itself and the arms manufacturers are constantly exploiting the phallic imagery and promise of sexual domination that their weapons so conveniently suggest."<sup>102</sup> As Cohn documents, the language of the military is rife with sexually explicit terms like "vertical erector launchers, thrust-to-weight ratios, soft lay downs, deep penetration, and the comparative advantages of protracted versus spasm attacks."<sup>103</sup> The way in which these terms are used places a unanimous power bias on the position of "penetrator/father." One strategist explained that a missile is to be placed in a new silo because "you're not going to take the nicest missile you have and put it in a crummy hole."<sup>104</sup> After bombing test islands, the military names the craters female names.<sup>105</sup> When a bomb is dropped, if it successfully explodes it is said that a

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100. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 192.

101. See *supra* note 93 and accompanying text.

102. Carol Cohn, *Sex and Death in the World of Defense Intellectuals*, 12 SIGNS 687, 694 (1987).

103. *Id.* at 693.

104. *Id.*

105. *Id.*

“baby is born - it’s a boy,” but if it is a dud, it is said to be a girl.<sup>106</sup> All of these images restate the philosophy that male is good, strong, powerful, and penetrating, and female is bad, weak, defenseless, and penetrated.

The military is also laden with images of sex in war. Troops do not simply march past enemy lines; they penetrate them.<sup>107</sup> The United States is often portrayed as a father, or as an old, wise Uncle Sam, while developing countries or countries in which the troops fight, such as India, Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines, are spoken of in general military parlance in feminine terms.<sup>108</sup> Manhood and victory are always paired together, and women and success are always the prizes. The physical nature of sex is interlaced with the physical act of war, and the conquering of a nation is interlaced with the sexual conquest of a man.

#### E. Women and the Navy in Society

The ideas of men’s and women’s places in society and in relation to each other are by no means restricted to the Navy, or even to the military in general. The myth of the nuclear family, commercials selling products to “real men” or “real women,” and John Gray’s separation of men and women into Martians and Venusians<sup>109</sup> all add to the image of men and women as fundamentally, naturally different, with distinctive places in society. The dynamic of male/dominant over female/submissive is undeniably integrated into American society, in great part due to the Judeo-Christian gender and family ethic. Finally, the image of the victor/champion, the powerful conqueror, winning the war or race as well as the woman can be seen at all levels of competitive male behavior.

In the ritual, the shellbacks begin to form a masculine identity in which it is necessary to subvert the feminine. The wog queen pageant merges with the ritual formation of group identity to create a complex idea of masculinity. Pollywogs represent unmarried women and female sexuality/sexual power that must be dominated by and transformed into shellbacks’ masculinized power and self-control. It is necessary to subordinate the sexuality to control it, an example of which is turning pollywogs into competitors for the shellbacks’ approval. Because the ritual works to form a military identity that is masculine, it ties the masculine to the subordination of the feminine. Pollywogs’ (women’s) sexual subordination becomes not only necessary to maintain the shellbacks’ (men’s) power and control, it becomes normalized to the point that one is not a shellback (man) unless he subordinates the pollywogs’ (women’s) sexuality.

So what does this mean for women? For women in the Navy, as evidenced by Tailhook, it means a long, hard struggle to achieve any sort of recognition as sailors, officers or pilots, rather than persistently being thought of as *female* sailors, *female* officers or *female* pilots.<sup>110</sup> The reason the Crossing the Line ceremony

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106. *Id.*

107. Cohn, *supra* note 102, at 694.

108. *Id.* at 693.

109. JOHN GRAY, MEN ARE FROM MARS, WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND GETTING WHAT YOU WANT IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS (1992).

110. See *infra* notes 143-46 and accompanying text.

is so important in this fight is because the ritual is continually remarking on ideas of femininity and about women's subordinate position under men. Not only does the ritual demonstrate the presence of these ideas but, by the format of the ritual itself, it validates the subordination of women as part of the process that creates the ideal military person as fully and only male.

## VI. HOMOEROTICISM ACROSS THE EQUATOR

Just as male bonding took place in the ritual through the subordination of women, so does it take place through homoeroticism. The ritual provides a format for participants to understand male/female relations and heterosexual/homosexual relations in the context of masculine identity. Encased in the ritual is a great deal of bizarre imagery: male sailors and officers enthusiastically simulating sex with other men, men forcing men to simulate sex with each other, and men performing homoerotic acts as women and as dogs. Understanding these acts in the context of the ritual requires an understanding of the Navy's conceptualization of homosexuality, the fluctuation over time of the general acceptability of homosexual acts, both in and out of the Navy, and the different types of homosexual relationships.

### A. Homosexuality in the Navy

Homosexuality and homoeroticism are definitely not new to the Navy. An old saying among heterosexual sailors is "it's only queer if you're tied to the pier," indicating that homosexual sex is acceptable if women are unavailable. In modern Navy slang the term "sea pussy" is used for homosexual sex among "supposedly straight sailors, taking a walk on the wild side during extended cruises."<sup>111</sup> Indeed, homosexuality has been an integral part of the British and American Naval histories for centuries. In response to an assertion that something was "not in the traditions of the British Navy," Winston Churchill replied that the traditions of the British Navy were "rum, sodomy and the lash."<sup>112</sup> Isolated on ships for long periods of time, the men on board often found each other to be acceptable substitutes for women. Oftentimes, older sailors or officers, either homosexual or heterosexual, would entice younger boys to their bunks or cabins to perform sexual acts for them.<sup>113</sup>

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111. ZIMMERMAN, *supra* note 1, at 50. Zimmerman states:

There are strict regulations against carnal relations aboard ship, with any homosexual act grounds for immediate expulsion from the service. None of which prevents (and may actually enhance) the raging sexual underground present on every ship in the fleet. In Navy slang, it's called "sea pussy": supposedly straight sailors, taking a walk on the wild side during extended cruises.

*Id.*

112. WILLIAM MANCHESTER, *THE LAST LION: WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL; ALONE: 1932-1940* (1988); ZIMMERMAN, *supra* note 1, at 46. Some sources also quote Churchill as saying "rum, sodomy and the cat [o' nine tails]," or "rum, buggery and the lash." Posting of Ron Barber to wash-soc archive (October 26, 1997) at <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~plinko/wash-soc/archive/73.html> (last visited June 27, 2002).

113. B.R. BURG, *AN AMERICAN SEAFARER IN THE AGE OF SAIL: THE INTIMATE DIARIES OF PHILIP C. VAN BUSKIRK 79* (1994).

Philip Buskirk, an American sailor in the mid to late nineteenth century, and who was heavily influenced by the teachings of Kellogg and Graham, complained of the “moral disintegration” and “unhealthy practices” aboard the ships in the U.S. Navy.<sup>114</sup> He related incidents of joint or group masturbation and oral sex and hinted at anal sex among the men on the ship. Most of the relationships were fairly formalized and took the form of a “chickenship” between a “chicken,” a young boy, and an older boy or man. The older men would court the boys, offering food, money and presents in return for sexual favors.<sup>115</sup> In port and at sea, the incidents drew little concern from Navy officers and officials. While age difference was sometimes a factor in establishing homosexual relationships, many men or boys of the same age also formed sexual relationships with each other. A large factor in the acceptability of these practices seems to be class. Most of the sailors were uneducated and illiterate, and even if they could read they were generally unconcerned with the “unhealthy and immoral” implications of homosexuality and masturbation.<sup>116</sup> Spurred by Kellogg’s and Graham’s ideas of the body as a closed system, Buskirk urged the boys to abstain from such activities so as not to degrade themselves physically and morally. In his diaries, he records his frustrations at his numerous attempts to convert the unconvertible men on his ship.<sup>117</sup>

#### B. The Purging of Homosexuals From the Navy

Homosexuality and homosexual acts among Navy men were tolerated by many, and brutally rejected by others, but they never became an issue of much contention in the U.S. Navy until the 1920s. In 1919, a Navy veteran named Ervin Arnold began infiltrating the massive underground homosexual society of the Newport, Rhode Island, military. A passionate homophobe, Arnold set out to rid the Navy of homosexuals.<sup>118</sup> After relating his findings of drugs, transvestism and homosexual behavior at the Navy’s YMCA to members of the Navy, he and two other naval personnel decided to conduct their own investigation. The findings of Arnold and his thirteen field agents, who were ordered to gather evidence of homosexual activity by participating in it, if need be, led to “the arrest of more than a dozen sailors, two trials for an accused civilian, and the emergence of a major national scandal which included not only the participants themselves but ultimately Secretary Daniels and Assistant Secretary Roosevelt as well.”<sup>119</sup>

At the time of the investigations, the homosexual relations in Newport were highly organized, with designated roles and interactions. Interestingly,

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114. *Id.* Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and Sylvester Graham were both activists in Victorian America who preached about the evils of sex and masturbation and proposed nutritional and often disturbing physical “treatments” for children and adults who masturbated. Carrie McLaren, *Porn Flakes: Kellogg, Graham, and the Crusade for Moral Fiber*, available at <http://www.ibiblio.org/stayfree/10/graham.htm> (last visited Mar. 19, 2002).

115. BURG, *supra* note 113, at 79.

116. *Id.*

117. *Id.* at 40.

118. LAWRENCE R. MURPHY, *PERVERTS BY OFFICIAL ORDER: THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS BY THE UNITED STATES NAVY* (1988).

119. *Id.* at 17.

what determined whether a man would be classified as “straight” or “queer” was not “the extent of his homosexual activity, but the gender role he assumed.”<sup>120</sup> Only men who assumed the sexual and cultural roles usually associated with women labeled themselves as “queer” or different from other men. The most prominent queers were the “queens,” or female impersonators. Transvestites in the early twentieth century Navy were fairly protected from suspicion due to the popularity of naval theatrical productions in which men took the female roles. When asked by investigators how to identify a queer, many men, gay and heterosexual, described effeminate behavior such as wearing makeup, having affectionate or feminine gestures, or other stereotypically female expressions such as walking with hands on one’s hips.<sup>121</sup> The queers were generally identified by their feminine behavior and sexual positioning, but were distinguished among themselves on the basis of which sexual activity they preferred. There were three general categories: “‘fairies,’ who were also called ‘cocksuckers;’ ‘pogues,’ who liked to be ‘brownd’ or anally penetrated; and ‘two-way artists,’ who enjoyed both.”<sup>122</sup> The group of sailors who took the opposing sexual role was much more ambiguous because these sailors conformed to masculine gender and sexual roles. They were never labeled, by themselves or others, as queer. These sailors were romantically or sexually involved with the “queers” and sometimes formed lasting relationships as husbands to the queer wives. But as George Chauncey Jr. points out, “[T]he ambiguity of the sexual category such men occupied was reflected in the difficulty observers found in labeling them.”<sup>123</sup> The Navy, which sometimes grouped such men with the “queers” as “perverts,” found it could only satisfactorily identify them “by describing what they *did* rather than naming what they *were*.”<sup>124</sup> Because these men took the male role in all sexual encounters, the Navy found it difficult to categorize them as non-masculine. This would imply that a key issue in gender identity is who penetrates and who is penetrated. Although not quite so simplistic, as will be seen later, the issue of penetration remains important. This was seen clearly in assumptions made by the investigators, who made many potentially incriminating statements in court about their own sexual roles in the investigations, that “‘normal’ men could take advantage of the pogues’ availability without questioning their own identities as ‘straight.’”<sup>125</sup> When the investigation was brought to trial, the fact that the court (and Navy) never prosecuted the investigators or any of the men who were serviced by the queers proved that the court (and Navy) agreed with this assessment.

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120. George Chauncey, Jr., *Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era*, in HIDDEN FROM HISTORY: RECLAIMING THE GAY AND LESBIAN PAST 297 (M.B. Duberman, et al. eds., 1989).

121. *Id.* at 298.

122. *Id.* at 298-99.

123. *Id.*

124. *Id.* at 299.

125. Chauncey, *supra* note 120, at 304.



### C. "Queers" Cross the Equator

The most important aspect of the trials of the accused "queers" was how the Navy defined "homosexual" and "performing homosexual acts." The trials forced the court to delve into an already established set of categories with which the participants in homosexual acts defined themselves. The court ultimately developed a uniform definition of "homosexuals" as men who enact the traditional feminine position both socially and sexually, and "perverts" as men who acted as the "husbands" to the queer "wives" and who would take the masculine role in sexual acts with the queers. Today, implications of the 1920s trials can be seen in the Crossing the Line's ritual enactments of homosexual acts and how they are interpreted within the ritual frame.<sup>126</sup> The intertwining of strength, masculinity and sexual identity create complicated definitions of manhood and homosexuality in these rituals. Outside of the ritual framework, it is officially unacceptable, and sometimes criminal, to perform any homosexual acts or homoeroticism, yet these acts still continue in the Navy today, many times officially sanctioned. The Crossing the Equator ceremony is a most dramatic example of sanctioned homoeroticism and homosexuality, which in any other context would be grounds for a dishonorable discharge from the Navy.

Besides its worth in shock value, the ceremony reveals a great many beliefs about the sailors' perceptions and definitions of homosexuality. The way the ritual participants view homosexuality in terms of sexual position, emotional investment, and intention determines how they view their own role and the role of others in the ritual, and vice versa. Many of the ideas expressed in the ritual are strikingly similar to the ideas expressed in the court trials of the twenties. For example, in the ritual, the homosexual acts are rarely viewed by the participants as homosexual; rather, they are viewed as heterosexual acts in which one person plays the female role. This confirms the belief that these acts are speaking of ideas and relationships outside of the homosexual relationship. The acts that will be examined both within and outside the context of the ritual are homoerotic acts (and homosexuality), and sexual domination. The following sections will examine specifically what is being said through the inclusion of these homosexual acts in the ritual.

### D. Homoerotic Acts and Homosexuality in the Ritual

In many of the events in the ceremony, such as the wog pageant and the wog dog auction, there exists a fair amount of blatant homoeroticism, with men simulating sexual acts with other men.<sup>127</sup> The following account is a powerful example of the range of acceptability these sexual acts have in certain contexts:

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126. As well as in the current military policy on gays and homosexual acts. See discussion *infra* Part VII.

127. As mentioned previously, an invaluable source of data has been Steven Zeeland's book *SAILORS AND SEXUAL IDENTITY*, in which he interviews several gay and straight sailors and officers about homosexuality and homoeroticism in the Navy. These sailors came from different ships and went through the ceremony at different times. Many of the previous and following testimonies have been taken from Zeeland's interviews. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22.

Sonny: The only people allowed to watch [the Wog Queen ceremony] are shellbacks. I was the first one down there, and all these other guys start walking in panties. One guy couldn't hide it at all. But some of 'em—the guy that won knew how to hide what he had. He dressed in black lace panties, black lace bra, and he had a cat-o'-nine-tails with a long handle. He put on the music and started swishing and stuff. You've got to put on a show. He was dancing, and he got up to the captain. The captain's sitting in his chair, and he just sits on the captain's lap, right on his cock, and starts scrunching. Then he stands up and he goes over to the XO, this big muscle-bound dude. Sticks that cat-o'-nine-tails right on his crank and starts acting like he's giving him a blowjob. We're all going crazy over this, we couldn't believe it—all of a sudden white stuff just spooges out of his mouth. Don't know where it came from or how it got there, but white stuff [makes sound effect]. And he won.

S: . . . you start crawling across the deck. And that's where they pulled my drawers down and shoved Crisco up my ass!

Zeeland: Did you have any feeling about the homosexual overtones of this?

S: No, because it's all tradition that's been done for, shoot, generations. And it's just there were no homosexual overtones, that I saw.

Z: You don't see any homosexual overtones to getting Crisco shoved up your ass?

S: No! Because it was part of the initiation. It wasn't something that these people do because they want to do it, it's something that's been handed down from generation to generation.

Z: White stuff spooging out of a cat-o'-nine-tails, you can't tell me—

S: Now that's the one I'm curious about. That FC [fire control technician], I betcha he's gay.

Z: Why do you think that?

S: Because what straight man would go to that extent just to win a stupid contest?

Z: So you're just speculating?

S: Oh yeah. I don't know. I just can't see going that far.<sup>128</sup>

Sonny describes transvestism, sodomy, and simulated homosexual anal and oral sex, which lead not to physical or legal harm, as it certainly would outside the ritual, but to a reward for the performer! Perhaps more interestingly, Sonny claims he finds nothing homoerotic about the experience. He not only explains the homoeroticism in terms of tradition, where tradition is some sort of compelling force that drives the shellbacks to perform acts that they don't necessarily want to perform, but he explains the fact that some shellbacks who appear to be enjoying the homoeroticism by suggesting they are homosexual.<sup>129</sup> In this situation, however, he declares that the homoerotic behavior is not truly homoe-

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128. *Id.* at 207-08.

129. The speaker in this case is a homosexual sailor who does not place a judgement on homosexuality or heterosexuality. *Id.*

rotic since the shellbacks do not willingly perform it. They are bound by tradition to engage in these situations and would not do so otherwise. This is a key point. In the previous chapter, the pollywogs submitted to cross-dressing and many forms of degradation because in the ritual they are in the inferior role. They can neither challenge nor enjoy the characters they must play because the point of the ceremony is to turn them into shellbacks. In this case, a previous definition of homosexuality (that one can participate in it and even enjoy it without being homosexual) is being adopted in order to permit this interaction in the ritual for the purpose of emphasizing again the pollywog/shellback relationship. Inherent in this unequal relationship is, however, the ever-present idea that the pollywog, playing the “queer” role inferior to the heterosexual/ambiguous shellback role, immediately places homosexuals in a position inferior to heterosexuals.

One part of the ritual which is very suggestive of the pollywog/shellback relationship is the kissing of the belly of the Royal Baby. Pollywogs kneeling before a very large man, placing their faces in his stomach, draws an image of pollywogs performing oral sex on the shellback. This image is enhanced with the performance of the pollywog, who must remove an object from the belly button of the Baby. Sometimes it is an object stuck in Crisco grease, and sometimes it is a substance like a raw oyster, which the pollywog must swallow. Regardless of what the pollywog must retrieve, the end result is that his face and teeth are covered with slime or grease which somewhat resembles semen. The Royal Baby is fully in command, holding the pollywog’s head and forcing it into the Baby’s belly.

#### E. The Sexual Submission of the Pollywogs

Also contained within the ritual is other specific homosexual/homoerotic play, which by all accounts would be shockingly (sometimes violently) inappropriate outside of the ritual. One sailor describes the sexual interaction from the point of view of a shellback:

Gregg: We had wog-fucking, where two guys get on top of each other and screw doggie style, or even missionary position sometimes. Officers often got that really bad.

Z: Simulated fucking?

G: Oh yeah, simulated. Simulated fucking, simulated blowjobs, simulated everything. Pretty much every sexual act that can be simulated was. But the last time I did it they made us stop the wog-fucking because apparently someone was complaining.<sup>130</sup>

Strikingly, all of these sexual encounters place shellbacks in positions of control, either directly sexually assaulting the pollywogs or ordering wogs to sexually assault each other.

Eddy: . . . I was in [the stocks] on my hands, and my head was locked in there, and I was bent over, and someone was behind me pretending they were having

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130. *Id.* at 157-58.

sex with me. . . He was behind me going like this [gets up and demonstrates], humping me. And this supposedly is a straight guy, who I know isn't so straight.

Z: How do you know that?

E: Well, I don't know; it's just a feeling that I have.

Z: Could you actually feel his dick?

E: Yeah, Oh yeah. But that wasn't unusual, because everyone was doing that that day. Wog day is a day for everyone to just have fun, and if anyone ever had a thought about any kind of homosexual tendency, they could do what they wanted to do without anyone even thinking about it.

Z: Was his dick hard?

E: No, but another guy's was. I know it was. And I think he thinks I probably just thought it was big.

Z: He was humping you, too?

E: They would give you orders. You are a slave—someone with no authority whatsoever. So I would get behind this guy and I'd be like this, having sex with him, and everyone would be laughing and stuff. You know straight people were getting' off on it. I could just tell.

Z: In what way?

E: Because they wouldn't just do it once. All of a sudden I'd look over and I'd have this straight person on top of me, riding me. You knew that it was more than just a thought, because they did it for so long . . . .

Z: Why would straight guys want to hump you? What does it mean that this is done in an organized, ritual way?

E: I don't know. Even though they say they're straight—I'm sure they are straight—sexuality and what gay people do is still on straight people's minds, no matter if they think it's wrong or right. So that was a day for someone just to say, "Hey, you go have sex with him," and get away with it. It wasn't like they were just pretending. I was on all fours, like a dog, and someone would be behind me actually hitting me with their dick like they were having sex with me. It wouldn't be a light thing, it would be, boom boom boom! And you could tell that that's what they were curious about.<sup>131</sup>

As the previous interview indicates, not only do shellbacks actively simulate sex with the pollywogs, they also command pollywogs to simulate sex with each other.

Joey: In the hangar bay they made us fuck each other. They said, "Get on him and fuck him and suck his dick!" They would fuckin' shove your head in some guy's crotch.

Z: Into another wog's crotch?

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131. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 57-58.

J: Yeah. “Act like you’re sucking his dick!” And they’d rub your face in his crotch.

Z: Is the simulated fucking just between the wogs? Or do the shellbacks sometimes mount the wogs?

J: I’ve never seen no shellbacks jump in. They’re there ordering you to do it with other wogs. They’d make you roll around with them and stuff . . . . And they’d have a whole train of guys fucking—[Laughs.] It was so funny! I mean, you’d sit there and be pounded on by somebody. And here the Navy says, no you [can’t be gay]. I’m like, oh, this is really funny.<sup>132</sup>

This wog-to-wog intercourse is also seen in the shellbacks’ ownerships of wog dogs. The wog dog auction, as discussed earlier, allows shellbacks to choose wogs, who are collared and leashed, to use as they please.

Gregg: . . . we always had—we called them wog dogs. When you’re a shellback you can pick one or two wogs as your personal wogs; you put them on a leash and run them around the ship. And I picked this guy . . . . I often had him screwing or getting screwed by other wogs . . . .<sup>133</sup>

As Eddy states earlier, the pollywogs are slaves. The fact that the pollywogs, as men, submit to this sort of authority is, objectively, bizarre until it is viewed in the same context as the submission of the pollywogs as women to the shellbacks. The pollywogs’ status in the inferior position forces them to take all undesirable social positions. Again, as in Part IV, a masculine identity is being formed which is tied to subordinating an “inferior” group. In this case, it is homosexuality which is being controlled, this time through violence. Another sailor describes a homoerotic experience, detailing the violence involved:

Russell: . . . they would pull you off out of the assembly line, and they would say, “Get up there and fuck him, wog! I wanna see you fuck him! Fuck him *hard*, wog! Fuck him like the bitch he is!” [Laughs.] And if you didn’t do it hard enough they’d slap you on the ass.

Z: So one wog would have to fuck another?

R: Yeah.

Z: Did you have to do that?

R: Yup. Yup. I was up there.

Z: You were the fucker, or the—

R: I was the fucker. I was going on like a dog from hell!

Z: Did you fuck hard enough, or did you have to be spanked?

R: I had to be spanked a couple times. [Laughs.]

Z: Was that fun?

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132. *Id.* at 282.

133. *Id.* at 158.

R: It was humiliation, but it seemed OK, because everyone else was going through it.

Z: You didn't see any sexual meanings to this?

R: Oh no. There wasn't any sexual meanings. I don't think there was any. It was just embarrassing.

Z: You said that you found the simulated sex humiliating. Which is more humiliating, to be the fucker or to be the fucked?

R: Probably the fucker, I think.

Z: That's more humiliating?

R: I would think so, because if you do it too well, or if you do it too hard, it seems like you're enjoying it.

Z: See, I would have said the one who's on the bottom. Like with your wimpy first class, with everyone joking about wanting his tight little butt, there's almost this meaning that he's like a woman, not completely male. "Fuck him like the *bitch* he is."

R: No. In most cases maybe, but in this case I think it's reversed, because the guy who's getting fucked doesn't have any choice. If he says anything then he gets his ass beat. And he doesn't want that, because it starts to hurt. Your ass is black and blue for the next two days. So he's not going to say anything, he's just going to take it, because he doesn't want any attention focused on him. He has no choice; he can't help it. It's being done to him. Whereas the other guy, he's the one in control. He's doing it. He's the dude who's fucking the guy, pumping away on his ass! [Laughs].<sup>134</sup>

The shellback position of control includes the use of violence to ensure that control. To Russell, a heterosexual sailor, even more demeaning than the physically feminine position in the sexual act is the position of sexual submissiveness as a man. While sexual submissiveness is expected (in the ritual) in women, it is completely contrary to the shellbacks' masculine ideals. The shellbacks, and therefore "real men," submit to no one sexually.

The violence mentioned here is definitely a sexual violence and a violence of domination, and it is being used expressly to humiliate the participants and remind them of the inferiority of their social position. This type of violence is everywhere in the ritual and can get very brutal, but as Russell points out, "It's got to be tough, it's got to be embarrassing, just so you can say, 'Yeah, I did it, I went through it,' to become part of the group they call the shellbacks."<sup>135</sup> Not only does this create the view that being able to withstand this sort of behavior and survive proves one's worth as a sailor (and as a man), but it again enforces the idea that when the men are being sexually controlled, they are in the wrong position.

The control which the shellbacks have over the pollywogs in cases of homoeroticism is just as powerful as the control held over them in issues of gender. Shellbacks not only force the pollywogs to submit to homosexual advances,

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134. ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 191-92.

135. *Id.* at 191.

they force the pollywogs to perform these acts on one another in a variety of contexts. With the wog dogs, the pollywogs have already submitted as a 'lower form of intelligence,' and the shellbacks continue the submission by forcing them to simulate sex with each other. This issue of penetration, as mentioned before, is still important, as the shellbacks never allow themselves to be penetrated. It does not, however, exist as the sole criterion for subverting the pollywogs, nor is it the sole criterion to be a true shellback (or man). What overrides the position of penetrator is the position of control.

#### F. Expression and Validation of Superior/Inferior Categories

The way in which homosexuality is perceived in the Navy, as a feminine, submissive role, is contrary to the developed image of men as sexual controllers. As a result, homosexuality and homoeroticism are used in the Crossing the Line ritual as the undesired, inferior position in opposition to the heterosexual male. In addition, several qualities are being associated with heterosexual masculinity: power, control, dominance and, importantly, violence against homosexuals. This violence, inherent in the control of the homosexual pollywogs, is normalized by the participants in the ritual, and becomes part of the masculine identity.

### VII. MAKING SENSE OF THE RITUAL IN REAL LIFE

Having explored the ritual process and how it affects views of women and homosexuals, the next question is how these views translate to the larger Navy community and to the outside world. In this final part, the ritual will be viewed in its entirety to try to understand how it relates to larger social issues. As the process is outlined and a shellback identity is formed, the restrictions on that identity will be explored as well. This part will look at the image of masculinity promoted by the Navy, and at how it affects the way members of the Navy understand and relate to women and homosexuals.

#### A. The Ritual Process Complete

The ritual process requires the uninitiated to pass tests before they become members of the initiated group. In the Crossing the Line ceremony, the participants are first separated into two groups: pollywogs and shellbacks, which have characterizations already established through descriptive flyers, announcements and threats before the ceremony begins. The pollywogs are placed in a liminal phase during which they assume social roles opposing the roles assumed by the shellbacks. All traits and characterizations that the shellbacks reject as inferior are imposed upon the pollywogs. The ritual works by separating the two groups into desired and undesired roles, with the uninitiated taking the undesired roles. As the ceremony progresses, the pollywogs are ritually killed and then reborn as shellbacks. This process of rebirth has the effect of binding the entire ritual group together, while the group finds its identity through the positive/negative ritual dialogue between the wogs and shellbacks. At the end of the ritual, all of the participants are shellbacks, which embody only positive qualities. The pollywogs' experience in the inferior group works to clearly illustrate on which the side of the opposition (e.g. male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, human/animal) they wish to be.

Not only are the participants finding a group identity in the superior role, they are finding a group identity in persecuting the inferior one. In the portrayals of male/female relationships in the ritual, the participants emerge both with a male identity and with distinct ideas about what it means to be male. Part of that definition is cultivated through the relationship of the male to the female in the ritual. In the wog queen pageant and other areas of sexual play, the pollywogs, as sexualized females, have their sexuality completely controlled by the shellbacks. Whether the shellbacks are forcing simulated sex upon the pollywogs or forcing the pollywogs to perform sexual dances for them, the shellbacks direct and monitor the wogs' sexuality. Thus, the subordination and control of female sexuality becomes part of the male identity.

The same occurs with homosexuals in the ritual. In the same way that shellbacks control women and female sexuality, they control homosexual men and homosexual sexuality. This is done partly through subordination but also through violence, while the control of the feminine is done partly through violence but mainly through subordination of sexuality. The ritual works on an individual level to create feelings of kinship and identity for its participants. On a larger scale, it creates a distinctly naval masculinity through the suppression of both women and homosexuals.

## B. Women and the Navy

The U.S. Navy has typically been characterized as an over-masculinized male institution. The image of sailors as hard-working, strong, sex-starved men (so that they resort to each other at times) has been exploited for years. It can be seen in a famous war picture in which a sailor, recently victorious in war, passionately kisses his (supposed) girlfriend. It can be seen in World War II newsreels of sailors running full-speed down the gangplank—presumably in search of female prey.<sup>136</sup> More importantly, and more practically, it can be seen in the direct link between the Navy and prostitution. Thousands of condoms are passed out to sailors when a ship is in a foreign port, where there are brothels and strip clubs catering to men in the military.<sup>137</sup>

The relationship of men and women is described by the Navy in a multitude of ways, both official and unofficial, but mostly in terms of sex. In the importation of prostitutes to boost morale in foreign ports, in the performances and visits of notable sex symbols such as Miss America and many famous actresses and singers in war-time concerts, and in the presence of strippers, exotic dancers and prostitutes at events such as the aviators' Tailhook convention,

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136. See, e.g., ZIMMERMAN, *supra* note 1, at photo insert 1 (depicting a cartoon of a sailor comforting his crying girlfriend/wife, saying "But honey, I haven't got a girl in every port. I ain't BEEN in every port." Zimmerman's caption reads, "The sailor's randy reputation was well established by the time E. Simms Campbell lampooned it in 1941."); ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at fig. 4 (photograph of sailors at a row of phone booths, with caption reading, "But sailors have long been celebrated as sexual adventurers—and have a *reputation*: a girl (or guy) in every port").

137. See David Wood, *American military works to clean up its bawdy image*, ATLANTA J. & CONSTITUTION, Dec. 31, 1995 ("In the old days, if you showed up for morning formation not reeking of alcohol and cheap perfume, 'you were suspect.' . . . Wartime prostitution was rampant, of course, but it had its place in peacetime, too. 'The chaplain would tell you to stay away, and the sergeant would hand out condoms,' says a Marine.").



women's sexuality has been sold again and again: literally in the Navy's payment of sexually related services, and figuratively as something necessary to the maintenance of a healthy Navy.<sup>138</sup> Because male/female relationships are understood in the military in terms of sexual relations, with the emphasis on women as sexual icons/servants, it is understandably difficult for women to exist on any professional level in the Navy.

In 1991, probably the most famous example of how difficult it is for women to survive as military professionals occurred in Las Vegas at the annual Tailhook Convention, one month after the overwhelming victory of the U.S. in the Gulf War. A wide-sweeping scandal developed when several women, including Admiral's Aide Lt. Paula Coughlin, were sexually assaulted by a group of drunken men.<sup>139</sup> The Navy had "invited" several strippers and prostitutes to the convention, which was well known for its debauchery, to entertain the male aviators.<sup>140</sup> As Jean Zimmerman noted, the men were "riding high" on the victory over Iraq, and wanted to continue their conquests in the sexual arena.<sup>141</sup> As a result, several officers, civilians and one teenage girl were mobbed and groped on what the aviators called "the gauntlet."<sup>142</sup> After recounting her experience, Coughlin was herself blamed—even by her superior officer - for attending a convention where such behaviors were bound to go on. She and many other women began publicly to question the aviator's conduct, and they were viciously attacked by male congressmen, officers and sailors. As Zimmerman writes:

Old-line Navy supporters watched with horror as Tailhook mutated into a force that might "unman" the Navy, transform it into "a bunch of 'pantywaists,' sailing around like members of a yacht club." They found themselves talking less and less about what Paula had wrought and more about the feminist and congressional assault on the male-only domain of combat.

"Congratulations to Rep. Pat Schroeder," wrote one correspondent. "She is accomplishing what the Soviet Union couldn't achieve in the past 40 years—destruction of our military forces, 'man by man.'" Schroeder, Rep. Beverly Byron, Barbara Boxer, et al.—the new evil empire. Again and again, "naturalness" and nature" were cited as ultimate arbiters of what should be, with the image of the woman warrior held up as some sort of Darwinian horror story. "The success of any operation," wrote a World War II veteran, "depends on its operators being in their natural places. Segregation is a fact of life. For society to promote pugnacity in women is an outrage. What is there to come home to if the women are not there?"

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138. See *infra* note 139 and accompanying text.

139. See generally GREGORY L. VISTICA, *FALL FROM GLORY: THE MEN WHO SANK THE U.S. NAVY* (1995) (describing the events at the 1991 Tailhook Convention).

140. ZIMMERMAN, *supra* note 1, at photo insert 1 (depicting a naked stripper standing over a man lying on the ground in a hotel room, while other men watch. Zimmerman's caption reads, "A stripper displays a flight squadron 'zapper' during her performance in a hospitality suite [at the 1991 Tailhook Convention].).

141. *Id.* at 56-58.

142. *Id.*

The last sentence here, the cry of the latchkey child, gives it all away. A woman's place was up on the widow's walk, scanning the horizon for the return of the warrior.<sup>143</sup>

The fear within the Navy at this outcry against sexism was the demasculinization of the military, the fear that the Navy would become a "bunch of 'pantywaists.'"<sup>144</sup> For members of the Navy, power and control are everyday elements of job and lifestyle. Ships and submarines are extremely powerful and potentially destructive. The men on board these ships and submarines face enormous risks in the event of an international conflict. Even in peacetime, as one interviewee mentioned, the men are continually primed for war.<sup>145</sup> As with its sexual metaphors of missiles and bombs, the military has long exploited images of sexual domination in glorifying military action.<sup>146</sup> Just as Navy masculinity finds affirmation of its superiority through domination, control, and other military concepts, so does the Navy find affirmation of its ability to dominate and control through its image of male domination and control of women.

It is important to note that not all of the Crossing the Line ritual content regarding women is negative, nor is it all sexual.<sup>147</sup> Much of ritual play that explores gender oppositions is not misogynistic. But here there are unmistakable tones of violence. In much of it there is an undeniable malice, and much of the sexual content is abusive and derogatory to the person in the "female" role.

The major difference between the Crossing the Line ritual and an experience like Tailhook is that in the ritual the violence is not directly done to women, but rather to men who fail to rid themselves of the feminine roles. This is complicated by the historical presence of relationships between older and younger men on the ships.<sup>148</sup> With the lack of women on the ships, the men were (and are) forced into nurturant roles with each other. These roles continually shift between older and younger men, officers and sailors. Whether or not these relationships were sexual, they continually experimented with different gender configurations on the ships. As women become incorporated into all levels and arenas in the Navy, the gender negotiation continues, peppered with conflict as people try to adjust and make sense of the new configurations. This ceremony is simply one snapshot into the negotiation, and its evolution throughout the past decades offer hints as to how changes are being effected.

### C. Homosexuals and the Navy

While women in the Navy are fighting for equal rights, gays in the military are fighting for any rights at all. The Navy has virtually banned homosexuals from being participants in any way. Even former President Clinton, one of the homosexual community's most liberal public supporters, could only achieve a compromise which many think is hardly better than the previous situation.

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143. *Id.* at 113.

144. *Id.*

145. Phone interview with Naval Officer 1 (Feb. 21, 1998).

146. *See* Cohn, *supra* note 102.

147. *See supra* notes 91-93 and accompanying text (regarding powerful, non-sexual female shell-back roles).

148. *See* BURG, *supra* note 113.

Rather than allowing witch hunts of homosexuals in the military to continue, Clinton supported the compromise of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” which does not forbid the expulsion of military personnel on the basis of their sexuality, but simply does not allow anyone to ask what their sexuality is.<sup>149</sup>

During the negotiation of this compromise, investigators discussed the issues surrounding homosexuals in the military with many men and women in various military branches. The committees especially focused on the Navy, quoting its close quarters and the forced physical intimacy of the shipmates as hazards for rampant sexual harassment by homosexuals. As one source states, “[T]here are strict regulations against carnal relations aboard ship, with any homosexual act grounds for immediate expulsion from the service.”<sup>150</sup> Some of the reasons given by opponents of Clinton’s attempt to lift the ban on gays include:

“You have to spend a lot of times in close quarters, and I wouldn’t want to have to worry about some guy making a pass at me. If I don’t know he’s gay, then I won’t worry about it unless he starts acting strange.”

“If they change the laws, the gay population would become more aggressive, more outgoing and that would bother me.”

“Homosexuality decreases [the soldiers’] comfortableness, and I don’t want to put my men in an uncomfortable situation.”

“When you’re out in the field, all you often have is your buddy. Once you’ve got doubts (about a buddy’s sexual orientation), you might not take risks. Trust is the big thing.”<sup>151</sup>

Homosexuals are still seen as a threat to the integrity of the Navy.<sup>152</sup> Homosexuality is seen as both male and not male, threatening the status of heterosexual masculinity as penetrator and not penetrated, and most of all, impinging upon the heterosexual men’s masculinity by sexually harassing them the way that they are supposed to be sexually harassing women. The issues surrounding the acceptance of gays in the military do not center on the abilities or productivity of the gays. Rather, they focus on how the entry of gays into Navy life would affect the military’s concept of masculinity. It is the gendered identity of the Navy that produces the largest barriers to acceptance of homosexuals among the ranks.

149. This policy is still in full effect today. See Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces, 10 U.S.C. § 654 (2002).

150. ZIMMERMAN, *supra* note 1, at 50.

151. Ann Lolordo, *Fear of Gays Haunts Soldiers Old and New*, BALTIMORE SUN, Feb. 4, 1993, available at <http://www-2.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs.cmu.edu/user/scotts/bulgarians/fear-military-ban.html> (last visited June 18, 2002).

152. Even after the September 11, 2001 attacks, when the military is mobilizing and there is talk of a draft being instituted if military action increases, the military’s policy against homosexuals stands. As of October 4, 2001, the Navy has implemented a “stop-loss” order suspending certain administrative discharges to help retain sufficient personnel for combat readiness. This order explicitly does not refer to people discharged under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue, Don’t Harass” policy, thereby continuing the exclusion of homosexual personnel. Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, *Survival Guide: How Will the Current Military Mobilization Affect ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’?* at <http://www.sldn.org/templates/get/record.html?record=410> (last visited Feb. 7, 2002).

## D. Violence, Hazing, and Ritual Play

The 1990s were very tumultuous for the Navy and other branches of the military, as they came under public attack for policies and “traditions” formerly justified as necessary to the integrity of the military. As discussed, in the late 80s and early 90s, accounts of sexual harassment against female personnel in the military became increasingly prevalent, coming to a head with the Tailhook scandal.<sup>153</sup> These accounts coincided with accusations of discrimination, particularly focused on Gulf War criticism of the military’s ban on female fighter pilots.<sup>154</sup> At the same time, Clinton stirred controversy with his investigation of the issue of gays in the military and his policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” which satisfied neither side of the debate.

While these political battles were waged, concerns over hazing were heightened by numerous stories of severe injuries or death. The near-fatal beating of a Marine at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 1986 became the subject of the 1992 blockbuster film *A Few Good Men*.<sup>155</sup> In 1997, videotapes were aired on national television showing Marines gouging each others’ chests with paratrooper’s jump wing pins during a “blood pinning” ceremony.<sup>156</sup> Shortly after, a 1991 video of the Crossing the Line ceremony was aired on Los Angeles news station, depicting many of the more graphic parts of the ceremony aboard the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz.<sup>157</sup>

Many of the severest accounts of hazing were directly linked to the issues of gays and women in the military, such as the beating of a female recruit. She was attacked in a Navy boot camp shower by three men who told her she had to “be taught a lesson before she could order men around.”<sup>158</sup> Private military schools like the Citadel in South Carolina and Virginia Military Institute, having lost court battles to keep women out, staged massive resistance.<sup>159</sup> Shannon Faulkner, the first female Citadel recruit, suffered two years of harassment be-

153. See *supra* notes 139-43 and accompanying text; see also ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 283 (Z: What about the second time you went through the ceremony. . .did you take advantage of being a shellback. . .? J: I wanted to, but see, with Tailhook and with gays in the military and Clinton and all that other stuff—we didn’t even have a lot of the same things. . .All you could do was yell at ‘em and pour food on ‘em. You couldn’t hit ‘em. It sucked. It was not the same.).

154. See ZIMMERMAN, *supra* note 1.

155. Kerry Derochi, *Navy Takes Hard Line on Hazing: But Ingrained Traditions, Even When They Result in Injury, Don’t Disappear Overnight*, SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER, Jan. 29, 1997, at B5 (citing A FEW GOOD MEN (Castle Rock Entertainment/Columbia Pictures 1992)).

156. See Jon R. Anderson, ‘Shellback’ Tradition Rebuked: *Crossing the Hazing Line?*, NAVY TIMES, Apr. 28, 1997, at 3 (“Blood pinning” of jump wings, or “tacking on” of submarine dolphin pins is a ceremony where the uninitiated line up to receive their pins, which are pushed into their bare chest and pounded by each initiated member in turn.).

157. Jeff Kramer, *O.C. Man Stumbled onto Navy Hazing Tape*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, June 20, 1997, at A1.

158. Derochi, *supra* note 155, at B5 (“She is now awaiting a medical discharge for an equilibrium disorder that may be linked to the beating.”).

159. *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 151 (1996); *Faulkner v. Jones*, 66 F.3d 661 (4th Cir. 1995), *cert denied*, 516 U.S. 938 (1995).

fore she was permitted to join the school as a recruit, and she was so psychologically tormented at the school that she dropped the program after a week.<sup>160</sup>

The military's responses often complicated the situation. Eager to institute more gender and sexually neutral policies, the Navy rushed women through fighter pilot training programs, resulting in tragedy. The first woman to pass the program was accidentally killed during a practice flight, and Navy investigations eventually determined that her death was due to lack of training.<sup>161</sup> The military's adoption of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy has led to thousands of cases of harassment of suspected gay personnel, and to witch hunts that have led to more dismissals of gays under this policy than under the prior ban.<sup>162</sup> The attacks on hazing led the military to soften its training camps, an action lauded by feminists and human rights activists as "humanizing" the military, but also highly criticized as not preparing recruits for combat.<sup>163</sup>

More directly, the Navy and Marines have set (or have begun enforcing already set) restrictions on hazing and "hazing" ceremonies like the Crossing the Line ceremony.<sup>164</sup> The extreme restrictions, which sometimes have banned hazing ceremonies altogether, have resulted in a backlash.<sup>165</sup> Several have voiced complaints that doing away with traditional ceremonies is an inappropriately stringent response to unauthorized hazings. They feel that rites of passage and

160. SUSAN FALUDI, *STIFFED: THE BETRAYAL OF THE AMERICAN MAN* 114 (1999) (Shannon Faulkner dealt with verbal and written threats, vandalism, and personal attacks. One bit of graffiti in the campus men's room read, "Let her in—then fuck her to death." According to the cadets, "... 'female' was the ultimate insult among the cadets." One former student stated that "According to the Citadel creed of the cadet...women have no rights. They are objects. They are things that you can do with whatever you want to.").

161. ZIMMERMAN, *supra* note 1.

162. During 2001 alone, the Pentagon fired a record 1,250 men and women for being lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This is the highest number of gay discharges since 1987 (seven years prior to the implementation of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy). *Conduct Unbecoming: The 8th Annual Report on 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'* SERVICEMEMBERS LEGAL DEFENSE NETWORK, Mar. 14, 2002, at <http://www.sldn.org/templates/law/record.html?record=473> (last visited Mar. 18, 2002).

163. See Paul Richter, *Boot Camp Softens Its Image: Hoping to Train 'Warrior Technicians,' the Military Stresses Brains over Brawn and Emotional Support Over Intimidation. Critics Fear Such Changes May Not Prepare Recruits for Old-Style Combat*, L.A. TIMES, Oct. 26, 1997, at A1.

164. After the disclosure of a homemade videotape showing the Marines "blood pinning" ritual in early 1997, Defense Secretary William Cohen announced a "zero tolerance" policy on hazing. See Kramer, *supra* note 157; see also DEP'T OF THE NAVY, *COMSEVENTHFLT GUIDELINES*, USS INDEPENDENCE NOTICE 5050 encl. 2 (April 1997) (Guidelines from the COMSEVENTHFLT's message to Commanding Officers regarding the "Crossing the Line" Ceremony include safety instructions forbidding hazing and striking, requiring medical screening and supervision, and prohibiting "sexually suggestive activities, props, costumes, skits, gags, or gifts...[d]enigrating, sexually explicit, perverse, or lewd behavior...") The guidelines also state that "[o]nly behavior that would be acceptable in an open forum attended by families and friends is acceptable during initiation ceremonies."); Gidget Fuentes, *Marine Corps Puts Out Tough Rules on Hazing*, NAVY TIMES, June 30, 1997 at 16.

165. One former WWII sailor called the marines' anti-shellback policies "treasonous," and implied that fear was at the basis of the policy, suggesting changing the marine slogan from "A few good men" to "A few sissy cream puffs." Sam A. Moore, Editorial letter, *A Few Good Cream Puffs?*, NAVY TIMES, May 26, 1997, at 31.

bonding ceremonies are very important for a group of people who will be relying upon one another, often in tight quarters and in pressured situations.<sup>166</sup>

Hazing is often a part of military ceremonies, such as the Crossing the Line ceremony, and it contributes to the secrecy of the ceremony. Hazing incidents have led to few military court cases because serious injury rarely occurs during hazing, and because when injury does occur it is typically handled on an administrative level.<sup>167</sup> More importantly, like the military ceremonies, a certain level of hazing is seen as an integral part of the military, something the participants must experience and overcome to become part of the fighting forces.<sup>168</sup>

Many viewed the secrecy of the ritual as implying guilt on the part of the military.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, the ceremony is very secretive. As with other ceremonies, it is considered a proud and necessary rite of passage, one that should be secretive and guarded. All of the men I interviewed who had participated in it were very hesitant to reveal any of the details, whether risqué or not. But secrecy should not automatically condemn the ceremony; it is a part of many traditions and ritual processes. Rites of passage culminate with bonding between the initiates, which would not be possible without a certain amount of discretion.<sup>170</sup> Also, the gender bending and sexual play, which are explored in the context of the ritual, are protected by this discretion, and otherwise such gender negotiations would not be possible.

On the other hand, the participants' frequent description of the ceremony as "innocent" and "just a tradition" is also not to be taken at face value.<sup>171</sup> Participants are willing to overlook unbelievable humiliation and pain and discomfort, considering it so important that they are willing to risk punishment to ensure that it is carried out.<sup>172</sup> If secrecy does not automatically condemn the ceremony, neither do these proclamations by participants automatically vindicate it. The ceremony is very complex, as evidenced by the discussion here, and involves some aspects that are violent and disturbing. The sexual violence and subjugation in the "ritual play" reflect conflicts in the larger social context.

As the social context shifts, so will the form and meaning of the Crossing the Line ceremony shift. One example of this is the previously mentioned tradi-

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166. Gregory A. Smith, Editorial letter, *A Few Good Cream Puffs?*, NAVY TIMES, May 26, 1997 at 31; Interview with Sailor 1 (Aug. 15, 1997).

167. Derochi, *supra* note 155, at B5.

168. *Id.*

169. See, e.g., *The US Navy's Dirty Little Secrets*, SPY MAGAZINE, Mar. 1993.

170. As one sailor remarked, "We were all equals afterwards. It was like a big brotherhood." Interview with Sailor 1 (Aug. 15, 1997).

171. See, e.g., ZEELAND, *supra* note 22, at 158; Darlene Himmelspach, *Equator Rite: Honored Maritime Tradition, or Hazing?*, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIB., Apr. 30, 1997, at B2 ("To someone hearing about this, they might think it's weird," said [Lance Cpl. Frank] Allen. "But it's the same as college when you pledge. You're a member for life and you can sit around a table and reminisce.").

172. See, e.g., Burlage, *supra* note 6 (Twelve sailors on the USS Princeton were punished for hazing. Four were discharged from the Navy after being convicted of assault, failure to maintain the physical security of a magazine and disobeying a direct order when they performed an ad hoc "wog night" ceremony the day before the sanctioned shellback ceremony. The sanctioned ceremony was cancelled and the offending men were processed out of the Navy. A spokesman for the Navy said, "This validates that the Navy takes hazing seriously."); James W. Crawley, *Navy Punishes 12 Sailors in Shipboard Hazing at Equator*, THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE, July 12, 1997, at B5.

tion of blacking faces.<sup>173</sup> Examples of this can be seen as late as 1912, and possibly later, but it was conspicuously absent from all of the books I reviewed dating from World War II or later.<sup>174</sup> With the prevalence of black soldiers and sailors during World War II, and with the subsequent prominent struggles for racial equality and civil rights, it would seem strange and offensive to use black-facing now. Not only are many of the current crewmembers and officers black, making the act ineffective and meaningless, the very gesture has been taken as derogatory and unacceptable.<sup>175</sup> Perhaps this change in the ceremony reflects the change in society; the ceremony certainly changed simultaneously with it.<sup>176</sup>

#### E. The Navy's Identity Crisis

The addition of gays and women to the Crossing the Line ceremony fundamentally disrupts the meanings of the ritual. Adding women to the crew makes the transvestism less sexual, both because the "fake" women lose much of their sexuality next to "real" women and become mainly humorous, and because the women who cross-dress as men do not have the same sexual power as when they are women.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, when women and homosexual men are in the pollywog position, any sexual play becomes too similar to rape or sexual harassment. Much of what makes such a ritual work is maintaining the humor of the inversion, and when a male shellback simulates the rape of a female pollywog, many see neither inversion nor humor in the situation.<sup>178</sup>

The ritual, which works to confirm the military masculinity of its participants, ceases to have meaning when women and homosexuals participate because after surviving the pageant, the trials, and the abuse, the women and homosexuals who passed through the ritual are still women and homosexuals. They would continue to be and to embody all that the ritual attempts to extricate from the initiates. Perhaps more importantly, the women and homosexuals who completed the ceremony would provide counter-examples to the negative stereotypes supported in the ritual. Rather than being weak, vulnerable, over-sexed and inferior, the female and homosexual initiates would prove to be every bit as strong and powerful as their heterosexual male counterparts, thereby destroying the contrasting stereotypes of women versus men and homosexual versus heterosexual upon which the ritual is built.

173. See *supra* notes 11-13 and accompanying text.

174. USS MARYLAND, *supra* note 49.

175. One example of the current social unacceptability of black-facing is when Ted Danson appeared in public in black-facing with Whoopi Goldberg in 1993. Even though Danson appeared with Goldberg, who is black, a media frenzy followed, highly criticizing Danson.

176. This is not to say that racial equality has been achieved, either in society or in the Navy, but changes in the public perception of race, as reflected in the ritual, do suggest that racial liminality does not have the same meaning and impact today as gender or sexual liminalities.

177. However, as previously mentioned, the women dressed as men then have the "domination" power to molest the men dressed as women. See *supra* notes 96-98 and accompanying text.

178. The addition of women to other military ceremonies has changed them as well. One army soldier told me that she and her troop of mostly men went through the blood winging ceremony when they became paratroopers, but her troop leader refused to wing her, not wanting to hurt her. Interview with Soldier 1 (Aug. 7, 1999).

The gender and sex imagery found in the Crossing the Equator ceremony cannot be interpreted as being derived from the motivations of its participants. The imagery originates not from individuals, but from the greater cultural context. In this context the U.S. military, more specifically the U.S. Navy, presents a microcosm or an exaggerated version of larger social issues in American society. As more and more women enter the military, the Navy and other branches begin to suffer identity crises.<sup>179</sup> As already demonstrated, on ships where women participate in the sexual play in the ceremony, the meaning and impact of the sexual play diminishes.<sup>180</sup> With ideas about the relationships between men and women already established and seen in everything from the language to the rituals in the Navy, the entry of capable, strong, intelligent women on a large-scale basis completely contradicts the previous stereotypes of women. This contradiction threatens to redefine the military persona as no longer solely male, but as both male and female.

Perhaps most crucial to understanding the power of the ritual and the difficulty in including women and homosexuals is understanding the identity of the Navy itself. The use of sexual imagery to glorify military action is so important in the military that it is found in the language of missiles and attacks.<sup>181</sup> Thus, female and homosexual participation in the Navy is threatening on a very deep level. Because of the correlation between military domination and male sexual power, the entry of feminine sexuality or of “penetrated” men destroys the identity of the Navy and its members. Until the image of what constitutes a Naval military persona, as exemplified by the shellback role in the Crossing the Line ritual, becomes more flexible—allowing for both male and female and both gay and straight sexuality, the resolution of issues surrounding the admission of homosexuals and the civil rights of women and homosexuals cannot proceed.

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179. This renegotiation requires finding a new space for understanding men and women, both in the Navy and in larger society. As one female sailor expressed, “I don’t want to be treated like a guy, but I expect the men to keep their hands to themselves.” Women report that the more women on ships, the better the atmosphere is for them. Timothy Egan, *Female Sailors Talk of Slow but Certain Change*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, June 14, 1992.

180. See discussion *supra* Part V.B.

181. See Cohn, *supra* note 102.