

# FROM BOYS TO MEN

## RHETORICS OF EMERGENT AMERICAN MASCULINITY

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SWR

STUDIES IN WRITING AND RHETORIC

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# 1

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## Coming of Age as a Boy in America: Emerging Masculinity as Rhetoric

A COLUMN TITLED “FROM BOYS TO MEN” IN the *New York Times* on October 15, 2010, proclaimed the arrival of “A New Masculine Ideal” in male runway models. But rather than a new ideal, the article describes the return on that year’s catwalks and magazine pages from the image of a “juvenile with pipe-cleaner proportions” that prevailed during the previous decade to a more “conventional” image of men. The author cites the troublesome economy as a call for this return:

You lose the T-shirt and the skateboard. You buy an interview suit and a package of Gillette Mach 3 blades. You grow up, in other words. Suddenly evidence of a new phase in the cycle of evolving masculine imagery was all over the catwalks in the runway season that recently ended. Just as suddenly it can be seen splashed across the covers of magazines, where the boys of recent memory have been transformed overnight into men. (Trebay)

According to Trebay, this posttransformation image of manhood reflects American men’s desire to imagine themselves as workers during a time of soaring unemployment in the United States. But the image itself and Trebay’s interpretation of it rely on a deeper cultural narrative in which the transformation from boyhood to masculinity—“growing up,” as Trebay calls it—is a key focus. What is involved in this transformation? Trebay’s column suggests that the change means choosing different images to represent manhood,

but in fact the images themselves rely on a broader sense of American masculine identity. In that broader narrative that frames identity, the male models and, by extension, American males in general are actors whose actions mimic the transformations of American adolescent males generally. The actors are alternately “boys” and “men” depending on their body types and where they fall within the narrative chronology, and within Trebay’s language they are also “you” in both cases. The actions include “los[ing] the T-shirt and skateboard” and “buy[ing] an interview suit and a package of Gillette Mach 3 blades.” A rhetorical reading of the article reveals that the men on the runway transform in response to the current economy, changing not just their behavior but also the nature of their maleness. The article’s narrative presents masculinity as emerging through a process of choices and behaviors that, if successful, result in true American maleness.

The Trebay article both mystifies and reifies a process of moving from boy to man, a masculine transformation, and it is worth analyzing because it is representative; the rhetorical creation of this transformation process from a pre-masculine to a masculine state is perhaps the most fundamental element of representations of masculinity in the United States. Similar to many identity-marking efforts, Trebay’s article defines masculinity against what it is not, and it is these concrete definitions that create the background for the transformation story: a real man is not a boy because a man shaves, is large-framed, wears a suit; a boy is not a man because a boy can’t shave, is small, doesn’t wear a suit because he isn’t active in the economy. Mystified by the article but yet essential to it is the idea of transformation that links these two sides of the binary with its implied argument that it is possible to become a man, but not guaranteed. The process portrayed indirectly through the images and accompanying narrative is highly consequential: becoming a man in this context can be as easy as purchasing the right implements, but failing to do so means failing economically and as a representative male person.

Yet this transformation process involves more than buying or wearing something; it requires a change in discourse that mani-

fests through rhetorical moves. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke provides insight into why the process is so deep-reaching in its power to shape behavior:

[A]n adolescent, eager to “grow up,” is trained by our motion pictures to meditate much on the imagery of brutality and murder, as the most noteworthy signs of action in an ideal or imaginary adult world. By the time he is fifteen, he has “witnessed” more violence than most soldiers or gunmen experience in a lifetime. And he has “participated in” all this imagery, “empathically reënacting” it. Thus initiated, he might well think of “growing up” (that is, of “transformation”) in such excessive terms. His awareness of himself as a developing person requires a vocabulary. (17–18)

These two views of masculinity that Trebay and Burke call attention to, one of money-earning, suit-wearing self-control and the other of conditioned acceptance of violence, demonstrate two different and potentially contradictory images of masculinity that result from the process of “transformation.” While the authors of these two different images construct our ideas of what is possible for males, Burke suggests with his quotation marks that the process of masculine “transformation” is itself a concept that boys are primed to accept from birth. Thus, the transformation is rhetorically constructed and demands a change in rhetorical action.

I argue that Burke offers the most useful analytical framework for understanding this rhetorical process of masculine transformation—a use to which Burke’s writings have not yet been put, but which can accommodate the contradictions and various results that have emerged from masculine transformation rhetoric, such as the two versions of masculinity described here. While gender theorists have provided much guidance in understanding the social construction of masculinity and its intersections with race, class, sexuality, and ability, a rhetorical approach is needed to demonstrate how language works socially to induce popular participation in the process of its construction.

I engage here with the masculine transformation process as it has been institutionalized in organizations in the United States, even

though the process is not limited to such sites. American boys attain the vocabulary Burke points to from sites as disparate as the self-consciously performative space of the fashion runway, the easy entertainment of films and television, and the remote authority of the geneticists' laboratory, all of which make claims about masculinity's vitality and fundamental function in American lives. These claims form narratives about mainstream manhood that sometimes swirl around us obliquely, including stories of cultivating manhood over time and others of more contracted crucible experiences. Our interpretations of physical manhood and the journey boys take into its space underwrite popular culture and social experience, forming a significant element of the way many people in the United States understand themselves. Institutional, organized expressions of male coming-of-age rhetoric, the concern of this monograph, encourage American audiences to believe that emergent masculinity is an enduring natural phenomenon and an essential component of American identity, and that the outcomes of the transformation process have important consequences for the United States as a nation.

Because this idea of transformation is socially produced and performed in public spaces that intersect with institutional spaces, organizations for boys provide the best specific places to find examples of its workings. Looking throughout the twentieth century in the United States, one finds narratives of male development in many organizations for boys, sites that have received broad social, familial, and state support. The groups that I analyze here have been able to gain strong cultural support because their language and practices have become such an intrinsic part of American identity that we are guided to believe that membership is part of proper male citizenship grooming. These organizations have presented this citizenship grooming as the road boys must follow in order to cultivate good character. In each case, American ideas about boyhood have resulted not from direct public appeals to credibility, emotion, or data, but rather through rhetorical genres, including ritualized statements and symbols such as the US Army's "Soldier's Creed" and the Boy Scouts of America's origin myth. Through these genres, the organizations have tapped into young males' conscious-

ness, shaping their identities and invoking them as incipient members of the nation. Organizations for boys are an excellent example of the role of Burkean identification in crafting the tie between consciousness of the nation as a “community” and popular conceptions of the developing boy during the last century. Yet they also point to significant ambiguity as they push boys to identify with the overarching imagined community of Americans through the fog of class antagonism, as citizens who would resolve the problem of individualism that remains in tension with national unity, and as warriors who would symbolically forward national, imperial expansion despite the controversial accompanying violence.

The process of imagining a movement from boyhood to manhood is a rhetorical undertaking not just because of its effect on individual American boys, but also because it requires large groups of people to identify with a particular conception of destiny or teleology and in so identifying, to conceive of boys as agents in a broader scene that expands to national boundaries. The mental and physical discipline applied to boys through youth organizations stems from ideologically driven theories of male and childhood development, and these theories have been applied rhetorically through origin stories, credos, public statements, and other symbols. American youth organizations have been one powerful node from which complex rhetorics of national manhood have emanated. The rhetorical process of transforming ideology into practice invokes—*interpellates*, to use Louis Althusser’s term—boys’ consciousness of who they are by addressing them and then limiting the possibilities for their identification (173). Race, class, sexuality, and ability attend the identification process for boys and create dialectics between hegemonic masculinity and a myriad of marginalized identities.

My primary concern here is with the role of this potential ambiguity in hegemonic young male identification, and in a particular pattern of using the idea of “transformation” as an attempt to reconcile the ambiguities that arise in the process of constituting male identity. I join other rhetoricians who have engaged masculinity theories and whose work has pointed to the need to understand more thoroughly how communication functions in and

through masculinity as a discourse that arranges cultural practices and that brings about material consequences. Early rhetorical work on masculinity effectively made the case for addressing masculinity in the field of composition and rhetoric, though that work remains incomplete. Specifically, Robert Connors pointed out that “throughout most of Western History . . . [t]he historical discipline of rhetoric was shaped by male rituals, male contests, male ideals, and masculine agendas” (139), drawing on Walter Ong’s history of agonistic ritual and men’s insecurity-driven struggles for control (140). Connors notes that in the absence of effective male role models, boys have resorted to organizations like the YMCA that impose social controls and rituals bestowing manhood upon them, but that today fraternities provide the only option for this type of guidance. While critical of these organizational sites of manhood, Connors continues to search for a source of identity transformation that will account for boys’ emotional needs—a replacement for initiation rites that can resolve the alienation that he argues many men feel as they fail to reconcile the social roles they are expected to fulfill with the emotions they are unable to make sense of.

To some extent, then, Connors sees masculinity rhetoric as a response to manhood-in-crisis. Deepening a dialogue on masculinity rhetoric, Luke Winslow questions the predominant popular narrative of masculinity-in-crisis that often reifies a conception of gender as biologically fixed, emerging from a single homogenous foundation. In his dissertation, “Style and Struggle: The Rhetoric of Masculinity,” he instead proposes that masculinity is act-oriented rather than agent-oriented or fixed in the nature of the person, paraphrasing Burke: “Like women, men need to define themselves—they can’t just *be*” (27). Winslow makes central the performance inherent in masculinity.

James V. Catano’s study *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and the Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man* takes a psychoanalytic approach to the rhetoric of masculinity, arguing in line with Judith Butler (140) that masculinity is “rule-governed[,] . . . performed and maintained—culturally and individually—through and in terms of preset rhetorical arguments” (Catano 2). He asserts that the myth of the self-made man covers its rhetorical tracks by obfuscating the

contradiction between the myth and the relative class immobility and income disparity in the United States. This contradiction also surrounds the myths of the male youth organizations that I analyze here, making clear that the sources of such “preset rhetorical arguments” are worth uncovering and scrutinizing with the rhetorical tools available.

Perhaps closest to the theoretical spirit of my inquiry but furthest from its historical location, Lindsay Green McManus uses Erving Goffman’s work on performativity to understand what she calls the “true, psychological self” that manifests through performances of masculinity. In her dissertation, “Performing Masculinity: Control, Manhood, and the Rhetoric of Effeminacy,” she analyzes masculinity in Quintilian’s rhetorical work and in literature from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, asserting that in each case masculinity was defined through its opposition to effeminacy. This binary between masculinity and femininity that is inherent in masculine performances is also key to the identity-forming activities of youth organizations for boys in the United States, and McManus is correct in locating rhetoric within gender performance. I depart from her argument when she groups manhood performance with masculinity performance, however. As I outline in the following paragraphs, masculinity in the United States is an outgrowth of a particular historical relationship to economics and race that manifested within American gender performances at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

Outside of rhetorical scholarship, in the broader world, contemporary public assertions about how boys develop into men are situated within conversations about the US nation, race, class, labor, medicine, and education at various points in the last century. The result of these overlapping discourses is what we receive today as a mainstream idea—that there is an American man, characterized by his role in daily life and in exceptional circumstances—and a preoccupation among parents, educators, doctors, and community leaders with how members of a national “community” can build that American man from a boy. The American man is discursively positioned as a metonym for the American in particular historical moments. While coded as hegemonic masculinity, the performance of

manhood at these moments is at the same time presented as a universal performance of Americanness. The cultural preoccupation with building that Americanness, and building the American boy into a man who embodies it, is funneled most coherently through organizations outside of formal schooling, though these organizations act in tandem with formal, particularly public, schooling. The distinction between formal education and the training by extracurricular organizations is relevant because it explains why youth organizations have persisted for boys from a wide range of political, class, and religious backgrounds.

To help explain the role of formal education as opposed to extracurricular training, Ian Hunter's work examines the nearly universally shared ideal of principled education through school systems, an ideal that relies on the belief in the liberal subject and the importance of that subject's development. Hunter argues that in reality, rather than a deliberate, systematic means of fostering such principled development, schooling is primarily an "improvised assemblage as a device to meet the contingencies of a particular history" (xvii)—a device that historically has reflected the most advanced bureaucratic technologies available for schooling at a particular time rather than any fundamental idealistic principles. These bureaucratic technologies have effectively separated the development of students' civic identities from the development of their spiritual consciousness, making the civic the realm of government institutions and leaving the spiritual and moral development to other social forces (xxii–xxiii).

This separation that Hunter describes has created a perceived need for nongovernmental institutions such as the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) and college fraternities to take up the task of spiritual and moral development for youth. The function of the US Army is more ambiguous than that of the BSA and fraternities, as the army is clearly a government institution but has adopted language of spiritual and moral development in its recruiting campaigns and its creeds. The chapters that follow address the bridge between civic development and spiritual/moral development that the three organizations form, attending to the tensions and con-

traditions that arise between the two goals. I examine these contradictions by applying Burke's lens of rhetoric as identity performance from *A Rhetoric of Motives*, focusing on the organizations' semipublic and public textual performances.

In the following section, I describe a theory of identification that I later use to explore the ways these performances function rhetorically, and then I briefly summarize how nationalism and masculinity function as intertwined components of males' identification as emergent, masculine American subjects.

#### UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY-BUILDING RHETORIC IN ORGANIZATIONS FOR BOYS

While national masculinity has been constructed in and for public spaces, it has also been formulated in more quotidian language acts in the private space of the family and semiprivate meeting spaces of community organizations. Rather than functioning as explicitly public appeals, masculinity and nationalism are best understood as effects arising when audiences identify with the discourse that is presented in these semipublic spaces. These effects are then carried home into the most private spaces, as well as publicized in the most public spaces. Figures such as community authorities create nationalism and masculinity in this way by invoking audiences as part of a natural, predetermined, and enduring community, and audiences, so interpellated, carry their identities as a framework for understanding and performing themselves publicly and privately.

A rhetorical analysis of the rhetoric of emergent masculinity must explain how language functions in this interpellation to convince young males to imagine themselves as masculine in response to the complex situations they encounter. Gender theorist R. W. Connell writes that "practice . . . always responds to a situation, and situations are structured in ways that admit certain possibilities and not others" (65). And as language practices, the possibilities for rhetorics of manhood are worked out in such constrained situations. Aristotle explained rhetorical responses to such constraints through the concepts of *kairos* (opportunity) and *to prepon* (appropriateness). In the same tradition, Lloyd Bitzer argued that rhetorical responses are attuned to particular exigencies (9–13). For the

most part, rhetoric scholars understand that discourse is created from a mass of such specific settings, for particular audiences, and by speakers or writers who present particular versions of their characters. Yet as Richard Vatz has argued seminally, we should not be limited by Bitzer's classical understanding of rhetoric as persuasion, which relies on the notion of a fixed, preexisting speaker, audience, and context for argument. Bitzer's model fails to account for the complexity involved in gender identity that Connell describes. As gender theorists have made clear, gender is a construction, and the notion of a fixed, preexisting audience does not adequately explain how gender is constructed through language.

Much more useful is Burke's notion of rhetoric as performance wherein subjectivity and identity, as well as a rhetorical situation, are created within a situation rather than assumed (*Rhetoric*). This model allows for the constraints on subjectivity that come from outside an individual, but also allows for a range of possible responses that in turn create the situation itself.

Burke's dramatistic paradigm explains how language moves boys and young men to imagine themselves as masculine Americans in this way, creating a rhetorical situation and a performance of the self. By pulling rhetoric away from a classical understanding of public discourse as appeals to *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*—character, emotion, and logic—and placing it into a world of actions and words executed in the drama of everyday life, he describes rhetorical situations in the modern world as “modes of action” that involve a scene (setting or situation), act (thing done), agent (actor), agency (method of doing), and purpose (*Grammar* xxii). These elements make up a rhetorical situation in which a person imagines himself to fit in a particular way. Applying these terms to particular cases, Burke finds that ratios between two of them typically serve as a “container” and a “thing contained” (3). That is, one element—usually the scene or the act—forms the background and justification for the other—typically the act, agent, agency, or purpose, though other ratios are possible. Burke's ratios allow rhetoricians to explain rhetorical situations in terms of consistencies, inconsistencies, and complexities between a backdrop and a foreground, a kind of reworking of the premise and the conclusion.

Burke's essential contribution to rhetoric is his argument that humans are persuaded to act by identifying with other humans, and in making this argument, he redefines rhetoric as identification rather than persuasion. Through the drama of rhetorical situations, people imagine themselves to be "consubstantial"—that is, they identify—with others. He points out that "[a] doctrine of *consubstantiality*, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. . . . [A]nd a way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial* (*Rhetoric* 21). Burke understood that the banal actions that make up our "way of life" are motivated by a deep need to belong, but also that the terms of that belonging precede us. Often, the process of identifying with these terms is unplanned and unconscious (*Language* 301).

Because the chapters that follow are ultimately an ideological critique of cultural practices, I want to clarify what I mean by appeals and why appeals are inherently ideological in the context of my Burkean reading of masculinity rhetoric, and so need to turn to the history that explains the way rhetoricians have understood the relationship between rhetors and audiences, beginning with the constitutive model of rhetoric. The constitutive model is important not just as a way to understand this exchange of linguistic effects on audiences, but also as a particular way to conceive of the meaning and function of appeals themselves in rhetoric. When I locate and analyze appeals in male youth organizations, I understand those appeals as events that develop and reify the participants' subjectivity, as well as the rhetorical situations themselves. In this conception, rhetorical appeals are performance. An understanding of the rhetorical process as performance has evolved during the twentieth century to position appeals as ideological and ethical rather than merely mechanical effects because, in the constitutive model, they are an act of world disclosure, a way of publicly imagining the world and the self within that world. In contrast, the classical (influence) model positions rhetoric as a goal-oriented activity, the implications of which hinge on the question of whether the rhetor is successful or has failed within a world that is established and unchangeable, as Ronald Walter Greene has pointed out.

For Aristotle, the touchstone source of classically based modern understandings of rhetoric, appeals were measured as persuasive effects on audiences: he described rhetoric famously in Book II of *On Rhetoric* as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” Aristotle saw these available means as observable to the skilled rhetorician because they respond to a preexisting relationship of influence between speaker and audience. Aristotle explicated his types of appeals and connected them to the variety of possible audience dispositions that may pose as variables in a rhetorical situation. So reliable and fixed were these means of persuasion and this model of influence for Aristotle and his progeny that Renaissance rhetoricians suggested pupils practice an abundance of possible arguments beforehand and choose from among those in their mental toolbox when they needed to persuade an audience. Rhetoricians in the Aristotelian tradition generally held that such a catalog of appeals, executed selectively by a practiced rhetor, would lead to the persuasive effect that the rhetor desired. In this context, an appeal was a strategy that influenced an audience by changing their minds or their actions, and the appeal’s success was based on whether it achieved that effect. No attention was paid to how audiences rethought the world or reimagined themselves as a result of the appeal.

This classically based understanding of rhetoric as persuasion permeates our contemporary theory and analysis. Greene refers to this conceptualization as the “influence model of effectivity.” But to say that public argument or public artifacts are rhetorical because they are persuasive misses a key development in the field of rhetoric, which is the understanding of rhetoric as performance rather than straightforward persuasion, a development that began with Burke and evolved through the second half of the twentieth century into the constitutive model discussed earlier in this chapter. As Greene points out, “a constitutive model of rhetorical effectivity privileges identification over persuasion as the key to unpacking the rhetorical nature of public argument.” This model is elided, Greene argues, in the “constant repetition that rhetoric is a form of persuasion.” To correct this elision, we need to apply to public

argument the constitutive model with its conception of rhetoric as identification, understanding that identification implicates audiences beyond their immediate responses to a predefined rhetorical situation. And because rhetoric as identification enables and transforms the subject, it has a much deeper cultural reach than a persuasion model of rhetoric suggests. In inventing a worldview and a truth, rhetorical appeals are ideological. To borrow from Edwin Black's argument in "The Second Persona" as historicized by Greene, rhetoric invokes a particular type of audience and in so doing invokes an ideology, "ideology in the sense that Marx used the term: the network of interconnected convictions that functions in a man [or woman] epistemically and that shapes his [or her] identity by determining how he [or she] views the world" (qtd. in Greene).<sup>1</sup>

Because identification is ideological, seemingly minor or private (but repeated) instances of rhetoric that lead to national identification are crucial sites for rhetoricians, as these rhetorical moments form concepts of self and a relationship to what we think of as a "community," justifying significant actions by invoking commonplace values and concepts. We often find these commonplaces coded in key words and phrases such as *character* that are repeated in a variety of media and institutions from a broad political spectrum, and they also play out in our intimate relationships with friends and family. None of us is free from the ideological working of nationalist rhetoric. The rhetorician's job is to locate the ideologies that undergird the appeals they help form, working backwards to identify the values and subject-forming processes behind them. Rhetorical criticism becomes a "hermeneutic reading strategy dedicated to interpreting the meaning of the text based on how it positions an audience" (Greene). Drawing from Barbara Beisecker's 1989 article "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of *Différance*," I find that for rhetoricians a central ethical question is, how does a text make possible a subjectivity?

In engaging an ideological, performance-based critique of rhetoric, Burke helps rhetors follow the connection between ideology and language acts by describing four terms or "tropes." These tropes, from "Four Master Tropes" in the appendix to *A Grammar*

*of Motives*, provide a useful vocabulary for discussing language acts as appeals and provide further nuance to his pentad framework. For Burke they are the four structures through which we experience “the truth” (503). As such, we could say that they reveal the structures through which a worldview is created. These tropes include metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, and when they explain not literature but our experience of reality, Burke translates them as perspective, reduction, representation, and dialectic, respectively. Perspective (metaphor) tells us how a character is unique, different from other characters. So a boy participating in an organization might, for example, be seen through the perspective of his physical being or moral character, two perspectives that the Boy Scouts of America has taken. These perspectives are a way to explain human motivation (504).

In using reduction (metonymy), we use terms of the tangible to speak of the intangible, Burke explains (*Grammar* 506). For example, in the US military’s “Army of One” recruiting campaign, images of physical attributes—soldiers in uniform, standing erect, with bodies of roughly the same height—stand in for intangible characteristics such as self-control. And as Burke notes, “a reduction is a representation” (507). All of the tropes overlap for Burke, and in the analyses that follow, we see how perspective—for example, that of a boy—overlaps with reduction, such as that of a boy in uniform standing at attention, and those categories overlap with representation, such as that of a boy in uniform standing as a representative of the nation’s future.

Burke explains that synecdoche is at work in any political theory of representation: “[I]n a complex civilization,” he writes, “any act of representation automatically implies a synecdochic relationship (insofar as the act is, or is held to be, ‘truly representative’)” (*Grammar* 508). The rhetoric of youth organizations discussed in this study calls out boys as representative of the nation or particular national agendas.

When different agents act together, they participate in the rhetorical dialectic of Burke’s formulation. In their individual perspectives, agents may reveal themselves to have different motivations

from others; however, they act with others in spite of the difference, and for Burke this collective action as dialectic is the social equivalent of the literary trope of irony. The trope of dialectic explains how in the case of organizations for boys, their character-building activities exist alongside temptations; attention to family structure exists alongside urban development and a perceived dissolution of structure and values that accompanies it; the promise of the marketplace exists alongside the dying dream of individual wealth; and national progress exists alongside national violence and perceived weakness. The agents in conversations about boys include progressives and imperialists, advocates for nonviolence and militarists, feminists and advocates of conventional gender norms, and educators and defense spenders. These seemingly contradictory positions within the same organization arise from ambiguities in an organization's terms of identification, a condition I elaborate on a bit later.

Other scholars have extended Burke's model to account more fully for the effects of identification on large groups of people who imagine themselves to have a common purpose and common in-born characteristics, such as those who consider themselves to be a version of ideal American men. Rhetorician Maurice Charland theorizes that such identification is rhetorical, arguing that rather than members constituting a nation, in fact nationalist language constitutes members through rhetoric that invokes them as a "people" through a series of "narrative ideological effects" (134). He examines this process in proclamations made by Quebec's movement for political sovereignty. Building on this idea that political subjectivity is built through a process of identification, I argue that the process of constituting membership through rhetorical identification takes place not just during grand historical or political moments such as the drafting of a constitution; it often happens over the course of more banal moments that are repeated in the form of private and public rituals and habits. Through these rituals and habits, citizens learn of themselves as national subjects by reading documents in institutions such as schools and churches and by voluntary membership in organizations that provide language that grooms individuals in particular directions from an early age. Michael Billig refers to

the national ideology that emerges from such daily discourse as “banal nationalism.” For Billig the “beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices” that are reproduced in mundane, everyday actions are the most persuasive elements of nationalism, more persuasive than singular rhetorical responses to national events (6). He argues that “the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” (8). While organizations for boys have engaged in conscious and passionate flag waving in public presentations, their more common rituals have become mundane elements of American childhood and family life that have created national subjectivity for boys for at least a century and a half.

My analysis is an attempt to break down the processes by which some of those organizations for boys have enacted identification through the language of rituals, statements, and creeds, rhetorical moves that together form both exceptional and banal instances of masculine national identification. In this process, we see examples of how identification is troubled by economy, gender, race, and sexuality.

When we understand the way in which some of these organizations for boys have operated rhetorically throughout the history of masculinity in the United States, we can better understand how we arrive at our rhetorical practices today and why they are of concern to academic rhetoricians. For example, we can see how a book like 2012 Republican presidential hopeful Rick Perry’s *On My Honor: Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts Are Worth Fighting For* is not just a story of a shaping influence in the political candidate’s life, but an opening for his assertion of his character as affirmation of his Americanness, and that it sends a clear message that Perry identifies—and offers an identity for other males—as a hegemonic, unambiguously masculine male in the face of a confusing economic and political climate.

And those of us who teach rhetoric and composition can use this history to inform our classroom practices. Because rhetorics of emergent masculinity invoke all of the students we teach, both

male and female, it is a particularly rich subject for study. It also creates a particularly useful site of analysis through which students can begin to understand the role of rhetoric in forming subjectivity and identity. To push the possibilities further, the rhetorics of emergent masculinity can be an inroad to an inquiry into civic engagement in the United States. If students understand how they are constructed through narratives at the nexus of gender, race, class, and sexuality, they can begin to question assumed identities and reconceive their own agency within US democracy.

#### NATIONALISM AND RHETORIC

As masculinity is configured through language in the United States, it is typically tied to a sense of belonging to an American national community. Nationalism is a structured practice that, in concert with masculinity, “admits certain possibilities and limits others,” to once again refer to Connell’s phrase, and therefore is an important constraint for rhetoricians to attend to in considering how masculinities proliferate through language in American organizations for boys. In recent years, rhetoricians have begun to reexamine the ways that nationalism manifests as possibilities and limitations. Commenting on Burke’s description of the nation as a scene that creates identity among citizens, Gregory Clark notes that it “explains the covert as well as overt rhetorical ways in which individuals are prompted to recreate themselves in the image of a collective identity” (4). Burke himself saw the United States as a community put into practice by people who identify as citizens and then abide by the constraints on the possibilities for action among its members. Searching for markers of their personal meaning and value, Burke explained, citizens find scenes that “place a person in his own eyes, as he surrounds himself with a scene which, he is assured, attests to his moral quality. For he can feel that he participates in the quality that the scene itself is thought to possess” (qtd. in Clark 3).

Examining the nation as a rhetorically constructed space helps us to understand the idea of a nation as an “imagined political community,” as Benedict Anderson has influentially defined it (6). Anderson, whose definition has been a starting point for many subsequent studies of nationalism, describes a nation as a community

that we imagine as “both inherently limited and sovereign” (5–6). His definition contributes to a larger conversation about nationalism that attributes the phenomenon to causes ranging from an intangible sense of common spirit, as Renan argued in 1882, to a shared culture, as Gellner argued in 1983, to an imagined history and ethnic identity, as Balibar asserted in his 1991 postcolonial critique.

The effort in the United States to place meaning on the developing male is an influential effort to set up terms by which everyone belongs in the nation. Anthony Smith argues that nations must create myths that tie a nation to a geographic location (“Origins of Nations”). We see this connection forged in myths of developing youth, such as that represented by the Boy Scouts of America, that tie boys and young men to a mythologized landscape or an imagined cityscape. Further, the developing male often functions as a metonymy for the progress of a national people, often imagined in crisis. The male is often imagined to be in a state of identity crisis that reflects actual conflicts on a national scene that threaten to destabilize the myth of American exceptionalism that leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt draw on. When the national crisis itself functions as the scene, the man-as-agent is thrown into crisis as well. We see this scene-agent ratio play out in Guy Trebay’s *New York Times* article described at the beginning of this chapter. But in response, the developing male is constituted as in a precarious position as an agent, and his identity enables a response to the crisis, through which his masculinity becomes an agency that will ensure the nation remains as great as it historically has been. The ideal national scene is thus reaffirmed by the developing male as an agent, an agent whose actions Americans hope will confirm American exceptionalism. As agents, developing males present both danger and possibility rhetorically as they are imagined to emerge from dependency into a state of legal and economic power from which they can take independent action and engage in the civic sphere.

In fact, the rhetoric of male youth organizations enacts particular constructions of civic engagement for the emergent man. These constructions typically consolidate visions of capitalism and

democracy so that the man's democratic engagement is also defined by his participation in the capitalist market economy. We see this blending of democracy with capitalism<sup>2</sup> in the three sites of analysis here. They provide a strong statement about the relationship between constitutive rhetoric and democratic deliberation because they demonstrate that while boys' subjectivity as citizens is being constructed and therefore enabling civic engagement, it is also being limited to the vision that each organization presents. These constructions would demand counternarratives in order to present new possibilities for civic engagement among young males.

And we see possible counternarratives in the ambiguity that arises from the identification process these organizations initiate. Burke argues in *A Grammar of Motives* that ambiguity arises inevitably from identification because the process of identifying is inherently a process of disidentification or division. Here, Burke's rhetorical frame augments and helps explain Smith's ("Origins") and Anderson's conceptions of nationalism as a process of defining an "us" against a "them"—boundaries that do not always align neatly with agents' identities and motives.

This ambiguity ties this project to Omar Swartz's vision of rhetoric as possibility rather than critique, and this approach requires us to understand the complexity of rhetorical identification. Counternarratives are not only possible but also inherent in rhetorical identification, and they are the key to agency. As Burke himself notes in *A Grammar of Motives*, "It is in the areas of ambiguity that transformation takes place" (ix). Yet, while the concept of rhetoric as possibility offers rhetors/subjects agency and space for transformation, Burke does not describe a broadly useful path for the transformation that he locates in ambiguity. Krista Ratcliffe, while noting that discursive ambiguity creates space for a person's agency, rightly warns of the weakness of Burke's take on this transformation, explaining that "Burke's identification demands that differences be bridged. The danger of such a move is that differences and their possibilities, when bridged, may be displaced and mystified" (53). The question of how useful ambiguity might be surfaces in each of the organizations I address in this book. For example, in

the incipient Boy Scouts of America, there was ambiguity about the role of militarism in the organization's practices. In promoting civic engagement, founders asked one another, should it teach boys to use weapons, or should it teach them that war is wrong? This ambiguity led to disagreement among them that could have opened up new possibilities for identification as well as *disidentification*—a term Diana Fuss applies to “disavowed” identification (6)—with US citizenship, even transforming the organization’s mission into a peace-promoting one, and ultimately contributing to members’ civic engagement as antiwar rhetors. The issue, however, remained ambiguous and has been overshadowed historically by the other appeals to citizenship identity the organization offers. As there was no substantial challenge nationally to the organization’s construction of the American boy as someone in the process of transforming into a citizen soldier, disidentification did not create transformation. The difference in the founders’ conception of the BSA boy was marginalized as an issue, justifying Ratcliffe’s warning about the dangers of bridging differences. However, this history does not preclude the possibilities for future transformation.

In shaping the way we imagine the emergent American male and his possibilities for the future, language often directs us toward the past, and this past shapes the scene of American exceptionalism through which citizens identify. The role of the past is central in the rhetorical moves that construct national identity; in fact, Smith argues that our central question should be what role the past plays in creating the present (“Gastronomy” 18). He describes how this works in general terms, focusing on the rhetorical constraints that are enacted:

[N]ationalists have a vital role to play in the construction of nations, not as culinary artists or social engineers, but as political archaeologists rediscovering and reinterpreting the communal past in order to regenerate the community. Their task is indeed selective—they forget as well as remember the past—but to succeed in their task they must meet certain criteria. Their interpretations must be consonant not only with the ideological demands of nationalism, but also with

the scientific evidence, popular resonance and patterning of particular ethnohistories. (“Gastronomy” 19)

As members of a young country that emerged from a colonial project, people in the United States who identify through nationalism have made use of myths about colonial Europe and the Native Americans whom Europeans colonized. As nationalists, leaders of organizations for boys have shaped these myths around prevailing American scientific and popular conceptions of education, psychology, and economics, among other social narratives. The US Army, for example, places its myth of the emerging soldier in the context of economic mobility.

#### MASCULINITY AS A HISTORICAL, RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION IN THE UNITED STATES

Masculinity has taken many forms, sometimes contradictory, and served as a focus of identification for numerous communities that make up a larger national community. In this book, I focus on rhetorical practices of communities that identify with what Connell calls *hegemonic masculinity* (37). Connell’s term refers to the strategy of “gender practice” that appears to ensure that men have authority over women (77). The term “name[s] not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships” (81). These configurations can take many forms, including nonlinguistic performance such as dress and language. Because such configurations respond to specific contexts, I situate the rhetorical performances of masculinity in this book within the changing history of economic and social relationships where they have occurred. Connell conceives of masculinity as a project realized through practice over time (72) rather than as a static condition. The hegemony of any form of masculinity exists because it is continually remade through rhetorical acts, with the project of the developing male a key part of this remaking. Typically in the United States, hegemonic masculinity names a practice of manhood among white, straight males who claim authority in the most powerful positions, as well as those who attempt to share in that authority.<sup>3</sup>

As a hegemonic discourse of manhood has evolved during the history of the United States, so have the specific rhetorical practices that define the gendered roles of citizens. From the early nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century, the white, male middle class in the United States predominantly defined itself through the gender ideal of manly gentility and respectability. The qualities of manliness were forwarded in popular discourse as characteristics that would build fortunes for aspiring middle-class individuals. As Gail Bederman has described, during most of the nineteenth century, *manliness*, defined as “high-minded self-restraint,” was culturally accepted as a dependable way for middle-class men to build wealth (12). This self-restraint was exemplified in men like Andrew Carnegie who attained wealth through what was popularly framed as hard work and self-control. However, Bederman points out that by the 1890s, middle-class manly identity began to stumble because of the changing economy:

Middle-class manliness had been created in the context of a small-scale, competitive capitalism which had all but disappeared by 1910. Between 1870 and 1910, the proportion of men who were self-employed dropped from 67 percent to 37 percent. . . . Moreover, between 1873 and 1896, a recurring round of severe economic depressions resulted in tens of thousands of bankruptcies and drove home the reality that even a successful, self-denying small businessman might lose everything, unexpectedly and through no fault of his own. (12)

As the middle class saw the decreasing potential for individuals to make fortunes, the discourse of manly restraint lost potency. Moreover, the stage of political and economic power for middle-class men at the turn of the century seemed less solid generally as working-class men threatened to organize and the women’s suffrage movement gained steam. White middle-class culture responded with collective anxiety, and as a result the discourse of “masculinity” became a prominent set of arguments for the hegemony of white men. The Boy Scouts of America, the subject of Chapter 2, formed in the first decade of the twentieth century, as this discourse arose.

At the same time that a lifestyle of self-denial became economically and socially unprofitable, it also contradicted the growing cultural identification with leisure that increasingly influenced middle-class men, who expected less from their careers and more from their social lives (Bederman 13). This cultural shift from a discourse of manly restraint to a discourse of masculine leisure and unrestraint was visible in the growing number of recreational and extracurricular organizations for men and boys.

The collective discourse of masculinity that manifested in science, medicine, education, and politics by the turn of the century stressed the physical male body and called on white men to express what was understood as the latent long-forgotten primitive savage in themselves, embracing qualities that, according to this framework, African Americans and others defined as nonwhite (for example, from common immigrant groups) expressed freely as part of their nature. According to this new discourse of American masculinity, white men, who had “naturally” evolved past the savage stage to become civilized, had the evolutionary capacity to control their animal instincts; however, those instincts were latent strengths to be tapped into for power when needed. Literary, gender, and rhetoric scholars have demonstrated some of the practices that make up this discourse (see Bederman; Nelson; Enloe; Rotundo; Mountford). Earlier discourses of manhood throughout the nineteenth century had acknowledged a passionate side to manhood that included lust, greed, and physical assertiveness but represented such qualities as evils to be suppressed (Rotundo 227). At the turn of the twentieth century, however, these qualities were explained as valuable in those who would represent the nation.

While the middle-class culture of white manhood was shifting in reaction to the US economy, science and medicine at the turn of the century in the United States and Europe offered a variety of explanations for masculinity. Over the thirty-year course of his writings, Freud provided a psychoanalytical theory of masculinity, arguing that it was a complex construction with pre-Oedipal roots in the male psyche (Connell 8–10). While positing masculinity as a social construction, Freud also cemented the idea in medical

discourse that by adulthood, masculinity is a fixed component of the male makeup.

As Freud theorized about the male mind, others provided evidence for popular theories of the male body. When manly restraint became an ineffectual discursive position, medicine offered discourses of the body to explain why this was so. The concept of “neurasthenia,” dubbed “Americanitis” by the Rexall drug company (which offered an elixir for the condition), grew from neurologist George Miller Beard’s argument in his 1881 book *American Nervousness*. Beard offered that term for a condition he described as “a lack of nerve force,” which he also argued was a condition of civilization. In conceiving of this neurological condition, Beard pitted the intellect against the physical body, arguing that the white, middle-class male, under the work conditions of modern capitalism, had overdeveloped his intellect while his underdeveloped physical body had weakened and become effeminate. The concept of neurasthenia grew from and supported a discourse that positioned white people as more civilized and evolved than people of color. Neurasthenia was a white condition, according to Beard—something that white people experienced because they were the driving force of the capitalist development. Freud contributed to the writings on neurasthenia, focusing on a specific type that he attributed to sexual restraint and abstinence. While Freud and Beard saw the condition as a problem to be overcome, the diagnosis also implicitly confirmed the idea of white people as civilized and people of color as the inverse.

A solution to neurasthenia was offered by psychologist and pedagogy expert G. Stanley Hall, who agreed with Beard that the condition was an inevitable outcome of the way the middle class experienced modernity (Bederman). By drawing on recapitulation theory, Hall proposed that childhood growth stages incorporated the stages of civilized human evolution. The neurasthenic man had failed to cultivate his potential at an important stage in his development by failing to nurture his physical, aggressive impulses during childhood and adolescence. Hall’s answer was regimented physical education and activities that would encourage the “savage” in white

boys—activities such as sports that demanded embodied competition.

This attention to the body, the fundamental material place from which to approach an otherwise amorphous cultural sense of rapid change and loss of control, provided the site for national rhetorical action, marrying the idea of the boy body to a national cause. While physical education appeared in some schools and recreational organizations in the middle of the nineteenth century, it became nationalized and standardized during the Progressive Era, and promoting regimented, goal-oriented bodily performance became a mainstream approach to reinforcing hegemonic masculinity through the military and military-inspired youth organizations like the BSA. In language that described such bodily performance, organizations for boys called into being a key component of boys' emerging masculine identities.

#### THE RHETORIC OF MASCULINE TRANSFORMATION IN THREE EXAMPLES

In the next chapter, I argue that in its first years at the turn of the twentieth century, the Boy Scouts of America tapped into the American collective consciousness of race, gender, class, and sexuality to construct the nation as a space in which the American boy occupied a defining role for the ideal citizen. The rhetorical acts occurring in ritualized creeds, the origin story, and myths from the organization's first few years in the United States created a normalizing path to becoming a boy. Informed by a popular scientistic narrative of childhood development of the time, the BSA founders created their own animated narratives of how boys grow mentally and physically into men. As these narratives formed scripts for boys to use in play-acting and performing various organizational rituals, they worked rhetorically to constitute boys' identities as members of the nation, most obviously through terms such as *character*, *personal prowess*, *gang instinct*, and *moral courage*. The rhetorical presence of the early BSA can help us to understand the importance of rhetorical appeals more generally in crafting the tie between national consciousness and popular conceptions of boyhood and masculinity during the

Progressive Era. Organizations like the BSA created group experiences in which words worked alongside physical performances such as boys publicly wearing the uniform to constitute boys' civic and national identities in the face of significant ambiguity over the role hegemonic men were to play in the nation at the time.

In Chapter 3, "Constituting American Fraternity Members through the Rhetoric of Becoming," I argue that middle-class males who entered college after high school graduation at midcentury occupied a space that was not typically recognized narratively in American culture as "man" and yet also was recognized as beyond "boy" or "adolescent." This lack of definition left male identity ambiguous for young middle-class white males, many of whom attempted to solidify their hegemonic national position by joining fraternities. Fraternities placed a framework around incipient male adulthood and eased the transition through a narrative that fabricated a tie to ancient Greek history. This college fraternity member identity has been tied to US citizenship through an identity-building rhetoric of democratic engagement. Similar to the other organizations I explore, fraternities typically invoked the genre of origin stories and creeds to constitute identity among their male members. They also invoked racial identification, which they coded through concepts of justice and character. However, mainstream college fraternities were unique because of their emphasis on upward social mobility for their middle-class members. This emphasis on social class identity at a stage when male members were preparing for a career set up an orientation to the marketplace that rewarded upward class mobility and encouraged members to distinguish themselves along class lines. These organizations maintained their original focus on refinement of character in service of genteel manliness that began during the nineteenth century. This chapter demonstrates this process of identification that led to male subjectivity as men-to-be through the example of the Sigma Chi fraternity's handbook and organizational statements. As one of the oldest fraternities in the United States, this organization has been especially attentive to maintaining historical documents that reveal the rhetorical creation of male space by constituting fraternity members' identities.

through their sense of embodied masculinity through terms such as *brotherhood*, *commitment*, and *noble values*, along with the term *character* that is employed by all three of the organizations I address. When the contradiction between Sigma Chi's story of "noble values" and the reality of its racially exclusive membership policy is exposed, members attempt to reconcile the contradiction in their public statements.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the use of American manhood rhetoric in more recent history with the case of the US Army's short-running "Army of One" recruitment campaign aimed at recent high school graduates at the turn of the twenty-first century. The US Army represents a rhetorical space from which working-class American boys on the precipice of adulthood can identify as American men, and it represents a bridge between the civic identity formation through schooling that Ian Hunter describes and the spiritual/moral identity formation through extracurricular organizations such as the BSA.

In 2001 the army began its recruiting effort by spending an unprecedented figure to develop a slogan and message. To do so, the army hired the advertising firm Leo Burnett, the creator of McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Visa campaigns. The firm relied heavily on survey data that identified the high school population's interests, beliefs, and values. The army recruitment campaign that evolved over the next few years employed several modes of communication to broadcast its appeal to youth identity, including brochures handed out by army representatives in recruiting offices and at recruiting events held at places of business, high schools, and college campuses. Despite these efforts, the campaign lasted only five years, far briefer than the prior twenty-year "Be All That You Can Be" campaign.

By pairing text with images in recruiting documents, the army attempted to constitute a primarily male youth identity through the Soldier's Creed and the army uniform. These images and texts reveal an underlying narrative appeal to personal transformation, from what it portrayed as a directionless boy in search of an identity to a directed, self-possessed, and productive man in the army. The campaign points to the range of ways in which constitutive

rhetorics of the American boy have been used to build collective and individual national masculine identity. In this case, the army's attempt to create a transitional identity of "becoming" based on a perception of young males' values was attended by unreconciled ambiguity between the national boy and the national man in the army's campaign, as well as by the civic/moral divide, both of which the army attempted to bridge with visual images of a soldier who encompasses both elements of male development. This is perhaps the most obvious example among the three examples of an organization's attempt to create national masculinity identification among males. Unique among the organizations I investigate here, the army targeted males of color along with white males.

In Chapter 5, I outline a possible pedagogical approach and course organization that could result from the ideas discussed in this monograph. Based on my own teaching practices over several years incorporating sites of analysis local to my undergraduate and graduate students, I suggest an approach to exploring emergent masculine identity with students at a range of levels. Finally, I connect the case analyses of organizations to lingering contemporary questions about the role of rhetoric in constructing American males as masculine American men, and I explore possibilities for those questions to inform our composition and rhetoric pedagogy. As manhood progresses in the face of the evolving gender politics and capitalism of the early twenty-first century, I suggest that bringing sites of collective masculine, national identity into rhetoric and writing classrooms can help students examine the terms through which we construct civic engagement and personal identity, terms that tend to obscure how power is exchanged. Issues of national identity and gender affect young hegemonically identified males, but also the spectrum of gendered students who do not fit the performance scripts that these organizations put forth.

## RHETORIC / MASCULINITY STUDIES

*From Boys to Men* offers an accessible, engaging, richly detailed rhetorical history that will be of use to any student or teacher of rhetoric interested in US history, national identity, or gender construction. Its cogent exploration of how organizations for boys promoted idealized, racialized, and class-based masculine development amidst the pressures of national development brings essential depth to ongoing scholarly conversations in rhetorical studies.

—Christa J. Olson, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Jones's reading of Kenneth Burke's rhetoric of identification provides teachers with a powerful method of rhetorical criticism that exposes the motives that shape the shared experience of many American boys. In the process, she shows us all how to recognize and judge for ourselves the influence of the institutions that would organize our social lives.

—Gregory Clark, Brigham Young University

Institutional, organized expressions of male coming-of-age encourage Americans to believe that emergent masculinity is an enduring natural phenomenon and an essential component of American identity, and that the outcomes of the transformation process from boy to man have important consequences for the United States as a nation. Leigh Ann Jones explores performances of developing young male identity in case studies from twentieth- and twenty-first-century federal and civic organizations that recruit boys and young men using appeals to American national identity, often coding these appeals as character building.

Examining documents from the Boy Scouts of America during the Progressive Era, the Sigma Chi college fraternity in the 1960s, and the US Army's "Army of One" recruiting campaign in the early 2000s, Jones explicates rhetorical strategies that position the young male figure as a source of enduring national identification and as a citizen who is the product of a distinct trajectory of development and transformation. These strategies emerge from an intense interest among community leaders in the psychology of boys and are characterized by language that directs and shapes boys' consciousness of themselves as males, tying that consciousness to an American identity. Applying Kenneth Burke's concept of rhetoric as identification, particularly his understanding of constitutive rhetoric, Jones outlines a framework for understanding how such organizations for boys have endured, along with their myths about masculinity, in spite of the ways in which these stories are troubled by economics, gender, race, and sexuality.

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