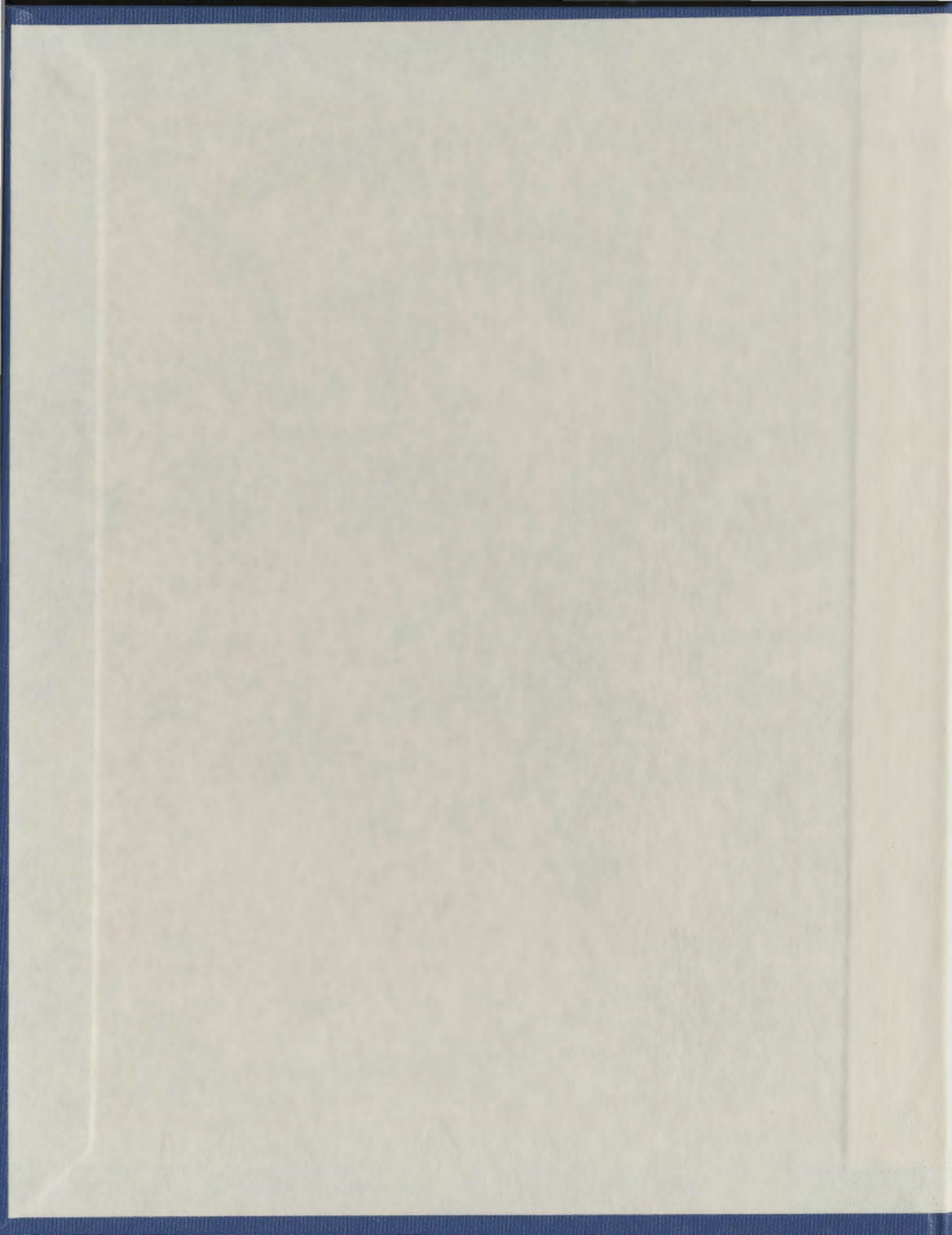


DEVELOP YOURSELF:  
ANXIETY AND PERFORMATIVE MASCULINITY  
IN ROBERT BADEN-POWELL'S  
SCOUTING FOR BOYS

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Develop Yourself: Anxiety and Performative Masculinity in Robert Baden-Powell's

*Scouting For Boys*

by

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## ABSTRACT

Robert Baden-Powell's seminal instructional tract *Scouting For Boys* has been in print continuously for one century, and is cited as one of the English-speaking world's bestselling books of the twentieth century. The youth movement that *Scouting For Boys* has spawned is now one of the largest and recognizable of such organizations in the world. Drawing on the sociological and psychoanalytical theories in Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex,'* the theory of performative identity is used to outline the myriad anxieties and contradictions inherent in this text. A performative analysis of *Scouting For Boys'* various discursive modes—as well as close readings of its key illustrations—allow for an understanding of the ways in which this text seeks to indoctrinate youth while simultaneously immunizing them from unwholesome outside influences. This thesis illustrates that *Scouting For Boys'* success depends on performativity, even while denying performativity's possibilities, and that the text itself is a crystallized example of the ways in which performance theories work.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2004 Oxford University Press re-issued Robert Baden-Powell's seminal 1908 text, *Scouting for Boys*, complete with a new introduction, notes, textual history, biographical information on Baden-Powell, and a selected bibliography, all by Elleke Boehmer. The new edition also included previously excised chapters. Even though Boehmer describes the first edition as "ramshackle" and constructed in a "pell-mell" way, *Scouting for Boys* ranks as one of the best-selling Anglophone works of the twentieth century, second only to the Bible in the English speaking world until mid-century (Boehmer, "Introduction" xi). The 2004 edition of *Scouting For Boys* (subtitled *A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*), was produced with perfect timing in advance of the centenary of the Scout movement in 2007. The Scout movement "has probably been the most extensive of any worldwide movement. Since its inception Scouting has involved close on 350 million people across the globe and today exists in nearly all of the world's countries, bar about 5 or 6" (Boehmer xi). The persistence of Scouting after a century of history and evolving social climates worldwide makes a study of its primary text timely: the movement has had a profound impact on both male and female youth all over the world.

Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* is a bible of masculinity for young British men in training, one that is ripe for analysis. The authorial voice of the text chimes in throughout, protesting on numerous occasions that the book is meant as a "suggestion" for the improvement of the British citizen, and a possible avenue for discipline and development (9). However, the phrasing of the text and the force with which Baden-

Powell pronounces these “suggestions” in fact suggest an alternate interpretation: the book is a template for British boys, or a course on the suppression of undesirable qualities which, in this case, would mean deviations from a Victorian, colonial-Christian identity. The nature of this cultural text lends itself to the theories of performativity proposed by Erving Goffman and Judith Butler, which will be used to investigate and unpack its implications. Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) introduces the idea of the conscious creation of identity in social settings, bringing theatrical metaphors into play, and how social “roles” dictate identifications. Butler, in both *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), suggests a more unconscious and therefore pervasive idea of “performance,” whereby social norms artificially shape both character and the presentation of identity at a much deeper, often more unconscious level. *Scouting For Boys*’ performative elements stem largely from the naturalization of bodies, behaviour and personality: Baden-Powell attributes the desirable, manly qualities that characterize every Scout to be essential and inherent identities, which he harnesses through his regimented training system. And yet, the fear and anxiety that lies beneath the text’s commands and instructions indicate that the subject—the Scout as paragon of masculinity and icon of British national health—and his identifications are not as firmly set and naturalized as Baden-Powell would have his charges and the British public believe.

The utter conviction of the text struggles against its anxieties and its performative nature: the movement’s success and continued survival are contingent upon the very malleability of the human subject’s identifications that *Scouting For Boys* denies. This contradiction inherent to the movement’s ideological thrust underlies Baden-Powell’s



anxiety. If characteristics, particularly class and gender traits, are hard-wired into a subject's biology, then alteration of those characteristics—or merely their expressions—would be a categorical impossibility. *Scouting For Boys*, with its staunch disavowal of artifice, exposes the extent to which many social functions and identities are actually fabricated, or at the very least are not invariably and inevitably anchored to the anatomy. In this thesis I argue that Baden-Powell inadvertently advocates a mode of performing identity, of behaving in a very particular yet apparently naturalized manner. The point of *Scouting for Boys*, if there is one, is the creation of a masculine ideal, *his* masculine ideal. If one of the key observations of performance theories is that the external world drives us to shape our bodies and personalities to better accommodate ourselves to social expectations, then the scouting movement, as it began and is outlined in Baden-Powell's text, provides a singular and fascinating environment for observing this tendency at work.

Returning continuously to the manly qualities that must be embodied by the modern British boy, Baden-Powell encourages displays of these qualities as badges of British masculinity. For example, healthy bodies are signposts of a proper citizen/man. In his condemnation of effeminate urban-dwellers Baden-Powell states that “nothing could be more ridiculous or more like a tenderfoot than a Scout with a cold in his head” (205). The commanding tone—“nothing could be more ridiculous”—equates a good Scout directly with a good *man*, which in turn is equated with an exemplary British citizen. Thus, the idea of performing an identity, as opposed to possessing it, is implicitly condoned by Baden-Powell's entire program. Following the lead of his commands virtually guarantees a good and healthy man. The text enacts a mode of active masculinity filtered through British Imperialism; the young boy becomes a colonial

training ground for both masculine and British identity. This thesis will unpack this ideological war through two performative displays: the clothing of the Boy Scout and his physical body. Both are submitted to the control of the politically charged dogma of the Boy Scout movement that swept England immediately following the original publication of Baden-Powell's text in 1908, and which is still at work—albeit in a much more relaxed, less Christian-based form—all over the world. Scouting's pervasiveness is evident in the centenary celebrations by Scouts across the globe in this century, proving that, while the organization may have been subject to ideological overhaul to accommodate global multiplicity, it is still an active force in the socialization of young people.

With the historical importance of the movement in mind, it is somewhat surprising to note that the critical history of Baden-Powell himself, the Scouting movement, and especially the founding text, is limited. While there are a number of books published on the history of Scouting, such as Mechling's *On My Honour: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth* (2001) and Macleod's *Building Character in the American Boy: the Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (1983), very few approach the man or the movement from theoretical, or textually/socially critical standpoints. A disproportionate number of the books are either general histories of scouting, biographies of Baden-Powell (detailing both his private life and his military successes), or discussions of the impact that scouting has had on the character of young people the world over. Tim Jeal's massive *Baden-Powell* (1989), Carolyn Soto's *The Boy Scouts* (1987), and Eileen Wade's *The Chief: the Life Story of Robert Baden-Powell* (1975) are three notable examples of this trend. These histories, it should be noted, create



a powerful narrative of the formation and growth of the Boy Scout movement, and detail the positive character traits learned through participation in the group, which is, in fact, what the founding text itself aims to accomplish in its weaving of practical instruction, “campfire yarns” and personal history. The self-mythologizing of Lord Baden-Powell is, to a large extent, merely replicated by these books. Further, while the topic of masculinity is an expanding subject of academic and popular study, little criticism yet exists that deals with the specific ways in which masculinity is constructed in *Scouting For Boys*. Many of the surveys of masculinity and culture refer to Baden-Powell and Scouting in passing (Beynon’s *Masculinities and Culture* (2002) and Connell’s *Masculinities* (2005) are two examples), and the text or movement are often cited as part of a larger discussion of either British imperialism or youth groups and their roles in the formation of Victorian and modern notions of the masculine. All discussions of *Scouting For Boys*, in this context, approach the book not only briefly, but merely as an example, or symptom, of the various ideologies examined within masculinity studies—never as a central text for criticism and analysis.

Scholarly articles on Baden-Powell and the Scouting text/movement have a similar lacuna. Almost all academic articles, similar to the book-length treatments, concentrate on history and moral impacts, with several focussing on either the post-colonial implications of the movement, or the influence of Baden-Powell on early 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction, or even the influence of adventure fiction on Baden-Powell himself. There is little commentary made on either the impact of the scouting text on the formation of youth identity or on the techniques of indoctrination that Baden-Powell advocates in his movement through *Scouting For Boys*. This thesis will not only engage

the existing scholarship on Baden-Powell, masculinity and performativity, but will also offer a more specific analysis of how the text of *Scouting For Boys* offers a suffocatingly conformist interpretation of anxiety-ridden Victorian masculinity.

Approaching a topic from the theoretical/critical stance of masculinity studies is fraught with complications. One of the primary reasons for this complication, and for the scattered, unfocused nature of the umbrella term “masculinity” is that it encompasses such a broad and contested number of points of view on the subject matter.<sup>1</sup> There is little unity to bind theories of masculinity: no common goal, rallying call, or philosophical stance. In fact, the ‘corpus’—if this term can even be applied to such a loose, divergent group of texts and studies—of masculinity studies incorporates work from a wide spectrum of disciplines, ranging from biology, chemistry, history, religious studies and anthropology, to literature, art history, queer theory, linguistics, feminism, and psychology. Despite the apparent lack of agreement among the varied disciplinary approaches, John Beynon, in *Masculinities and Culture* (2002), offers one way of categorizing the various approaches to studying masculinity, suggesting that there are five broad paths that masculinity studies generally follow. Beynon proposes that masculinity is generally analysed from one of the following perspectives: biological, social, psychoanalytical, discursive, or feminist, and that these groups tend to absorb the philosophies of the varying disciplines (55). The biological stance approaches masculinity as connected to the body and its inherent chemical processes; the social group covers analyses of masculinity as connected to modes of child-rearing and the

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<sup>1</sup> The contradictory, fractured and perpetually evolving definition of masculinity appropriately mirrors the stance of this thesis’ analysis of performance, which assumes an innately fluid, contradictory subject.



influence of socialization norms; psychoanalytical approaches cover a number of theories regarding subjectivity and psychology, particularly the emotional and subconscious facets of masculinity; the discursive approach groups together the methods of studying the manners in which language and power interact to define masculinity; and finally, the feminist approach, which admittedly overlaps somewhat with the other categories, analyzes masculinity in terms of patriarchal structures, and the subjection of both males and females to the presumably oppressive mechanisms that operate within these structures. Beynon's categories offer a great deal of choice for critically studying the history of masculinities.

The approach utilized in this thesis is the critical theory of performativity because it incorporates multiple disciplinary structures and modes. The theoretical framework of this paper assumes an intimate relationship between psychoanalysis, sociology, and history, and combines readings of the methods of performance outlined by both Erving Goffman and Judith Butler. Arguments that masculinity is grounded in biology—such as the overarching assumptions manifested in Baden-Powell's text—are not extinguished by these intersecting theories but are supplemented by the performative. The analytical framework is in fact meant to highlight the ways in which biological and social determinism present in Baden-Powell's text—which is rife with suggestion toward such determinisms—can be understood as modes of performance. Interpreting *Scouting For Boys* as a performative text exposes the anxieties and contradictions underlying Baden-Powell's ideological system. This thesis will illustrate that *Scouting For Boys* actually uses the adaptability and mutability of an individual's or group's identity so as to present British masculinity as essential and deterministic.

Chapter One of this thesis will survey the critical work already written on Baden-Powell and *Scouting For Boys*, noting the interesting gaps that appear in this scholarship. Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework used for the analysis of two specific elements in *Scouting For Boys*. Chapter Three offers a reading of the Scout's uniform as forms of drag and indoctrination. Chapter Four investigates the pivotal and problematic role of the physical body in Baden-Powell's program of training for British youth. This thesis underlines the anxiety present in *Scouting For Boys* that serves to undercut the stated mission of the text, and additionally, showcases the text's enactment of performance theories, even if such enactment is entirely unwitting.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Tracking the Scout: Critical Contexts

Scouting-related criticism is composed of texts in several types of media, and of several levels of quality. The bulk of this material is composed of internet websites and e-texts, which emphasize the global reach of Baden-Powell's Scout Movement. There are also several ambitious biographies that focus on the historical narrative of Baden-Powell's life and the creation of the Boy Scouts. The remainder of the texts, which are the most critical and limited in number, are academic studies that examine—often through the lens of cultural studies—topics such as colonial masculinity, race and empire, and the sociological impact of Scouting. Of these academic texts the two most critical studies are Michael Rosenthal's *The Character Factory* (1986) and Kathryn Kent's *Making Girls Into Women* (2003). Both are precise investigations of subject-formation in institutionalized settings.

The virtual world is full of commentary on Robert Baden-Powell and the Scouting movement. Since scouting is an integral component of the socialization of many youths not only in Britain but also in North America (and many other British colonies and former colonies), information on the subject is unsurprisingly readily available. It is also unsurprising, then, that this material varies drastically in quality and purpose. Web searches yield an impressive number of relevant pages, with over 10 million pages of commentary and information available: approximately 500,000 of which include news pieces featured online since 2000. As initially impressive as such numbers are, they are



also somewhat deceptive, since such websites are generally not what might be considered academic and rigorously researched pieces. In fact, much internet data consists of opinion pieces, anecdotes, memoirs and official narratives published by the various Scouting associations. On the official end of this spectrum are treasure troves such as "Scout Base," a compendium of historical facts, badge requirements, resources and support for leaders—including an archive of information for exploring "faiths and beliefs" within a multi-denominational troupe—and an archive of official publications.<sup>2</sup> On the unofficial end of this spectrum are "Scout Image," a database that is subtitled simply "ClipArt about Scouting," the collection of personal and inspirational narratives about the impact of the movement called "The Scouting Way," an editorial on the recent Scouting badge developed in conjunction with America's Motion Picture Association that encourages "respect for copyrights."<sup>3</sup> Such sites are very important for gaining an understanding of the global reach of the Boy and Girl Scouts, but there is little to no critical distance or peer review at work, which is key in the decision of substantial inclusion in this thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> "Scout Base": <http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/>

"Scout Image": <http://student.dei.uc.pt/~alex/scoutimage/>

"The Scouting Way": <http://www.scoutingway.com/>

<sup>3</sup> "MPAA Targets Boy Scouts With Anti-Piracy Campaign": <http://www.afterdawn.com/news/archive/8048.cfm>



### Lord Baden-Powell: The Great Man Scout

In addition to the wealth of online material available, there are a number of biographical studies of Baden-Powell and the origins of the Scouting movement which supplement the proliferation of "official" publications of the myriad international Scouting associations. These sources predictably present mostly similar details about Baden-Powell. He was born in February 1857 in London, and was educated at the Charterhouse boarding school. It was during his school years that the penchant for both outdoor activity and theatre emerged and was developed; inclinations that are at work in *Scouting For Boys*. During his military service, his scouting skills did not go unnoticed, and he gained national recognition for defending the town of Mafeking, South Africa against siege—partially due to his creation of a rag tag team of Scouts to aid the soldiers. The first Baden-Powell-led Scout troupe came together in 1906, and the serial version of *Scouting For Boys*, an international bestseller, was published in 1908. He married Olave Soames, with whom he had 3 children in October 1912, and the entire family's lives would be devoted to the growing movement. Baden-Powell died in Kenya on January 8, 1941.

Notable among Baden-Powell biographies are Harold Begbie's *The Story of Baden-Powell: the Wolf That Never Sleeps* (2004), *Baden-Powell: the Man Who Lived Twice* (1975) by Mary Drewery, William Hillcourt's *Baden-Powell: the Two Lives of a Hero* (1992) and Tim Jeal's comprehensive and definitive *Baden-Powell* (1989). While these biographies detail the formation and operation of the Boy Scouts during Baden-Powell's lifetime, they differ from other sources in that they construct an idea—or in some cases, an ideal—of Baden-Powell the man. Begbie's work is interesting in that it

was published before the official handbook, *Scouting For Boys*, when Baden-Powell was still considered more of a military hero than an enthusiast of boy culture and contemporary educational techniques. Hillcourt's work is similarly interesting in that it was issued through official Scouting associations, and was in fact written with the co-operation of Baden-Powell's wife, Olave, and has a tendency towards hagiography, since both the association and Baden-Powell's family had hands in moulding the final product. The word "Hero" in Hilcourt's title is an obvious indication of the flattering nature of his portrayal. Jeal's simply-titled *Baden-Powell* psychologizes the man by using primary sources from his life (interviews, journal entries and testimony), alongside officially-sanctioned narrative rhetoric. This work manages to address issues of controversy, such as Baden-Powell's sexuality and political sympathies, with a rigor that suggests thorough research, while simultaneously presenting a narrative neither as laudatory hero-worship, nor as trashy, judgmental sensationalism. That these biographies compose a large portion of the published Scouting canon underscores the notion that outside of the official texts and ideologies of Scouting, there is a desire to narrate and canonize the man and the life, as well as his ideas, and that Baden-Powell's life is just as key an educational tool as the laws of Scouting. However, these biographies, as I have suggested, are largely uncritical of both Baden-Powell's image and his dogma.

Key to this thesis is a particular deficit of academic and critical material on Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts, and especially the bible of the movement, *Scouting For Boys*. Of the scant amount of professionally-written and/or peer-reviewed material on the Scouting movement, very little is critical, likely due to the fact that most is either biographical or official publications of the Scouts. What remains, outside of the critical



works, are handbooks, guides to wilderness survival, and statistics issued or commissioned by the Scouting Associations. Treatises on youth culture in the twentieth century, and histories of educational and character-building movements such as Jon Savage's "Peter Pan and the Boy Scouts" from *Teenage: the Creation of Youth Culture* (2007) and David Macleod's 1983 study *Building Character in the American Boy: the Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners 1870-1920* constitute the remainder of relevant academic works on the Scouting movement. Although such material, again, is valuable for delineating the narrative of the formation and rise of the movement, it mostly lacks a critical stance beyond the assertion that Baden-Powell did or did not perform one act or another in the manner that has been recorded and lauded historically, as some of the biographical works tend to do.

The remaining critical material tends to focus on matters of race and colonization, and the relation of the Boy Scouts to imperial oppression and modernization, such as Robert MacDonald's *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918* (1995) and Timothy Parsons' *Race, Resistance, and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* (2004), both probing studies of the sociocultural and political impacts of Baden-Powell's militarized philosophies of education and socialization. The attempt to use the institution of Scouting as a tool of subject formation and marked division among classes and genders—despite the pseudo-egalitarian credo of Baden-Powell—is apparent in most of these academic studies in one form or another. For example, MacDonald's study presents Baden-Powell's assertion that, in the age of decadence and emerging modern urban states, the moral and physical decline of Britain could be reversed not only by applying a moral balm to native Britons, but by structuring

the development of allegedly underdeveloped colonies to reflect a developing hyper-awareness of the usefulness of these contemporary educational techniques of indoctrination. The colonies, MacDonald states, were generally perceived as a new frontier—a new dawn for the Empire—another opportunity to bring up the citizens of England in the correct manner. Baden-Powell stressed the therapeutic and masculinizing effects of the natural world, and what could be more natural than a new frontier that hasn't been ravaged by decadent modern urbanity? The imperial project of the frontier was, in MacDonald's terms, viewed as a "return to paradise" (22). A similar line of reasoning is presented in C.J Wan-Ling Wee's *Culture, Empire, and the Question of Being Modern* (2003), which asserts that the colonial frontier served as a realm wherein one could physically enact the mode of utilitarian masculinity proffered by Baden-Powell. The frontier offered an escape from the anxiety of urban, decadent gender enactments by returning to a sort of primitive state, wherein concrete action was valued over thought and abstraction.

Related to these ideas, Timothy Parsons' work sets up an interesting argument for the case of Scouting as a site of resistance in Colonial Africa; *Race, Resistance, and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* is a thorough study of historical documents and personal interviews and argues that although the emergence and growth of the Scouting movement among both white colonists and Africans under imperial rule was a veiled extension of colonial oppression, the rights and civil recognition afforded to Boy Scouts in Africa created opportunities for "subversion and reinterpretation" of Scout dogma (12). While racial and cultural oppression under colonial law is not directly related to issues of performance and gendered subjectivity, the connection between these two



ideas exists, and underscores the number of broader issues and struggles that the Scouting laws, texts and practices provoke. Parsons argues that "middle figures navigated the difficult terrain between cooperation and resistance to achieve mobility within the confines of colonial society"<sup>4</sup> (12). Parsons' ideas of oppression and sites of resistance will emerge as key issues in the theoretical construct of this thesis in later chapters.

Two key critical/theoretical works that more directly address the issues of gendered subject formation in both the Scouting movement and *Scouting for Boys* are Michael Rosenthal's *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (1986), and Kathryn R. Kent's *Making Girls Into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity* (2002). These two texts form the most immediate contexts against which this thesis is written, and provide a critical backdrop that complements the investigation of performance and masculinity that I argue is worked through in Baden-Powell's book. Michael Rosenthal's *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* is an impressive work that critically undoes the carefully-constructed ideological façade of purely selfless social concern proposed within the various texts of induction that are collected for the most part in the 1908 edition of *Scouting For Boys*. The study is book-length, and neatly broken down into discrete and subject-oriented chapters, covering a broad spectrum of contemporary social and historical contexts and anxieties. The result of this expansive coverage is that Rosenthal does not engage directly with masculinity at any length—or with performativity at all—but skillfully dissects not only the text of the Scouting movement,

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<sup>4</sup> Parsons' "middle figures" are those colonial subjects who transgress the boundary between resistant subject and compliant convert; that is, an obedient scout.

but also the historical anecdotes and contexts from which the works and philosophies of Baden-Powell grow. This book is simultaneously one of the most comprehensive histories of Scouting and its origins, as well as the most comprehensive piece of criticism on Scouting. Rosenthal combines textual criticism of *Scouting For Boys* with historical/social contexts and biographical criticism in a methodical and structured manner. Although gendered subject-formation is largely absent from the work, Rosenthal's ideological analysis does engage with, as the very title of the work suggests, character-formation from a sociological angle, allowing the exhaustive number of approaches utilized by Baden-Powell to be outlined and catalogued.

In his sociological and historical analysis, Rosenthal is different from the present analysis, which has a much more specific focus. Where this thesis starts with one highly focused point—performative masculinity—and moves outward, *The Character Factory* performs the opposite maneuver, combing letters, reports, and dozens of Baden-Powell's official Scouting publications to cull telling bits of information about the Scouts' ideologies regarding race, class, religion, gender, education and sport. A key motif in Rosenthal is Baden-Powell's obsessive "concern for the general mental, moral, and physical condition of the British people" (Rosenthal 131), since these conditions were directly linked in Baden-Powell's writings to the state of Britain and its vast colonial empire. The titles of the book's chapters are an indication of this direction in Rosenthal's investigation: "The Specter of Deterioration," "Fortifying the Wall of the Empire," or "Scouts, White Men and Christians." By presenting excerpts from a number of Baden-Powell's guides and pamphlets—including *Scouting For Boys*—Rosenthal illustrates that the anxieties surrounding class and racial purity, especially given the global vastness of



the British Empire, fed the compulsion to guide young people into a certain militarized social path. These anxieties and states of moral panic are where analyses of Scouting and its various induction manuals yield the most rewarding critical material. Rosenthal states that "the worldwide brotherhood of Scouting, as envisioned by Baden-Powell was far more problematic than it appeared, as interesting for those it sought to include as for those it felt comfortable keeping out" (278). Rosenthal immediately recognizes the socio-cultural ramifications of the white, middle-class, militarized Christian philosophy espoused by Baden-Powell, and that its thinly-veiled conservative agenda, while not without benefits to the general public, was largely a studied and meticulously woven advertisement for mostly middle-class and Victorian values.

Rosenthal's analysis is much more than a mere narrative of history. On numerous occasions, he notes the personal investment that Baden-Powell made to the organization and its texts, specifically the primary Scout motto "Be Prepared," which is derived from Baden-Powell's own initials (Baden-Powell 37).<sup>5</sup> Rosenthal probes the personal history and anecdotes that make up much of Scouting's foundational philosophies and texts, and proceeds to question many of the events that Baden-Powell provides as prime examples of good scouting. The legendary siege at Mafeking, Baden-Powell's constantly referenced shining moment, is for example undermined by Rosenthal's scholarly detective work. He scours letters and briefings, noting that Baden-Powell's statements about Mafeking continued to be altered each time they were rewritten, and that these alterations seemed to be "retroactive justification" (35) for his hasty, possibly illegal

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<sup>5</sup> This investment is most thoroughly and interestingly examined in Tim Jeal's 1989 biography, *Baden-Powell*, whose modus operandi and critical skill is similar to Rosenthal's.



military maneuvers. These claims validate the notion that Scouting was based on at least partially fabricated narratives, and these narratives then suggest that Baden-Powell's own history is subject to alteration in its presentation, and is therefore—if indirectly—one example of the performativity that this thesis aims to elucidate.

Rosenthal quotes one of Baden-Powell's military superiors as having made the offhand remark that Baden-Powell had a "strange fancy for being besieged" (45), which is an interesting remark given that the various sieges of his military career were used to define his public persona repeatedly throughout the myriad Scouting texts and personal interviews that were published during and after his lifetime. These details suggest that Baden-Powell seems to have been aware of the image-making possibilities of these sorts of military adventures. This awareness of image, and the incorporation of personal life into one's public persona, is also highlighted by Rosenthal's discussion of Baden-Powell's marriage. He notes: "Baden-Powell's private life, to the degree that he had one, was always very much caught up in his public role[...]even his marriage to Olave Soames in 1912 took place in the public forum of Scouting" (47). Rosenthal goes on to note that the marriage was publicly discussed in many of the Scouting papers at the time, proving that Baden-Powell, even in the early twentieth century, was more knowledgeable than many in the art of public relations and image-moulding.

Because Rosenthal's work tracks the historical narratives of Baden-Powell and the Boy Scouts with a critical eye, it is constantly if indirectly engaging with the constructed and fluid nature of identity, an idea that seems to contradict what Baden-Powell himself suggests: that identity is more concrete and essential. Rosenthal argues that the Scouting movement is aware that identity is malleable through his questioning of the anecdotal

validity of *Scouting For Boys*' narratives, which basically portray Baden-Powell as a master of spin, manipulation, and redirection: all tactics used to validate a particular performance. Baden-Powell's concern with his image, as presented by Rosenthal in his biographical research, allows for an interpretation of the man as highly aware of the effects of perception and personae, paving the way for a more focused analysis in terms of gendered subject formation, as his publicity-soaked marriage ceremony illustrates. Baden-Powell was, in this case, concerned with literal performance of identity-defining rituals.

### **Creating the Scout: Performing British Manhood**

The character factory of Rosenthal's title refers not only to the rigidly-indoctrinated youths the Scout Movement attempted to manufacture mechanically under a regime of conformity, but also to the deliberate and crafty care that Baden-Powell took in constructing his own heroic, uber-masculine backstory: a backstory that would eventually influence the socialization of thousands of young men and women around the globe. The proper rearing of these youths, Rosenthal's exhaustive investigating suggests, was such a profoundly serious task because the healthy body and mind of the young man was explicitly and directly linked to the spiritual health of the nation. The British Empire would fall if intervening steps were not taken to halt a downward spiral, or "Specter of Deterioration" (Rosenthal 131). In Rosenthal's view, Scouting was both a preventative measure and a healing balm for the perceived social and political ailments affecting Britain and its colonies.



The second major critical text, and the one that is most relevant for this thesis in terms of gender performance and conformity does not engage fully with *Scouting For Boys*, or with the Boy Scouts, but it does present a number of key issues and theses. Kathryn Kent's "'Scouting For Girls': Reading and Recruitment in the Early Twentieth Century," looks to the female counterpart to both the Boy Scout movement, and the Scouting text, and specifically in its ironic, and unintentional, potential to pervert the sexuality of the girls it means to pull under the blanket of stereotyped feminine identity. The concern of *Scouting For Girls*, she suggests, is almost identical to that of *Scouting For Boys*: "Imitation itself is not the problem, it is whom and what one imitates. [...] If subjectivity is formed through imitation, then there is no 'natural' self that grounds the subject: imitations lead to other imitations." Kent's article is a chapter from her book *Making Girls Into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity*, and concentrates on a number of issues touched upon in Rosenthal's work that deal directly with character formation. In Kent's case, however, the subject under creation is female and queer. Rosenthal's book is broadly focused and can only pay short attention to the social ramifications of the gender stereotypes Baden-Powell advocated, whereas Kent's text specifically concentrates on the Girl Scouts and queer subject-formation; taken together these two critical works offer a foundational critique of Baden-Powell's character-building agenda. Kent's focus on the 1920 *Scouting For Girls* text makes clear the gendered subject-formation that runs through Baden-Powell's foundational texts. Kent highlights an excerpt from the handbook that makes explicit the movement's goals and character-building strategies: "With all our modern inventions nobody has yet invented a substitute for a good, all-round woman, in a family" (qtd. in Kent 105). The



repetition of the word “invention” makes conscious the constructed nature of any Scout identity—male or female. While Kent's work is primarily concerned with the American, female offshoot of Baden-Powell's male brigade, and thus the equation between bodies and the British nation-state is minimized<sup>6</sup>, she masterfully presents that the panic inherent in Baden-Powell's zeal is present across continents. Kent makes a profound, crucial observation when she notes that “if subjectivity, no matter how 'naturalized,' was something that could be made, then what was to prevent this process of (re)production from having 'unnatural' effects?” (111). This idea of an invented, changeable subjectivity expands on the importance of Rosenthal's terminology, the “character factory.” Further, metaphors of mass production provide a buffer against Baden-Powell's perceived pollution of pure and natural forms of identification by virtue of efficiency and quantity of product: the product in this case being natural and pure youths, whose identifications have not been perverted.

Kent elaborates on this proposal, not only by citing the sociocultural anxieties that underlie the very foundational dogma of Scouting, but by citing the act of reading—as in reading the Scouting handbooks—as a problematic action wherein identifications may be formed or broken. Identifications can either be straightened out into conformity, or perverted and therefore wasted, since Baden-Powell identifies entire groups of youths whose lifestyles, for whatever reason, do not reflect the Scout's dogma, as “wasters” (Baden-Powell 299). Kent proposes that the female (and, by extension, the male) Scouting text—the icon of Scouting's dogma, and the embodiment of a thoroughly

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<sup>6</sup> Kent focuses on the Sapphic elements of Scouting For Girls, and as such, the specifics of her article problematic with regards to Scouting For Boys. Her basic philosophy of performative identification, however, is useful for generalizing across genders.

Victorian set of social sensibilities—promotes a regime of rigid monitoring of the self and others for unnatural identifications. In doing so, Scouting indirectly opens up the possibility of many identifications to young women by virtue of highlighting their existence. The possibility of deviant identifications must exist in order for them to be stigmatized as taboo: something that does not exist cannot be stigmatized, and this is one of the philosophical/ideological problems with which Scouting as an organized activity was faced. Scouting's efforts to educate and indoctrinate could be unravelled or reversed by its very methods and ideologies.

It is important to note that the dogmatic schema of self-monitoring is described by Kent as “performative” (114) in nature, since it directs behaviour while simultaneously claiming to be a voluntary position. The Scout manual has a profoundly important place in the Scouting tradition because of its status as one of, if not *the*, main avenues of induction, one that, given the worldwide success of the Scouting movement, clearly works to meet Baden-Powell's ends (obedient, clean, patriotic and chaste young people). But this very success highlights the movement's own precarious nature as an avenue for pure and natural identifications. If one text, such as *Scouting For Girls/Boys*, can produce such effective results, then it is possible for unnatural—in the case of Kent's piece, lesbian—identifications to also form, as inversions of those intended by the Scouting dogma. This notion of inversion through reading suggests one reason for *Scouting For Boys*' forceful, propagandistic nature. Kent argues that “imitation itself is not the problem, it is whom and what one imitates...there is no natural self that grounds the subject” (113). This anxiety regarding imitation and identification is essential to my performative critique of Baden-Powell's text. Kent concentrates on the potential for



queer identifications in repressive, rigid all-female environments—appropriately citing Havelock Ellis, whose work notoriously popularized the notion of “sexual inversion” as a moral menace (Ellis 99-100)—but her insightful analysis can extend to some of the other areas in which *Scouting For Boys* presents problematic philosophies of representation and identification, such as race, religion, class, and most importantly for this thesis, gender and gender-traits. Kent's work cements its own place in the slight canon of Scouting criticism by underlining the ironic power of not only the written word but of the very philosophies upon which Scouting is founded to both induct subjects and to pervert them; an analysis that is rich with potential for further exploration. Her focus on the fragility of identity, and the openness of the young to suggestion clearly aligns her with Goffman's notion of the social theatre, with Butler's performativity and West and Zimmerman's dismantling of biological and social determinisms—all to be discussed in the next chapter. While the surfeit of anecdotal and narrative Scouting texts impress the massive global impact of the Scouts, it is Rosenthal's and Kent's books that truly struggle with—even if indirectly—the performative origins and nature of Scouting organizations.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Theoretical Framework: Psychosocial Constructions and the Fallibility of Gender

Rosenthal's and Kent's texts provide excellent touchstones for the analysis of Baden-Powell's *Scouting For Boys* as an induction tool. They both argue that the character of British youth, counter to Baden-Powell's claims, is entirely malleable, open to suggestion and fluid enough to alter with social context. While neither Rosenthal nor Kent specifically use the theory of the performativity of gender, their work does match the critical theorists used as a framework in this thesis. The theorists discussed in this chapter may be broadly characterized as sociological, cultural and literary. Interestingly, *Scouting For Boys* has a pseudo-modernist, piecemeal structure, and so incorporating more than one theory is not only apt, but in fact a structural imperative. Since Baden-Powell's text and doctrine of behaviour utilizes various modes, so too does this thesis.

The performative element in Baden-Powell's educational texts can be most lucidly investigated through the lenses of social anthropology, biology, philosophy and psychoanalysis. Erving Goffman's groundbreaking book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), in conjunction with his later essays "Gender Display" (1976) and "The Arrangement Between the Sexes," (1977) provide a socio-cultural anthropology perspective for this discussion. The philosophical and psychoanalytical contribution to the framework is drawn from Judith Butler's seminal work *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993). Interpreting Baden-Powell's ideologically-driven text as performative in nature requires that the key signifiers in *Scouting for Boys* are

refracted through these multiple disciplines, since the social contexts, as well as the bodies and uniforms of Boy (and to a lesser extent, Girl) Scouts, are complex and multifarious. Further, because *Scouting For Boys* is a cultural text that combines literary, dramatic, visual and rhetorical strategies, a more interdisciplinary approach is appropriate.

The aim of this interdisciplinary theoretical discussion is two-fold: first, to outline the broad number of perspectives that might fall under the umbrella of performance theory or performativity, and the elasticity and general efficacy of these theories beyond abstract philosophy; and second, to underscore the problematic and layered nature of a text like Baden-Powell's, especially in light of the Scouting movement's established global prevalence and popularity. Movements and texts such as Baden-Powell's, when read superficially and reverently by their constituents, can have an imperceptible duality that is, through its veneer of moral goodness, quite dangerous in that it denies plurality. This duality lies within the movement's simultaneous requirement of submission as well as exploitation of the potential of the individual to transform himself. It is specifically these subtle undercurrents that this thesis will uncover and analyze. The use of multiple and disparate theoretical stances allows an interpretive flexibility and accessibility to a text that is overdetermined with signifiers of gender—both textual and visual.

In utilizing such a framework I mean not to imply that one particular form of gender subject-formation is more or less legitimate or practical than another, but I do suggest that subjectivities and gender identifications are particularly vulnerable to being taken for granted as essential and natural, which is a particularly prevalent cultural fallacy. The combination of gender and performance theories used herein not only



emphasizes the fragility of the gendered subject, but also the blind spots and neuroses that characterize Baden-Powell's text and problematize his ideology.<sup>7</sup>

### **Erving Goffman's Social Theatre**

One idea that forms the basis of many identity theories is the theatre. The metaphor can be traced back as far as William Shakespeare and even to the works of Plato (as Judith Butler repeatedly notes in *Bodies That Matter*), but one of the first and most rigorous contemporary studies of this metaphor appeared in 1959 with sociologist Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In this study—which also forms the general theoretical foundation for two of his more focused and specific essays, “Gender Display” (1976) and “The Arrangement Between the Sexes” (1977)—Goffman presents a comparison between reality and performed drama by illustrating the theatre's operation in social venues and interactions. Goffman's initial point is that, whether on a conscious level or not, all social interaction falls under the definition of a performance since every society is subject to its own dynamic set of expectations and assumptions. Because these assumptions are a part of the social fabric, operating within them—to prevent social ostracism and streamline quotidian life—necessitates, Goffman contends, performance. *The Presentation of Self* establishes a dramatic discourse, appropriating theatrical terminology to systematically break down social interactions and their influence on the shaping and presentation of identity and identities. This work thus offers a performative lexicon, a glossary of metaphors that can be used to understand, guide,

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of this thesis, Baden-Powell's ideology centers on a colonialist, utilitarian formulation of masculinity that disavows most forms of otherness, and is concerned mainly with the practical aspects of human personalities.



and mould behaviour. In relocating his analysis of identity-formation away from the highly psychological Goffman prioritizes the interaction of the individual consciousness with the often-unacknowledged boundaries and norms that are taken for granted in Western civilization.

In any social setting, consisting of two or more individuals, no matter their relation to one another, Goffman divides expression and reaction into a number of interacting elements. There is, at the most elementary level, a "front" (Goffman 22): the set of tools utilized in expressing a particular performance, the particular modes of expression that suit a particular interaction. A front inherently encompasses a variety of theatrical concepts, including "appearances," "stages" (both front and back), "mystifications," "performance teams," "ideals," and "discrepant roles." One of the more potent and piercing aspects of Goffman's assumption is the dynamism with which he imbues the human subject. Subjectivity is lent a fluidity that contradicted much of the contemporary popular conception of identity and character. This dynamism stems from a proposed interaction and movement between internalized ideals and norms, and their tangible social expressions.

Goffman's central thesis operates on the assumption of cultural prescription, and so parallels the operation of Baden-Powell's Scouting organization, which is prescriptive by virtue of the dozens of guidelines and admonishments found within the *Scouting for Boys* handbook. The social norms and expectations that, according to Goffman and the other theorists incorporated into this theoretical framework, contour and style our expressive identities, provide a functional dialogue. This dialogue is operating at any given time in any social situation, and forms the backbone of performativity: the

reaffirmation of social roles and mores—and therefore of the necessity of performance—is contingent on this dialogical relationship between a performer and audience, the duality through which, these theorists suggest, social subject-formation comes to fruition. Herein is the lynchpin of Goffman's theory, and provides a loose structure for his elaborations on the basic thesis: if the social is understood as the interaction or co-existence of two or more individuals, and the performer is understood as each individual's actions and conscious or unconscious awareness of the cultural assumptions, then the audience is an inherently constitutional element. The audience is a necessary complement to the performative subject-formation, validating it and feeding it energy for sustenance. The interaction of the performer with the audience has a certain incantatory power, according to Goffman, because of its ability—or, more appropriately its inherent obligation—to outline and draw attention to that which in daily life we may remain numb:

While in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure. For if the individual's activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilize his activity so that it will express *during the interaction* what he wishes to convey. [...] a performance presents an ideal view of the situation. (30-35)

This passage, down to its diction of visibility and interactivity, encapsulates the dynamic nature of performance, which is unable to rest. Additionally, the tangible use of signs



and expressive devices render conscious the normally invisible beast within: the elusive and contested notion of core essence.<sup>8</sup>

Those elements of the self that are glossed over or more accurately taken for granted on a daily—even hourly—basis are made visible and tangible through the act of performance. Flesh and behaviour become screens onto which the elements of a presumed essence or nature are played out, in the manner of a reverse film or slide projector. Values and signifiers bubble to the surface and disappear continuously as needed. In this formulation of the performative, the surface of social interaction is paramount, for it is the surface that makes perceptible the nuanced attributes corresponding to the “role” that one is inhabiting at any given moment. The audience’s understanding comes not from an intrinsic and internal system of structures, but from what they are able to perceive. The notion of the audience’s perception is one of the core facets of Goffman’s performance theory. The ornaments of physicality and setting, then, become a primary concern. It is this emphasis on ornamental and perceptual signs that will be considered in a much more detailed manner later in this thesis, in particular chapter 3, which focuses on the performativity of clothing, uniforms and ornamentation.

It should be noted that Goffman’s theory is not entirely one of social constructivism and relativism. Elements of performance—for example, the idealized conceits of masculinity—may or may not be inherent in the performer. I acknowledge that social identity is a concept that is fragile and fraught with complications, affected by

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of essentialism is more complexly and eloquently explored in Diana Fuss’ excellent *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. New York: Routledge, 1989.



the myriad mitigating factors of daily life. It must be stated at this point that the question is not whether or not there is a true or essential self, or what that might be: such a question is well beyond the scope of this thesis and is more suited to detailed philosophical investigation. The question is, rather, how is the kaleidoscopic, ever-distorting and fluid notion of the self manifested socially? Goffman's work suggests that performance is less about being, and more about the displays of being. For example:

To *be* a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain to the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto [...] A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized. (75)

This realization, the acknowledgement of the role or status, depends upon the audience, the social milieu, a plurality of individuals or groups who read the tangible cues. It is the interdependence of subjects that mirror and refract meaning among one another as signifiers are piled one upon the other, ensuring that even the most superficially simple of performative acts is wrapped in layers of perceptual cues. The coherent sustaining of role that Goffman references in this passage is essential to understanding the possible discrepancy between idealized projections (such as Baden-Powell's perfect Boy Scout)

and the flawed, nebulous depths beneath this surface (such as Baden-Powell's anxiety over British identity). Goffman refers to the necessity of coherent expressive fronts to cover this flawed and fluid humanity that is often divorced from the social self. *Scouting For Boys* enacts this dynamic between the flawed and the social, thus further underscoring the suggested fragility of social subject-formation.

This fragility is tested further by concept of the "Performance Team" that Goffman discusses at length in *Presentation* (77-105). Intimate social situations present a complex enough performative function, but maintaining fronts both within and without performance teams, which Goffman defines rather predictably as "any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine" (79) is a much greater challenge. This type of group setting presents a more problematic exercise in trust, co-dependence, and stamina maintenance. The difficulty of maintaining a coherent "front" is understandably multiplied in a group setting when people are acting both as audience and performer while simultaneously maintaining and matching performances. Within the team setting, each member must maintain a hyper-awareness, both to keep the other team members in check (surveillance and self-surveillance, as Kathryn Kent has noted on page 112 of *Making Girls into Women*), and to keep from disrupting the carefully structured front. The integrity of the presented front of the team is accomplished in the same manner as the individual and through the same means: adherence to social ideals. The team performance contributes greatly to my interpretation of *Scouting for Boys*, in addition to my understanding of the motivation behind its creation, and the heightened Victorian anxiety that permeates almost every section of Baden-Powell's sprawling, disjointed text. The dogmatic nature of Scouting, in light of Goffman's observation that performance



profoundly affects audience perceptions, is sociologically shrewd—even if it still betrays a severe attachment to a skewed and prejudicial mode of masculinity<sup>9</sup>.

In a team setting, such as the Scouts, there must be a perpetual reaffirmation of the social ideals to which the performances attune themselves. Not only must a coherent expressive front be projected, but the understanding of that performance must persevere outside of the intra-group setting. More simply, the audience must be complicit in the front, since their understanding and perception of cues and signs is crucial to the success of the endeavor. The team performance must remain in line with external reality; performance is predicated on meaning, and meaning is lost altogether when the audience does not know the rules, or when they are ignorant of the ideals. The interaction between audience and performance team is rendered virtually meaningless if the entire audience knows nothing about the rules of the game, or the social expectations, the ideals. Thus, the co-dependence of the team is also mirrored in the audience, whose interpretation and perception of performance contributes to the continued cohesion of ideals and expressive fronts. The ideal must be constantly iterated and reiterated. As the signifiers refract among subjects in the social setting, it is necessary to repeat those ideals, to affirm them and reaffirm over and over, since it is through this repetition that these ideals—and therefore performances—gain and maintain their social power and authority. This reiteration, however effective it is in lending authority to the dominant idealized views, can only ever mean that the subject or subjects are approximating its core values; they circle it, spiraling slowly around, moving in, but never reaching a centre, since the ideal is only able to be approximated by virtue of the fact that it is a dynamic cultural norm and

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<sup>9</sup> In chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, I will elaborate on Baden-Powell's articulations of masculinity.



not a static, immovable rock of fact. These reiterated performances presuppose their ideals as naturally-given, and through the acts of constant reaffirmation and physical manifestation, confirm the performance as a social fact. Thus a circular and insular argument is constructed, one, it should be noted, that is difficult break from. The performer's presupposition creates the need for, and in fact feeds the performance; the reiterated performances are then interpreted incorrectly as evidence of the factual, essential nature of the ideals, instead of as symptoms of the presupposition.

In "Gender Display," Goffman observes that in the dialogue of gender performance "stylization itself becomes an object of attention" (71). In line with the dialogical argument proposed in *Presentation*, the expressive iconography of gender styles is not to be mistaken for evidence of their inherent nature or essence. The directional flow of this relationship, Goffman advises, is an inversion of the popularly accepted essentialist ideas. Rather than signs stemming from objects as if some sort of natural extension, performance rather suggests that individuals use sanctioned imagery and behaviour that is strewn about the social arena as a retroactive justification of their identification. "Expression in the main is not instinctive but socially learned and socially patterned; it is a socially defined category which employs a particular expression and a socially established schedule which determines when these expression will occur" (75). This passage suggests that causal relationships are often inappropriately inferred, providing authority to essentialist assumptions of natural gender traits, when in fact social ideals merely replicate themselves. Goffman observes in this essay that "we are socialized to confirm our own hypotheses about our natures" (75). Iconography and

stylization are actively donned as an armour of self-evidence; they perpetuate performativity as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

For Goffman, gender styles are not biological, as Baden-Powell's text continually suggests, but rather a portrayal of ideals in line with his theatrical metaphor of social interaction. When these styles are attributed to nature, he argues, the reasoning and critical questioning of identity is arrested; the invocation of nature and essence invariably feeds upon itself and constitutes a delusive wall of argumentation (76). In "The Arrangement Between the Sexes" Goffman notes that the idioms of expression, the social and gendered lexicons, and the base structures of gender display and behaviour are drawn largely from "the ideally expressive environments of games and contests, imagery drawn from animal lore, residues from military training, and so forth" (324); thus, virtually cataloguing the elements of Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*. Goffman seizes on the anchors of essentialist arguments: a combination of metaphors and iconography drawn from the wild and human-manufactured and perpetuated traditions. The traditions in Baden-Powell's case are military-based definitions of gender style and rigid regimentation of behaviour. These metaphors, in paralleling human social interaction with wild and bestial codes, fashion sets of signifiers that again falsely imply that interactive expressions are causal by-products of static, discrete natures.

The aptness of Goffman's theory for my study lies in the fact that his dramaturgical conceptualizations align him stylistically with Baden-Powell's own motivational and pedagogical concerns in *Scouting for Boys*. Through his desire to sculpt the minds and bodies of British youth, Baden-Powell consistently advocated drama and performance: the staging of didactic, patriotic plays was one of his preferred techniques,



as was donning costume, and shifting the self into various roles as a psychological ploy to broaden the outlook of boys in peril; to socialize them. Whereas in Baden-Powell's text performance is actively advocated as an educational and indoctrinating device, Goffman's text underscores the necessity and existence of the performance metaphor in every social interaction, whether it is conscious or unconscious. This shared concern with surfaces, concealment, display, and shifting roles illuminates the many threads of connective tissue that link these two texts that initially appear to be vastly divergent in their ideological stances.

### **Judith Butler's Performative Being**

Erving Goffman's theory of social expression as performance is concerned less with the philosophical than with the practical elements of how the individual functions in everyday life. Although his articulation of performance theory becomes more complex as he moves from the individual to the group, political and polemical ideas manifest themselves as mostly depending upon the social context in which they are applied. Similarly, in Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) the argument that performativity is a political act is not only immediately present, but actually shapes her entire formulation of performance theory. Whereas Goffman's position combined practical psycho-social observations with a set of systematic metaphors that can be laid over social interactions like a set of screens that may or may not be opaque, Butler argues that gender identity, including the human body, is not necessarily a singular act but is in fact a complex of culturally-prescribed ideals and expectations that produce and reaffirm the subject that they name. For Butler, it is



through the reiterations of language and repetitions—as Goffman references in his own work—that gendered bodies, and psychic identities are made. Matter, in Butler’s more notorious and provocative claim, is sculpted by language and culture in such an insidious manner that the complex social operation is obscured. Furthermore, reiterative operations reaffirm hierarchies and binaries under the guise of nature/biology and essentialism. Some binaries that Butler argues are enforced by performative discourse and that profoundly alter the ways in which individual subjects perceive both themselves and those around them are: Internal/External, Masculine/Feminine, Gay/Straight, Self/Other. Such binaries are where consciousness and desire fall prey to the politics of cultural discourse. While Butler’s work is shaped by politics, philosophy and psychoanalysis, it shares common ground with Goffman’s arguments, and it is these commonalities that are valuable to this thesis.

Butler’s argument, which begins in 1990’s *Gender Trouble*, and is more refined in *Bodies That Matter*, states that linguistic reiteration (for example the proclamation “It’s a boy” or “I am a boy”), is a cycle of citations of presupposed knowledge and ideals. Butler notes that the body, that matter—especially the feminized or masculinized body—is “neither a simple, brute positivity or referent nor a blank surface or slate awaiting an external signification, but it is always in some sense temporalized” (*Bodies* 31). As such, she does not completely disregard the biological materiality of the body, but in fact calls attention to the vulnerability of this materiality to redefinition. The temporalization that she suggests, which is the centre for the body and self’s potential for fluidity, is wherein the perpetual reiteration and reaffirmation of linguistic and cultural ideals is played out. Like Goffman, Butler understands the influence of power structures on the performative,

and also recognizes that the mechanism by which these structures bind and shape the self is repetition and reiteration, an idea that is stressed consistently throughout her work. Goffman uses team performances as a concrete example of how this mechanism of repetition works, for a team must consistently repeat an ideal expression in order to prevent the breakdown of meaning in their performance. Gender, Butler suggests, is bound to the body as a coherent whole in a similar manner. Through the repetition of a system of prohibitions, foreclosures, and disavowals, wherein identity is deemed performative not because one is actively slipping into a social mask, but because the reiteration of linguistic categories—man, woman, frog, bookcase, etc—shapes (but does not *completely* bind) the subject's identificatory expressions by placing it along one of many possible binary pairs. There is less self-determination in Butler's work in terms of its confrontational political nature. There are, however, pockets of culture wherein artifice and linguistic and essential categories can provide a noticeable and deliberate resistance to this fusing of the body with discursive practices.

In her preface to *Bodies That Matter*, Butler asks "Why is it that what is constructed is understood as an artificial and dispensable character?" (xi). Here she questions the validity of all identities and subject-formations, regardless of whether or not they are perceived as overtly "constructed", such as Butler's famous example of drag balls, wherein gender norms are deliberately subverted. What is implicit in her question, and in the reading of Butler's work which this thesis is framed upon, is that her formulation of performativity takes no subject position as *absolutely* natural or essential. This is a bold and arguably dangerous political assertion, since it disrupts all the binaries upon which cultural and individual identities are placed, but also draws attention to the



stigma of overtly artificial or transgressive identifications, transgression being an inherently unstable concept, politically. Drag queens, who appropriate female or male signifiers to exaggerated effect, illustrate the unnaturalness, the overt artifice, and the variability of those signifiers and linguistic boundaries.

The performative nature of identity, then, is masked by the very norms and conventions that contour and define the acts of subject formation. A circular pattern develops, wherein presumed nature and linguistic/social symptoms refer to each other in a two-way dialogue, with each used to validate and justify the other. It is not surprising in this case, for theorists such as Goffman and Butler, to suggest that performativity is both an explanation for the reaffirmation of conventions as well as a possible method of subverting these norms, of exposing the weaknesses and inadequacies of ideal-based binary cultural structures. Performativity should not indicate that any subject-formation should be privileged over another, or that one performance is in any way more legitimate or “real” than another—whether one is being transgressive or wholly adhering to convention. The question that Butler poses in her preface suggests that the problem lies within such assumptions of “reality.” These assumptions drive the continued life of the conventions that necessitate the performativity that she so rigorously outlines in this text and elsewhere.

Another element of Butler’s theory that will be incorporated into the analytical framework of this thesis is that the existing binaries, and the possibilities for transgression and breakdown that exist—in other words, the potential for fragility—is a source of potential anxiety. Anxiety stemming from fear of pollution and fear of perversion in the Scouting movement has already been noted in Kathryn Kent’s article on



the lesbian subtext of *Scouting for Girls*, and is equally powerful and present in Baden-Powell's text for boys: an anxiety that will be illustrated in greater detail in the following chapters of this thesis. The binaries that provoke performance are extensions of sets of cultural norms that protect against the same sorts of pollutions and transgressions that Butler and Kent note. These conventions and ideals, that both Butler and Goffman make use of in their theoretical explications, are social boundaries. Conventions are established and reiterated continuously to prevent the breakdown of binaries. The constant drive to limit and bind the body/identity implies such an anxiety exists. One of the key points that this thesis incorporates from Butler's theory is:

The performative dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms. In this sense, then, it is not only that there are constraints to performativity; rather, constraint calls to be rethought as the very condition of performativity. Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation, nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which sustains and compels performativity. (94-95)

The "constraint" that Butler discusses is imperative not only for performativity to exist, but for subject-formation in general. Such constraints are a symptom of the anxiety that emerges when the clearly drawn boundaries, binaries, and limits on the self threaten total breakdown of coherence. Constraint is key not only for explaining the forced reiteration

of socio-cultural ideals in Butler's text, but it is also the defining tone and direction in Baden-Powell's advice for developing the character of "good citizen." Therefore, the anxiety that is implied by Butler's performative formulation also finds itself seeping into every chapter of *Scouting for Boys*.

Butler continues to elaborate on this system of boundaries, however, and introduces the remaining major concepts that form the backbone of this theoretical framework: prohibition and ostracism. She proposes that

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act", or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (95)

With this statement, Butler explicitly links punitive measures—social ostracism and even death or other bodily harm—with transgression of conventional boundaries or ideals. It is these punitive measures that give shape to the oppressive systems of constraint that draw the very boundaries of social identity. In this passage, with its implications of social punishment and anxiety over boundary dissolution, the abject is summoned, and it



is through this concept that Butler twists the traditional notions of performance. The delineation between self and other, or masculine and feminine, sets the standard of convention through which the self is defined against the other. The social norm, the ideal of masculinity in the case of Baden-Powell's text, is defined only because there is the disavowed other, the feminine, or even worse, the feminized male, who breaks down the otherwise solid cultural limit between male and female. Through a casting off of the feminine, the masculine is more neatly and safely defined. When the boundaries between the two are either broken down or illustrated to be fluid or traversable, then the coherence and solidity of self-identification dissolves, causing that dread and anxiety. Butler argues that the performative is fueled by this abject dread, the anxiety that the self is permeable, ephemeral, and not contingent on a solid, inherent nature, or a specific configuration of body parts and psychic structures.

The performative is often made tangible by hyperbolic displays of gender traits, especially in the case of drag. Although she focuses on cross-gender drag performances, Butler's discussion of gendered expressions is pertinent to *Scouting For Boys*. Butler suggests that drag—a hyperbolic expression of gender traits—has the potential to simultaneously affirm the ideals that it hyperbolizes, as well as to underscore the artificial, constructed nature of expressive devices such as clothing, bodies, and make up. She states that “drag may well be used in the service of both denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms. [...] drag is a site of certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted” (125). Drag is not only a literal, Goffmanesque “front,” but a direct accentuation of social and cultural ideals. Butler proposes that



both drag and transsexualism, like Baden-Powell's use of uniforms and bodily sanctions, contain the potential to reinforce gender ideals and to highlight their inherent artificiality. They are "a destabilization that is denaturalizing and that calls into question the claims of normativity and originality by which gender and sexual oppression sometimes operate" (128). The very significations of gender, according to Butler, are often able to undermine or even undo that which they are used to express. The transsexual individual exemplary of the performative nature of gender, and also of the inherent instability of the notion of an essential character underlining even the malleability of the flesh, is erroneously taken as a product of nature. Butler's more political and linguistic focus, in terms of the framework of this thesis, is appropriate for framing the Baden-Powell text insofar as *Scouting for Boys* is grounded in rhetorical practices and techniques (in language) that are meant as both a call to arms for British youth, and a mechanism of social division through ostracism.

Candace West and Don Zimmerman's essay "Doing Gender" (1991), post-Goffman, but contemporaneous to Butler, connect these identity theories by acknowledging many of the basic arguments present in both texts. West and Zimmerman state that gender is a socially contrived category, one that is formed of "an achieved property of situated conduct" (14). This "situated" conduct shows up in Butler as temporality and performativity, but is rooted in the sociological practicality of Goffman, whose notion of situational conduct is quite literal. He proposes the existence of various fronts, roles, and stages through which individuals and groups maneuver in every social encounter. West and Zimmerman's position, as the title "Doing Gender" suggests, is that gender is both something that is actively achieved and that is shaped and defined by

social conventions. The visible signifiers of gender play a major role in their theoretical stance, although they don't define "doing gender" as "performative" or "performance" as such. While their position borrows elements from both Butler and Goffman, they diverge in their emphasis on the active and conscious element of "performing" or "doing" gender roles. They suggest that gender becomes a self-regulating concept, a process wherein individuals constantly monitor their own bodies, and those of others, keeping an active watch on the signifiers produced by subject-formation, a process they specifically articulate as "the valuation of those ideals as the proper ways of being and behaving" (29). This process is one that, in accordance with the theoretical positions taken up by Butler and Goffman, must be "maintained," a word suggesting the repetition and reiteration of Butler's theory. West and Zimmerman also write about the homeostatic coherence of character that all these theorists note is so vexed and thus a necessary component of performance and performativity.

The reading of these theorists illustrates that although methodologies may differ, their combinations of sociological observation and philosophical/psychoanalytical high theory allow for a fruitful analysis of *Scouting for Boys* that operates on both a discursive level and a practical, context-driven plane. Since Baden-Powell's text combines rhetorical, literary, dramatic, and visual cues and signifiers, the intertwining of these approaches allows for a more comprehensive and sophisticated reading of the century-old text, and also maintains an elasticity of interpretation that would perhaps be impossible with a single-text, monolithic theoretical framework. The chapter to follow moves into a specific element of *Scouting For Boys*—the uniform—and reads that "front" as a form of drag.



## CHAPTER THREE

## Clothing as Obedience and Performance as Essence: Reading the Uniform

Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying  
gestures through which gender itself is established?

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (xxviii)

You're born naked, and the rest is drag.<sup>10</sup>

RuPaul

To quote notorious cross-dressing celebrity RuPaul is in no way to trivialize the social theories discussed thus far. However, by distilling the relationship between clothing, the body, and identity into such precise terms, he has in fact astutely touched on the foundational ideas of human social nature of theorists such as Goffman and Butler. If difference is the elementary fuel that energizes the notion of performativity as I am using it, then one of the more basic and visible techniques of delineating this difference is through clothing: in this case, the prescribed uniform of the Scout. Put simply, as the Butler epigraph suggests, the uniform of the Boy Scout is a hyperbolized form of drag. One of the primary rhetorical strategies that Baden-Powell employs in the text of *Scouting For Boys* is that of constructing an actively adversarial relationship between the

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<sup>10</sup> qtd. in Felshin's "Clothing As Subject" (20).



Scout and the undesirable "tenderfoot."<sup>11</sup> The performative structure "I am X because I am not Y" is thereby solidified. In Baden-Powell's book, the theoretical notion of performance is most evident in a rather absurd discussion of clothing and fashion. Baden-Powell seeks to eradicate the undesirable, womanly qualities of youth, ensuring that the tenderfoot does not wear the uniform, which theoretically salvages the integrity of the uniform's "front." The relationship between the Scout's masculine identity and both the body that expresses it and the apparel that wraps it illustrates the necessity for a dual understanding of the concept of performativity. That the uniform of the Boy Scout manifests both the interpersonal visual theatre of Erving Goffman and the psychoanalytical, hierarchical social power structures of Judith Butler is the underlying assumption of the arguments in this chapter. These arguments present performativity and clothing as key strategies for understanding Baden-Powell's assumption that the self is inseparable from the presentation or perception of the self. This chapter addresses the question: is the manipulation of perception through clothing a performance, and does performance necessarily mean difference?

Performativity as a theoretical school of analysis has faced a number of criticisms from academics and theorists such as Tim Edwards in *Cultures of Masculinity* (2006) and Kate Cregan's *The Sociology of the Body* (2006). In both of these works Butler is seen as unrealistically disengaging the body from the subject and some of her more specific arguments are read as not generalizable across all cultures. The primary justification for

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<sup>11</sup> The tenderfoot is generally perceived to be useless, and prone to whining and inadvertently starting bush fires. They are, in Baden-Powell's estimation, not only cowards but also dangerous and sexually ambiguous: "half men, half old women" (301).

the use of performativity theory in this thesis, however, is precisely because it supposes a specific, social constructionist framework—primarily the social influence on the identificatory displays—without becoming an all-encompassing, monolithic sheet thrown over every facet of human existence. In this thesis, performative masculinity makes no claim to multiple cultural and social identities as absolutely and not inherently inauthentic. In fact, the argument in the following two chapters is meant to illustrate that while Baden-Powell's text presents a biased, monolithic conception of masculine identity, a conception that performativity argues may or may not be “essential,” the Boy Scout is always one of many possible shifting identifications. This chapter, as the epigraphs suggest, positions Baden-Powell's use of signifier-laden uniforms as a form discipline through drag. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler notes that drag—which is defined as any hyperbolized expression of gender traits—denaturalizes signifiers of gender ideals by exposing their inherently constructed nature. She argues that

hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. That it must repeat this imitation, that it sets up this pathologizing practices and normalizing sciences in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety, suggests that heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome, that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally or fully achieved. (125)

The elements of the uniform discussed in this chapter do not constitute drag in the traditional connotation—that of a cross-gender expression—but as a hyperbolic expression of Scouting, which in *Scouting For Boys* equates the heterosexual with white,



Christian masculinity. If the uniform is thought of as a form of masculine drag, complete with semiotic messages woven into it, then the anxiety that courses through *Scouting For Boys* about the fragility of masculinity, and the potential for the performance of the Scout to undermine the program's ends becomes much more obvious.

### **Wearing Masculinity: the Uniform as Identity**

Baden-Powell's singular conviction and championing of a narrow, militarized, white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon masculine ideal seeps into of the language of every fragmented chapter of his Scouting bible. Goffman's idea of social performance, as the previous chapter stated, is that the cultural conventions of a particular social milieu have an undeniable impact on the formation of character. A fascinating intersection of factors occurs in Baden-Powell's artificially contrived, pseudo-social microcosm, that create an environment that allows for performative analysis. Firstly, the tone of the text, and by extension the Scouting movement, is forceful, unforgiving, and rigidly structured—which accounts for the imperative of performance—and yet, this movement that so resembles a group of drafted soldiers is ostensibly voluntary in nature, presuming a modicum of independence in both youth and caretaker. Secondly, Baden-Powell's insistence that his methodology produces (and, by implication, is one of the *few* methods that does successfully produce) a real man, and the ideal masculine citizen of empire, is crystallized in proclamations such as “Every boy ought to learn how to shoot and to obey orders, else he is no more good when war breaks out than an old woman, and merely gets killed like a squealing rabbit, being unable to defend himself” (11), and that Peace Scouts



and other such troupes in uniform are “men, in fact, of the best type”(300). Baden-Powell is convinced that only the firm structure and vigilance of military or other uniformed brigades such as the Scouts can mould a perceptibly masculine man. Finally, perception is the foundation of successful performance, as Goffman would later illustrate, so Baden-Powell, being a shrewd artist of public relations in the pre-mass media age, began on the most elementary of levels, and crafted a public image of the Scouting movement. He meticulously outlined the persona of the Scout—and himself—as well as instilling an internal sense of duty, obedience, and honour in the movement’s constituents. The British imperial project, with which Baden-Powell’s anecdotes, letters, and biographies clearly indicate an alignment, called for such selfless duty and obedience. Colonizing the boy is the first step toward further global imperial successes. Thus, *Scouting For Boys* is dictatorial and intent on producing real men, but its success hinges upon performance.

There are moments in the text when Baden-Powell’s motives surface in such a blatant and unapologetic manner that it borders on disarming. The text’s tone is militaristic and imperative. The instructions are in line with military training, and deeply concerned with masculine ideals. The text explicitly states that “the whole ulterior object of this scheme is to form character in the boys—to make them manly, good citizens” (317): a statement of purpose that shrewdly appears near the end of the text, when the reader, especially the young reader, has been mentally exhausted by the relentless barrage of instructions and admonishments. The repeated instructions resemble the textual equivalent of a physical and emotional boot camp. And yet, such a determined tone exposes an underlying anxiety in the militaristic nature of Baden-

Powell's training. He wants to instill a performative mode of middle-class British masculinity, a mode that necessitates a complete obedience to church and nation. For Baden-Powell to assume that his model would succeed is to acknowledge the malleability of the young subject, that Scouts can be made. It is this malleability that functions as the core of performance theory. Baden-Powell's use of sign-laden uniforms foregrounds a relationship between dread and relief: the uniform is able to both suppress individual instinct and harness the subject's potential for change. The anxiety over perceived impurities that threaten the concreteness and immutability of British national identity advocates and produces the very performance that inspires this dread to begin with. There is a blind spot in Baden-Powell's methodology: the boy's potential to be molded and (mis)led prompts the adoption of modeling and molding strategies to rescue the wayward. Baden-Powell, then, erects a ready made "front" into which masses of youths are drafted and tested to determine whether or not they are capable of meeting the multiple challenges of the text's obstacle course. The first test of this aptitude begins when the Scout dons the uniform of the movement, and takes his place among the team of cohorts, maintaining a coherent and acceptable front.

The more general components of the uniform as outlined by Baden-Powell are combined with an arsenal of much more specialized, rank-differentiating pieces of ornamentation, the Scout badges, which are tellingly referred to as the Scout's "life." Were he to transgress, especially by breaking his honour or his word, the Scout would be immediately stripped of a badge, and removed from the organization. Equally, if the scout were to ascend the ranks of the organization, then his uniform's ornamentation and the badge's position would also change. A master wears the badge on the left side of the



cap, and a troupe leader wears it on the front. A corporal's badge is augmented by a white braid, whereas second class Scouts only display one portion of the badge: the motto.

"Marks" are placed on the uniform by the Scout Masters in recognition of achievement in specific areas, areas that Baden-Powell surprisingly does not outline, and are presumably created regionally.



Figure 1

Thus the uniform, and its various articles of ornamentation, is a crucial element of Baden-Powell's regimented formation of identity and status.

Virginia Woolf observes in her ambiguously-gendered fantasy/biography *Orlando* that "there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them" (132). Her statement cuts through the traditional notion that meticulous attention to the sartorial is somehow superficial, or of little social consequence. She continues: "we may



make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking" (132). Woolf underlines the dialogical relationship between the self and the presentation of the self, subtly noting the fluidity and complexity of such a transaction. She also reinforces the performative nature of the uniform, which functions in an even more overt and officially sanctioned manner than other forms of fashion. This idea that clothing's relationship to subject-formation is deeply rooted, and perhaps subliminal, does not go unnoticed by Baden-Powell who, as a decorated and experienced military hero, possessed first-hand experience with this relationship. Not only does the uniform graft itself onto the youth's self-image, but it profoundly affects the perception of the audience, the international public. The uniform differentiates the Scout from the general population, and it also functions through a chain of significations as an instrument of induction. The uniform amplifies ideological ties and behavioural cues in an institutional setting. These subtle and provocative qualities make the uniform an arguably more insidious instrument of indoctrination than physical training or keeping a checklist of one's good deeds for the week.

By making all Scouts dress alike, any difference between the neat, semiotically-structured appearance and their self-identification is clothed or masked by uniformity. Difference in this case functions not only in reference to "others", or non-Scouts, including the much-maligned "tenderfoot," but also to a possible split within the individual Scouts. According to Kathryn Kent's contagion theory, the uniform by virtue of its emphasis on conformity and strictly controlled use of ornamentation, can open up a space for appropriation and twisting of semiotic messages wherein the very intention of the front—the uniform—is used for the very sorts of activities that it was designed to

curb initially. One frequently cited example of this phenomenon is contemporary school uniforms (Craik 12), where a uniform is presumed to collapse expressions of difference and prevent misbehaviour, such as sexual transgression, but may in fact incite these very actions in the act of repressing them. For example, the notorious Britney Spears music video, "Baby One More Time," plays with the signage of uniform. In this video, the Catholic schoolgirl uniform is used not only to outline the curves of the young female body, but to accentuate the highly sexual tone of the song itself. In such instances, the potential for the misuse of signifiers is deliberately exploited. The formal significance of the uniform invites ironic reversals through both its defining singularity of intended meaning and its disavowals of alternate reading of identity. The satirical animated television show, *American Dad!*, is another example, suggesting an even more relevant subversion. A group of perpetually uniformed "Scout Rangers" present a coherent, united group front to concerned parents using the cover of their clothing to gamble, smoke and drink beer. This scene explicitly invokes the more literal elements of Goffman's theoretical position, and crucially illustrates the valuable cultural currency that the Boy Scout uniform possesses. Further, these contemporary uses of the uniform ironically support Baden-Powell's obvious belief that the uniform has performative power.

The act of performance in both its theatrical and socio-philosophical permutations hinges upon the application of codes and signifiers, as well as the processing and interpretation of these codes, whether they are physical, verbal, active, or passive. Baden-Powell's tone is imperative: the flesh of both Scouts and their leaders, in fact all who are affiliated with the movement in any capacity, are not merely wrapped in cloth



and given a knapsack for self-sufficiency. In designing and enforcing the specific uniform that clothes the entire movement, Baden-Powell presumes that each Scout fulfills his duties by roaming through British society righting any perceived misconduct and generally maintaining a sharp vigilance. The Boy Scout is encrusted in a system of highly specific signifiers of his constitution; he is a walking, breathing text of British masculinity. As living signifiers of ideology, Baden-Powell's Scouts are not, however, merely paper dolls. Clothing is one of the most pivotal and controlled display methods of the movement. The detail of what these youths wore, just as much as what they did or in fact *were*, is an element of their self-identification. The official Scouting uniform is not composed of mere adornments, nor is it caught up in the complex systems of popular fashion and commercial capitalism. What the uniform is, however, is a manifestation of complex interweaving of codes and cues whose specific intention, as Baden-Powell outlined near the end of the treatise, is to bind and transform character, to *fashion* men—of a particular sort—out of boys.

The uniform prompts performance by pairing the sartorial proliferation of signs with habitual and monitored behaviour. In her exhaustive study of the historical use of uniforms and their influence on contemporary fashion trends, Jennifer Craik (2005) suggests that

The rationale of uniforms is highly specific to an institution, organization or group because it embodies precise calculations designed to distinguish members of that uniformed group by their acquisition of distinctive body techniques. In this process, learning to wear the



uniform in the prescribed way—or, rather, learning what *not* to do—is an integral part of the role of uniforms as an extension of the habitus of the individual. The acquisition of a uniform's codes becomes internalized at the same time as other body techniques particular to the institution are being acquired. (11)

Craik's analysis of the uniform highlights the learned nature of bodily techniques (as will be discussed at length in the following chapter) and identificatory displays that are inherent in any highly organized, uniformed organization. It is just such a simultaneous internalization of codes that Baden-Powell outlines through the proper actions for Boy Scouts, and it is the prohibition of feminized traits that often drives the ideological thrust of Baden-Powell's writing, especially when it comes to the body. As Baden-Powell works on the minds and bodies of the youths in his charge, the uniform that is associated with these ideas becomes an integral component of the subject-formation. As Virginia Woolf notes, clothes often influence the wearer in subtle and delicate ways that are imperceptible.

The details of the Scouting uniform amply illustrate the connection between heavily coded and decorated militaristic dress and behaviour. Baden-Powell lists, for example, the locations on the Scout apparel where rank and badges converge. As noted earlier, Scout masters wear their "life" on their hat or left arm, or on the left arm with an additional piece of white braiding for a corporal. First class Scouts, he explains, are privileged to wear the entire Scout motto badge, whereas second class Scouts are forbidden to wear the motto as part of their badge (Baden-Powell 35). Uniform specifics

such as these not only act as rewards for obedience, but enforce difference in the ranks. This structure of rules and dress indicates the hierarchical nature of the organization and also the imperative of proving one's character through carefully chosen indicators, indicators that are rigorously outlined in *Scouting For Boys*. What essentially differentiates these classes of Scout, other than a title or a braid or a slogan emblazoned across the arm, is often unclear. Even in a text whose dogma is as structured and catalogue-like as this one, ambiguity might promote a more intuitive, internal appropriation of masculine and militaristic codes, or perhaps it is kept obscured because these criteria are arbitrarily chosen and applied. In either case, the idea of difference, not only between Scouts and the public but within groups of Scouts themselves, is paramount to the efficacy of the movement and is constantly heightened by the strict use of symbolic visual codes such as badges and braids. The uniform's immeasurable centrality to the success of any highly structured organization or group movement such as the Boy Scouts is clearly due to its functional duality: the uniform is both external display and indicator of internal quality.

On one hand, the uniform has a definitive ability to elide individual differences in a group. On the other hand, the uniform also incorporates semiotic codes whose sole function is differentiation, to mark position or rank. A label might simplify social interaction and provide a heuristic shortcut, but performativity stems from the discernment of such energy-saving cues. Virginia Woolf continues her commentary on the social function of clothing in *Three Guineas* (1938), when she contemplates the visual spectacle of both formal academic dress and more ceremonial military uniforms, uniforms that are even more spectacular than the Boy Scout uniform, full of badges,



smothered in coveted medals, ribbons, and crests. In the context of a presumption of performative gender identities, Woolf notes that these spectacles are performed almost exclusively by men. She writes that this public display

serves to advertise the social, professional, or intellectual standing of the wearer. If you will excuse the humble illustration, your dress fulfills the same function as the tickets in a grocer's shop. But, here, instead of saying 'This is the margarine; this pure butter; this is the finest butter in the market,' it says 'This man is a clever man—he is a Master of Arts; this man is a very clever man—he is a Doctor of Letters; this man is a most clever man—he is a Member of the Order of Merit.' It is this function—the advertisement function—of your dress that seems the most singular. (137)

The commercial metaphor of this analysis calls on the “singular” function of ironically denoting difference. For Woolf, advertising serves the same purpose as a uniform: employing denotation and connotation to manipulate the perception of the public. Woolf cannily predicts many of the arguments suggested by later performance theorists, sociologists, and philosophers; that is, an attention to the detail found within these sartorial structures calls out the elements of hierarchical social difference. It is these fine grades of difference—the margarine in relation to the butter in relation to the Doctoral scholar in relation to the Order of Merit member—that performative theories of identity highlight. Woolf clearly sees labels as a comparison, not only echoing the idea of a



shared system of codes present in Goffman, West and Zimmerman, and Butler, but also anticipating Butler's interest in naming conventions and the interaction between discourse and matter. Both Butler and Goffman see labeling or naming as setting in motion a schema of self-fulfilling prophecy within the individual. This is the very schema that Baden-Powell constructs in his text: the system through which the Scout assumes the role of the man—through donning of heavily coded apparel and body techniques. The display functions of semiotically-coded fashion trigger behavioural cues, prompting a self-fulfilling prophecy. This self-fulfilling prophecy is enacted through repetition: Butler's notion of reiteration constantly defining and redefining the self. The drag-like uniform itself serves as a reiteration, in conjunction with bodily and behavioural sanctions. The uniform outlines divisions that must be highlighted again and again to ensure perpetuation. The uniform is a kind of drag performance because it is hyperbolic in its presentation but also because there is the potential for anyone to wear it. If all it takes to be a Scout is to attain the uniform, then being a Scout has nothing to do with natural, essential qualities. Rather, being a Scout is wearing a uniform. That reading is how Butler might see the Scout's uniform—it is certainly not how Baden-Powell intends it. The advertising functions of the uniform work for the audience, who read the cues, and also for the Scouts themselves, who internalize the boundaries they suggest.

In *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context* (1996), Susan Kaiser examines the potential for any type of fashion, not just uniforms, to transgress their commonly cited functions as symptoms of capitalist consumption and carry meaning on an ideological level that is not always perceived or acknowledged. Kaiser draws on the seminal semiotic fashion theory of Roland Barthes to suggest that

“ideology may be reflected in everyday objects that people do not question and that they interpret with relative ease because of shared meaning. Cultural messages of this sort form the basis of the construction and transformation of cultural knowledge” (51). What Woolf’s observations have in common with Kaiser’s suggestion is that not only do clothes transmit—perhaps unconsciously—performative messages about both the wearer and the observer, but that implicit in these messages, depending on the cultural contexts in which they are located, are hierarchical judgment values that perpetuate socio-cultural conventions and norms, which to Butler and Goffman is an integral element of the politics in her philosophical/discursive school of performance theory.

The ability to read the system of codes that all these thinkers outline is an ability that Baden-Powell explicitly addresses in his text. One of the essential skills of a successful Scout—and therefore of a successful and useful man and British citizen—is the technique of reading “sign,” whether these are the signals on a person’s face, items in a store window in the city (that most vile and depraved of spaces), or the plants and animal traces of the open wilderness. The possibility that a set of fur-strewn tracks may indicate panther territory, or that an ill-constructed shoe will reveal a murderer’s identity means that the Scout is boldly and explicitly implored to “let nothing escape his attention; he must notice small points and signs, and then make out the meaning of them” (66). Boy Scout training functions as a course in geographical/social semiotics as much as in good citizenship. The tenderfoot, since he is not a Scout, is one who has not learned and is unable to learn, to read sign, a skill that could save or doom the empire in wartime. Reading and interpreting details is a motif on which Baden-Powell fixates, and keeps in the foreground of almost every chapter. Baden-Powell’s insistence that “when a Scout



has learned to notice 'sign,' he must learn to 'put this and that together,' and so read a meaning from what he has seen" (89). Kent would argue that their ability to read and interpret codes can be turned back on the text in order to peel away the skin of presumably essential identifications that it takes for granted as natural. Such a reading unveils a more insidious mistrust of youth: a mistrust that lends a notable weight to the theorists' suspicion of monolithic methods of socialization.

This mistrust and anxiety surfaces in one particularly interesting aspect of *Scouting For Boys* that deals with a discrete element of the required scouting uniform: the omnipresent Scouting neck scarf.



**A Boy Scout's Necktie.**

Figure 2

"Make each Scout tie a knot in his necktie to remind him to do a good turn the next day" (23) suggests the text. In addition to Baden-Powell's mistrust of the youth in his charge is his own lack of faith in the conviction that the young Anglo-Saxon male is possessed of a natural sense of civility and masculine duty. The sartorial codification of the "good deed," which is one of the cornerstones of the Scouting movement and, by extension,



Baden-Powell's conception of the ideal contemporary man, is perhaps one method of unlocking the socio-cultural implications of the text itself. The codification of the need to perform a good deed (the Scout must be reminded to be good), which in turn guarantees one's success and upward mobility as a Boy Scout, suggests that even the most basic moral, human impulses can be indoctrinated into the behaviour of the British youth, prompting comparisons to what Rosenthal sees as mechanical, factory-like subject-production. This "character factory" of signage and servitude undermines individual personality, identity, and self-determination. The nature of the visual spectacle created by the code-heavy Scouting uniform falls in line with the theatricality of identity proposed by Goffman, as the uniform functions specifically as a tool to maintain the coherence of the group's "front." The potential for such a loss of agency in the determination of the self at this most basic level, however, recalls the wary, cautious tone of Judith Butler's suggestion that the self is determined on both conscious and unconscious levels by the social milieux in which individuals find themselves.

Although the uniform is adorned with many semiotic signposts that specifically point to proper behavioural cues for Scouts, Baden-Powell's anxiety over the potential for misuse or misinterpretation is perhaps understandable, since sartorial cues such as those outlined in *Scouting For Boys* are quite easily transgressed and even subverted—as in any form of drag. The hyperbolic drag show of the uniform, however, is merely one layer of armour in Baden-Powell's program: the body, perhaps the most naturalized and essentialized site of self-expression, is the ultimate focus of his text. The uniform carries signs, but is unable to be naturalized because of its overtly constructed nature. In the next chapter I will illustrate that the body is yet another site that is used by Baden-Powell to

highlight his essentialist arguments, but also undermines those arguments by unintentionally highlighting the performative nature of the flesh.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## The Textual Body: Investing the Flesh With the Weight of the Future

We must all be bricks in the wall of that great edifice — the British Empire[...]and we must make ourselves the best men in the world for honour and goodness to others so that we may DESERVE to keep that position.

Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting For Boys* (292)

In the previous chapter, one of Baden-Powell's primary tactics of induction was illustrated. With its assorted insignia of cultural economy, the uniform functions primarily as a vehicle of ideology. The nature of the uniform's sign system is symptomatic of and invested with a profound anxiety over the perversion—and consequently erosion—of British youth. In Baden-Powell's ambitious and extensive "scheme," clothing has a foundational and yet diminished role. To truly alter masses of young British boys, Baden-Powell realized that while militaristic structures and semiotic-rich uniforms play a vital role, such structures could only play a cooperative role in mass conversion. A superficial performance can contribute to a coherent front, but since Baden-Powell links Scouting so foundationally with the health of the British Empire, a continuing adherence to the performance and total immersion in the internalized ideals was the goal of the movement. Because of this absolute devotion to the ideology as expressed in *Scouting For Boys*, the body of the Scout emerges as the ultimate expressive site. The body is a pivotal performative joint that unifies the movements of all other expressive devices. Although "fronts," such as the uniform, are key elements of the performance of the Scouting movement, they function mostly as an amplifier of the body:



as a functional costume. In Baden-Powell's program, the body of the Scout loses all autonomy; once the flesh submits to the ideology, it is no longer the individual's body. The body is an atom of the British Empire: a "brick in the wall."

Baden-Powell treats the body as the most permanent and potentially bountiful element of the Boy Scout. As Judith Butler notes in her work on performative matter, the body is the expressive site that is most susceptible to essentialism and naturalization, two processes that Baden-Powell employs in his ideology, and two processes that most complicate the text's assumptions of masculinity. The body as a performative site unites the arguably disparate theoretical ideas and concerns of Goffman and Butler: discourse, power, and the physical theatre of the flesh. The body is the expressive site that is most fraught with controversies and theoretical complications, as seen in the inordinate amount of emphasis in Baden-Powell's text, and more generally on the body's central place in theories of identity and gender. Much feminist and sociological theory of the past fifty years has sought to rethink and, in fact, overturn the natural and essentialized relationship of the body to the individual identity that Baden-Powell here suggests. Whether the body is determined by biological or social forces (or a combination of the two) remains debatable among many thinkers. With the uniform, *Scouting For Boys* presumes a mode of masculinity that is flattened onto the body and services a display of honour, duty and obedience. Each Boy Scout thus becomes a submissive brick in the wall that is described in this chapter's epigraph. But with the body, the delicacy of this wall—the British Empire—as a coherent construct of masculinity becomes a source of the text's driving, motivational anxiety. Thus, the body is a fascinating element of *Scouting For Boys*, but also an indicator of the conflicts inherent in any theory of identity or performativity.

The instances of performativity of the flesh are scattered haphazardly throughout the text, but there are several occasions wherein they are clustered together and described in minute detail. For example, some of Baden-Powell's very specific, paranoia-fed chapter headings include: "The Nose," "Ears," "Eyes," "Teeth," "Smoking," "Drinking," "Early Rising," "Smile," "Microbes," and "Clothing." The text's attention to the bodies of the Scout borders at such times on manic and obsessive. This catalogue of bodily concerns, in conjunction with the detailed sign system of the uniform, exposes the depths of the pollution-paranoia that powers Baden-Powell's imperial anxiety. "Microbes" in particular expresses such panic. Accordingly, the body and its many hyperbolic cultural implications becomes a form of drag. Baden-Powell's linking of the body of the British youth with his paranoia over contemporary masculinity makes it near impossible to view the body in any other way. The intense awareness of both the body and the state of British "manliness" that pervades *Scouting For Boys* transforms Baden-Powell's suggestions for good citizenship into a set of performative imperatives that directly impact the state of the nation. Baden-Powell's attention to the body as a site of expressive performativity means that, like the uniform and its adornments, it is meant to be read like a text, and to perform what Kent describes as the discursive functions of a text.

This chapter will outline some choice moments of bodily performativity that *Scouting For Boys* advocates, as well as the perceived associations between bodies, manhood, and the health of the British Empire. The text erects a schema for the interpretation of bodily contours as well as mannerisms, wherein the framework for Baden-Powell's own program of bodily discipline has its roots. The detailed cataloguing



that the text performs on the body, in addition to textualizing the subject, also indicates a fascinating denial of the full scope of the problems of masculinity and the nation. In the end, the strict regime of bodily discipline advocated in the text not only reinforces the anxiety regarding the potential for dynamism within the subject, but it also indicates the vital role that internalization plays in the performance of the Scout. Baden-Powell's anxiety over a disintegrating empire, and how this national, political dread is reflected—and in the case of *Scouting For Boys*, deflected—in the flesh of the subject.

### **The Textual Body**

Chapter three explored Baden-Powell's demand that Scouts develop the skill to read sign and how that skill translates into the symbol-laden realm of fashion and socio-cultural economy. Fronts and performances can only be effective when they are read and interpreted properly; the reading function, then, becomes one of the central motifs of *Scouting For Boys*, and by extension the general ideology of the Scouting movement itself. Reading the uniform and subsequently manipulating its codes and their reception is a vital component of the ideological campaign of *Scouting For Boys*, but I argue their skill is ultimately secondary to the presentation of the body; this chapter will present the body and the self in Baden-Powell's text as invariably conflated.

Baden-Powell insists that "close observation of people and ability to read their character and thoughts is of immense value" (68), and it is clear that such reading does not involve merely interpreting overt body language. Thus, his bodily regime may be ultimately concerned with those in his charge, but it is no way limited to the Scouts. As



an ideology based on induction and growth, Scouting's preoccupation with the physical extends to the public at large, who are walking, breathing symptoms of the nation's health, as well as potential constituents of the movement. The text preaches reading sign and maintaining a heightened level of observation at all times, so it is little surprise that Baden-Powell outlines how to interpret the body of the other in the same clinical manner as he describes the tracking of an animal through the forest. The tenderfoot and the waster, for example, are two of his favoured targets of scorn, and are the animals of the urban habitat. As such, they, along with the rich, the poor, the cheery-tempered, the studious, the nervous and other character classifications, must be visually identifiable.

In a section entitled "Details of People," Baden-Powell outlines several cases of the body as a barometer for personality. The nervous man hurries along in a jerky manner, he explains, whereas a loafer or waster proceeds with a much more casual and relaxed "slouch" (68) of a walk. The Scout, however, strides along in a smooth and silent manner. Even the swinging of one's arms is a detail full of meaning in *Scouting For Boys*. Baden-Powell confesses to mistrusting men with waxed mustaches, explaining that they are often indicative of "vanity and sometimes drink" (68), adding that a "quiff" of hair hanging across the forehead is shorthand for a silly character. As a manual of induction that uses a(n outmoded) set of social conventions as its bedrock, *Scouting For Boys* repeatedly allows the performative aspects of its ideology to become foregrounded by allowing the body to be interchangeable with the personality.

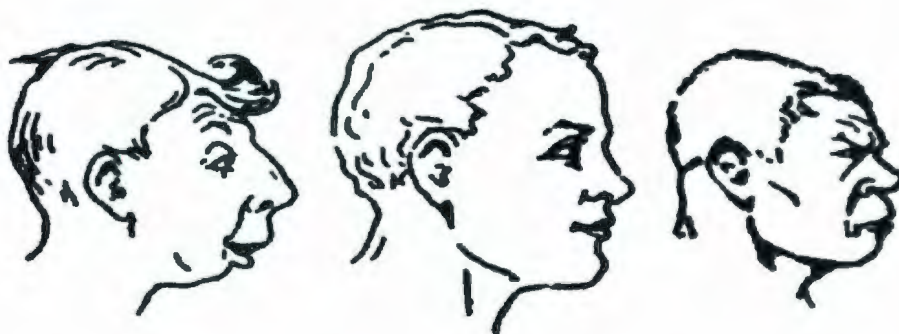


Figure 3

In his analysis of the body's movement, Baden-Powell contrasts the walk of the Scout, his ideal model of British manhood, with those of less desirable non-Scouts. This type of behavioural comparison is the movement's stock in trade, and is problematic in that it directly links ideal conventions of masculinity singularly with the Scout, and disavows all other subjects. This disavowal of otherness and idealization of the Scout is at the core of the text's performative nature. The above figure is taken from the "Details of People" section, and is presented with the following comment: "The shape of the face gives a good guide to the man's character. Perhaps you can tell the character of these gentlemen?" (69). The figure on the far left is presented with an expression as if to seem dull and simple, clearly Baden-Powell's goal, while the figure to the far right is almost grotesque and simian, with a snarling, menacing expression. Contrasted with these two extremes is the middle figure: a symmetrically-aligned, youthful young man, whose expression is even and pleasant. It comes as no surprise that this middle figure is uncannily similar to the same faces used to illustrate the Boy Scouts engaged in assorted wilderness activities throughout the text. This unambiguous and phrenological reading of facial features and skull shape is symptomatic of the framework in which Baden-Powell situates his discourse on the body of the Scout. The example of the profiles is



particularly interesting, since Baden-Powell does not analyze these faces in any detail. Additionally, he provides absolutely no context in which to place the profiles. There is no background drawn behind the sketches, nor is there even a body present, whose clothes would at least possess some sort of tangible signifying function, as the previous chapter of this thesis has illustrated. Perhaps Baden-Powell presents these figures without lingering over the issue precisely because these elements of the body are—to a certain extent—theoretically unchangeable. As it is presented, the implications of this section of the text are performative in nature because of the use of difference: they emphasize not what a scout *is*, but rather the qualities of body (and presumably character) that a proper scout does *not* possess. This subtle disavowal of otherness illustrates the expectations of the Scouting ideology, wherein the simple or animalistic physicalities must reflect simple or animalistic natures, neither of which conform to the Baden-Powell schema of Victorian British masculinity. Because the text does not explicitly state the biological/psychological determinism that it implies, but merely illustrates three differing body types, the ultimate interpretation of these figures is left to the reader.

However, the determinism implied by this illustration could be cloaked because of the arguably unchanging nature of these bodily features: they are immutable. In a performative analysis, however, whether the ideal norms that are employed are natural or artificial or even realistic is irrelevant. Baden-Powell argues adamantly in this text for a naturalistic and essentialized discourse of the body and the psychology of the subject. His method of training youth, however, illustrates the ironic anxiety that such assumed essential positions the text takes for granted are in fact not wholly natural. Where essentialist biological suppositions are exposed by performance theorists as



fundamentally flawed, the notion of performativity, especially the socio-politically oriented position of Butler, attempts to uncover the contradictions and competing drives of the human subject as a site of play, not of fixity.

Baden-Powell's presumption that bodily features, such as one's face, are directly related to the subject's nature serves to eradicate any plurality or fluidity within the individual. The ideology outlined in the text does not erase the difference between the internal (the personality) and the external (the body, clothing, and other expressive surfaces) so much as it proposes that the subject and their bodies function as mirrors of one another. The subject and his body, the pivotal expressive device of his identity, are pressed into one another in the text; whereas, the basic arguments of the various performance theorists suggest that the relationship between the subject and the body resembles a feature-warping funhouse mirror at best. Butler's claim that "what is *invoked* by the one who speaks or inscribes the law is the *fiction* of a speaker who wields the authority to make his words binding" (*Bodies* 107) suggests the mechanism by which Baden-Powell is able to fuse the features of the body to an abstract conception of personality. He suggests that both body and personality are absolutely dependent on, and connected to, each other. Butler's explanation of the manifestation of the subject under the word or law assumes that this complicated and problematic identification has no active or voluntary element, which in this case is appropriate, since the skull and facial features are presumably unable to be altered to accommodate a radical bodily performance. Baden-Powell's voice in *Scouting For Boys* is just such an authority; he is the law of this particular widespread and influential arena of youth training. As such, his analyses of the profiles presented carries the weight and force that Butler notes as a key

feature of the performativity. He fabricates a reality by the very act of flattening subjects/bodies that he performs in the "Details of People." The authority that he carries as both textual author and the original architect of the Scouting movement allows him to easily conflate his word with the law, with reality, a fusing of ideas that is ultimately internalized by the youths who constitute the movement. The authoritative voice of Baden-Powell fashions social perceptions in such a way that his word becomes reality through self-fulfilling prophecy: public perception produces subjects by defining them. The details of this section of *Scouting For Boys* suggest that discerning character is merely a matter of applying superficial conventions to the appearance of the body, which Butler argues then places an impetus on those subjects to become that which they are being defined as. And yet, the reading and perception of bodily features becomes a much more loaded set of acts than perhaps even Baden-Powell himself could understand.

*Scouting For Boys* clearly advocates a system of interpreting the flesh of others as a barometer of social health, a way of discerning at a glance the character and thoughts of the inhabitants of a rapidly expanding urban landscape. This urban other was a major cause of concern for Baden-Powell and the advocates of the Scouting movement. Consequently, the system of reading the character through the other's body became a primary method of social interpretation incorporated into more benign, utilitarian activities such as tying convoluted knots, hut-building in the wild, or administering emergency first aid to an injured man. The others (the wasters and tenderfoot boys) constitute much of the non-Scout population. To be a non-Scout is by definition to belong to these categories, these flawed and polluted masculinities. The Scout's bodily purity and embodiment of ideal British manliness depends on their critical judgment of



the profiles of those others, for it is against these others that a Scout's presumed benefit to society—their very reason for existing—is measured. Thrown into relief against these social outcasts, whose bodies and faces and movements taint and mark them, the Scout's purity and discipline is foregrounded. The performance of the Scout is more heavily outlined, and certainly more discernible—both to themselves and to the British public—when the non-Scout's undesirable character is written on his body. This critical differentiation is why the details of “people” are given early in the text and periodically throughout. One more element of reading and interpretation that is required by the Scout is to learn what he is not so that he can learn what he is. This equation is a vital precursor to the more careful outlining of the ways in which manliness is performed by the body of the individual Scout himself.

### **The Taxonomy of the Scout, the Vagaries of the Other: Performative Breakdowns of the Scout**

The body of the Scout is given detailed and regimented treatment in *Scouting For Boys*. In contrast, the body of the other is outlined in vague terms such as “nervous” or “slouching,” characteristics that are just elusive and negative enough to powerfully imply failed masculinity. The non-Scout is unquestionably undesirable and his unfit masculinity is not up for debate. There is no consideration of the possibility for plurality of identities, fluidity of character, or a schism between body and subject. Baden-Powell uses a foreboding, anxiety-inducing vagueness to keep non-Scouts and their bodies as threats to those fine citizens such as himself: he fully exploits the power of suggestion.



The vagaries of undesirable, tender-footed others elide debate surrounding performance, masculinity, and the limitations of social convention. As such, the tactic of *Scouting For Boys*' incredibly detailed taxonomy of the successful soldier and Scout's physique, incredibly, indicates a blind spot in his concept of masculinity. This blindness is similar to the inherently conflicted, fluid and mutable nature of the subject as suggested by Goffman, Butler, and West and Zimmerman.

Baden-Powell writes that each Scout should know by heart his catalogue of bodily measurements. Bizarrely included in a chapter titled "Camp Life," that consists mostly of instructions for building huts and rope bridges, the breakdown of physical measurements includes "Nail joint of forefinger, or breadth of thumb," "Span of thumb and forefinger," "Span of thumb and little finger or other finger (This also gives you the length of your foot)," "Wrist to elbow," "Elbow to tip of forefinger," "Middle of kneecap to ground" (131). The table into which Baden-Powell arranges this collection of specific measures of manliness is augmented by "the average man's measure." Not to stop at measuring pieces of the body, this section also lists the measure of a man's pace, average pulsation of his heart, and the time it takes to stride a mile ("16 minutes" while fast walking). Explicitly invoking the "average man" in this detailed breakdown, Baden-Powell suggests bodily conventions as an ironic form of self-knowledge. The comparison with this "average man" constructs a performative structure of bodily identifications; the list functions as a key to piecing together the puzzle of the masculine body, with its many discrete units demonstrating socially readable signals of "average" British manliness. Rome fell, according to Baden-Powell, because "the soldiers fell away from the standard of their forefathers in bodily strength" (184). These standards are

measured in mathematical manners, quantifying masculinity. Baden-Powell proceeds to compare the average measurement of the contemporary British man with his forefathers, linking the decline of the military forces with the shift in measurements. For example: “in 1900 forty-four men in every thousand recruits weighed under 7st. 12lbs.; in 1905 this deficiency had increased to seventy-six per thousand” (184) (the relationship between Rome and Britain is addressed in the following chapter). The measurements of the body are directly correlated with the quality of the man, which is directly correlated with the nation’s health and success. Baden-Powell is giving the Scout the proper masculine measurements. If Butler’s notion of the performative hinges on the compulsive reiteration of norms and repetition, then this section of the text establishes a mark towards which the material of the Scout’s body must continually approximate. Butler asks, “Is materiality a site or surface that is excluded from the process of construction, as that through which and on which construction works?” (*Bodies* 28), and in his taxonomy of the healthy masculine body, Baden-Powell sets a template for self-construction. Performance must approximate a social or cultural norm, and Baden-Powell’s strict bodily norms are an appropriate example of this insidious body fascism at work. Like the uniform, which is also broken down into a complex system of interlocking, semiotic signals, the body’s textual nature—to be read and interpreted—is a source of both relief and anxiety. The near obsessive cataloguing of bodily dimensions is performative in a similar manner to the “Details of People” chapter in that it presents an explicit template of the perfect soldier/citizen/man, while simultaneously linking the lack of these qualities with the fall of an empire. The difference between these two sections lies in the fact that the focus shifts from a very vague, broad-stroke assessment of the general populace, to a



concentration on the minutiae of the Scouts' bodies. In employing such a scope, Baden-Powell sets the standard of the Scout as the standard for the nation.

Measurements alter as the body adjusts during adolescence and early adulthood, and once set, are theoretically unchangeable. Why, then does this section of *Scouting For Boys* suggest a rigorous performative framework? The performance suggested by Baden-Powell's dissection of bodily dimensions is similar yet counter to the performance prompted by the details of the other: these dimensions are both a goal of growth and a standard by which inclusion among the ranks is to be judged. There is a bodily standard presented as proof of proper masculinity, and if one does not measure up, then he can always join the Scouts to learn how to condition his body to live up to these standards. The physical and psychological are melded together to become one element. The ideal soldier-citizen is to measure up to the standards of the text, and the bodily dimensions are no exception, for the body of said subject is joined with the health and wealth of the British Empire, a link that will be further outlined shortly.

The fact that the Scout's body is dissected and ordered in such an obsessive manner is indicative of Baden-Powell's anxiety regarding the state of British masculinity, which is the foundation of the text's pervasively performative core. This table of measurements is also suggestive of an anxiety over the male body or the concept of masculinity in any kind of abstract or theoretical way of thinking; the tight focus on mathematical measurements as essential quantifications of masculinity is paranoiac in its avoidance of proposing even a modestly metaphysical measurement of such a complex idea. In *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (1995), James Eli Adams suggests that in the Victorian era, "the properly ordered male body functions as a



ground of authority opposed to the claims of abstract rationality—whether it be political economy[...] or philosophical reflection, generally” (153). Both the “Details of People” section of the text as well as the cataloguing of the ideal dimensions of the body—which every Scout must know—reflects this aspect of Baden-Powell's authority and philosophy. The grand generalizations combined with microscopic taxonomies of the body reveal that one of the sources of the text's anxiety, and also one of catalysts of its performativity, is an inability—or perhaps refusal—to deal with the philosophical and theoretical dimensions of the masculine subject. Although completely fixated on the concept of either failed or successful embodiments of masculinity, Baden-Powell uses tables and catalogues as the primary means by which to avoid addressing the question of changing or mutable identity/identities. Such a direct, yet elusive tactic motivates the performative nature of the movement, since it suggests with pinpoint specificity a certain ideal; this specificity then acts as a form of disavowal, especially in light of the text's other bodily regimes, motifs, and reading practices. Performance is the repeated approximation of an ideal that may or may not be realistic, and in this instance a behavioural regime has explicitly stated not just psychological, but physical ideals and exists solely to reinforce those ideals. The man, and therefore the quality of masculinity, is reduced to a singular set of characteristics, traits that can be observed in a detached and scientific manner. Rather than suggesting one interpretation of an ideal, the “average” is used as an inarguable, natural core. The taxonomy immediately deadens any dialogue or argument, and readily avoids such debate by dwelling on compartmentalized, mathematical segments of the body. The precision of Baden-Powell's measurement scheme underlines the fear of the perversion of the national body through the body of its boys, both of which

this text seeks to weld together in a bid to make the Scout's body a mirror of the nation's health and prosperity.

The avoidance of abstract conceptualizations of a man foregrounds the perversion anxiety as well as the assumption of naturalized male ideals. Averaged measurements of the space between fingers, or the length of a man's pace, require little to no theorization concerning what a British man *is* or *should be*. Baden-Powell's catalogue speaks of and to the British everyman, yet refuses to engage in dialogue or philosophical theorization on just whom or what this everyman is. Such refusal indicates a reliance on what Peter Schwenger (1979) labels "the masculine mode" (621). Schwenger argues that such conservative concepts of gender identity imply that

to think about masculinity is to become less masculine oneself. For one of the most powerful archetypes of manhood is the idea that the real man is the one who acts, rather than the one who contemplates. The real man thinks of practical matters rather than abstract ones and certainly does not brood upon himself or the nature of his sexuality. To think about himself would be to split and turn inward the confident wholeness which is the badge of masculinity.<sup>12</sup> And to consider his own sexuality at any length would be to admit that his maleness can be questioned, can be revised, and, to a large degree, has been

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<sup>12</sup> "Badge" is appropriate terminology in the case of this thesis, since the Scout's badge is literally his badge of masculinity.



created rather than existing naturally and irresistibly as real  
virility is supposed to. (632)

Schwenger's articulation of the masculine mode highlights the general anxieties that motivated the construction of *Scouting For Boys*, and lends credence to Judith Butler's suggestion that, in terms of the relationship between social conventions and performativity, what is understood as artificial or constructed with great thought and consideration is devalued or considered false (Butler xi). The text, as the analysis of the description of the body's components suggests, connects the subject with its identity in such a way that body and character are not only flattened into one psycho-physiological entity, but dissected in such a way as to suggest that the everyman is composed of a 17 inch cubit, is 18 inches from kneecap to ground, and is able to stride at a pace of about 2.5 feet. The body's dimensions are fetishized to deflect attention away from the psychological, abstract, immeasurable, and perhaps unknowable, components of the subject's identity. Manliness is not an abstract philosophical concept to Baden-Powell: it is measurable and scientific. If the body and behaviour fit the measurements, then that body is a proper man. Further, turning the body from a complex social/physical/philosophical nexus into an easily constructed automaton drains the male subject—especially the Scouts and their leaders—of any sexuality. Baden-Powell reduces the body to a collection of pieces, a mechanism that is without any internal contradictions, desires, or even complexities. Put simply, to ponder the nature of masculinity as anything more than a biologically-determined, measurable object would be for the framework of Baden-Powell's text and ideology to cave in on itself. The body is one with the masculine subject, and *Scouting For Boys*—particularly in the cataloging



section—robs that subject of his subjectivity. The Scout is merely a brick in the wall, after all, a brick who cannot ponder his identity or purpose: the body of Britain depends upon this dutiful obedience to militaristic, patriotic soldier-producing programs.

### **Your Body is Your Nation: The Scout's Embodiment of Britain**

The chapter "Endurance For Scouts" begins with an interesting and revealing note that reinforces this conflation of subject with body and body with national health and prosperity. Baden-Powell explains that "one cause which contributed to the downfall of the Roman Empire was the fact that the soldiers fell away from the standard of their forefathers in bodily strength. [...] This year our recruits were two inches below the standard height of men of their age, viz., eighteen to nineteen, and six pounds under the average weight" (208). Such an analysis might be harmless were it not for the conflation of body and nation in Baden-Powell's ideology. The Roman Empire opens the chapter neither incidentally nor without serious performative implications. The parallels between Empires, Rome and Britain, impress upon the young men of Britain the serious threat facing the nation in the new century: danger does not come from without, as expected, but from within, in the form of their very own pitifully sub-standard bodily measurements. This passage is not meant to judge their inherent or potential abilities on the battlefield or in politics, but to state that without a system such as *Scouting For Boys*, the British nation will fall as did Rome. The desperate and hyperbolic tone of this comparison lends weight to the commanding tone of the text, commands and demands that shape the front of the performance. One's duty as a Scout—his most critical

characteristic—is to embody the tradition of fleshly characteristics for the benefit of the nation, and by extension, the globe. Social norms and power relations are two axes in this text for which the body of the Scout is responsible. These axes do not allow for a proliferation of masculinities, or conflicting identifications within a single subject.

Baden-Powell sets up an entrenched binary of Scout (good)/tenderfoot (bad), and such hyperbolic tactics suggest that he knows his scheme of subject-formation will produce but only one of many possible masculinities. Dressing a young man in the official Scouting uniform, with all its regal adornments, won't craft a truly coherent and effective front if the Scout's body is frail and unimpressive.

The complexity of the relationship between the body and *Scouting For Boys*' suggestions of bodily dimensions is difficult to measure. Baden-Powell does not ruminate over the connection himself, since masculinity is something that simply exists, rather than something that one approaches, constructs, or debates. As Butler suggests, masculinity may be something that is temporal, where an ideal exists that cannot be accomplished entirely, but remains a standard towards which one acts and perceives others. These regularly referenced standards that function as bodily/social conventions possess a certain gravitational pull. The invocation of a standard of the male body in conjunction with the body/nation conflation constructs a prison of self-image that the Scout, on threat of ostracism, must move toward. This movement, however, cannot be overtly discernible as *theatre*, for the rubric of masculine perfection suggested by *Scouting For Boys* requires this embodiment to be *natural*. One is urged to “develope [sic] himself” (192) after all, to not become a Boy Scout in drag, even though this is



exactly the ironic subtext of the ideology, which is clearly and perpetually at odds with its own methodology.

While Baden-Powell advocates a mode of masculinity that he is unable to perceive as anything other than intrinsic—one either possesses a core masculinity or one doesn't—those who are not immediately and recognizably endowed with these qualities quite often have the potential to “develope” them should they lie buried beneath learned laziness. It is the development of the body through rigorous discipline that differentiates the Scout from the tenderfoot or waster, and which most blatantly embodies the anxieties heretofore examined, as well as the performative frameworks. The “distinctive regime of bodily discipline” (Pryke 22) that Baden-Powell develops in *Scouting For Boys* betrays its own faith in the essential nature of gendered identity and characteristics by suggesting that although the self is flattened against the body, both are malleable and possessed of an exploitable potential for redirection. There are tenderfoot boys and there are wasters, who are diametrically opposed to the Scout. The difference between these two broad categories of young man exists perhaps only in the gaps and blind spots of *Scouting For Boys*' logical and rhetorical acrobatics. The idealized masculinity of the Scout is inherent in his very biology, but may be dulled by the bad habits that develop from social pressures and lack of direction or discipline. This sort of youth, the type who can be salvaged and moulded through the application of strict discipline, possesses an inherent and elusive quality, but must have it recognized and harnessed. One element of this bodily discipline that concerns performativity and gender identity is pollutants and impurities, which the discipline of *Scouting For Boys* attempts to expel.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes that performativity is culturally anchored in the fear of pollution, thus necessitating boundaries (168-9), and in Baden-Powell's case, binaries. In his discussion of the body, Baden-Powell is increasingly concerned with bodily pollutants such as drink, drugs, and sickness. Although Baden-Powell argues that pure masculinity is an essential and inherent quality, such pollutants transgress presumably solid physical boundaries and compromise the Scout's masculinity. Such concerns are directly addressed in the text: "there is nothing manly about getting drunk" (239); "if you get sick you are no use as a Scout, and are only a burden to others" (150); "a good Scout trains himself pretty well to do without liquid" (199). These bodily sanctions are key to *Scouting For Boys*' program, and Baden-Powell is deeply involved in policing them. This vigilance reveals the deeply-rooted performative anxiety that undercuts these sanctions. He explains that

if we plant the ambition to learn for himself we are doing a greater work than by attempting to drum into him, an operation which he may only partially consent to. Even if we do, instruction which only produces surface knowledge, leaves little impression on character, and that in the long run is the only thing that counts. (qtd. in Pryke 27)

Obedience to his codes is not enough in *Scouting For Boys*: there must be total internalization, an adherence to an ideology so deep that it cannot be discerned from the character of the boy. The body reflects the boy, who reflects the conventions of masculinity.



Thus the values of the movement are clearly indicated by the text's demands on the young man, but it is in the "Continence" chapter that the performative anxiety of pollution is foregrounded most bizarrely. This section, excised under duress from the original 1908 edition on the grounds that it was much too explicit regarding bodily urges and their prohibition (Baden-Powell 351), is a treatise concerning the physical and mental dangers of not habitual masturbation, but the occurrence of any, even sporadic, onanism. Baden Powell warns that

the practice is called 'self-abuse'. And the result is  
always—mind you, always—that the boy after a time  
becomes weak and nervous and shy, he gets headaches and  
probably palpitation of the heart, and if he still carries on  
too far he very often goes out of his mind and becomes an  
idiot. (351)

Young men, for fear of their own health and sanity, must submit to Scouting's program to avoid such horrors. The imperative and authoritative tone of such pronouncements emphasizes the intermingling of external authority with "self control" that fuels the masculine performance. When fusing these two concepts, Baden-Powell is assured of a more deeply-ingrained sense of discipline and devotion to the ideology than with a boy who merely believes that he should not masturbate in case he may be caught and chastised. This example is exactly the type of taboo that Kathryn Kent argues may undercut the very purpose of the movement. She explains that "in its anxious effort to demarcate 'good' forms of imitation from 'bad' ones, the movement underlines the instability and temporality of all identifications" (113). The entire program of *Scouting*

*For Boys* is based on mimicry of the text's moral codes and of its leaders: a form of Scout drag. This is mimicry in which the act of prohibition not only creates the other, the acts against which the ideal is set, but simultaneously calls attention to its existence. For Baden-Powell, masturbation is a form of pollution that perverts the strong, ideal British boy, but the strength of this taboo is compromised by the potential of the Scout to desire to transgress this admonition.

In such a singular case as the prohibition of onanism, Baden-Powell foregrounds his anxiety and paranoia that the nation's imminent decay will stem from the pollution and perversion of the bodily dimensions and discipline of young boys and men. The acts of defining the masculine ideal and delineating both the proper and improper uses of the flesh ironically propose the performative nature of the Scout. In branding masturbation to be a prime force of corruption and even evil, Baden-Powell ironically highlights the adolescent boy's overwhelming urge to do this. He is not using his authority to prohibit something that is not likely to happen, he is using it to prohibit something that the boys actually want to do very badly. Baden-Powell's unconscious performance theory is seen in his use of hyperbole to mitigate completely natural adolescent desires. The Scout laws, then, outline a set of arguments about what is being compromised, and what must be recovered, ironically through performance: Baden-Powell's ideal man. Baden-Powell's practices of repetitive disciplinary exercises and authoritative textual definitions and disavowals highlight the wish for the young British man to "become what we practice being" (Frye qtd. in West and Zimmerman 33), when in fact the act of becoming is fraught with problems at best, and a transitive, temporal endeavour by definition.



## CONCLUSION

It is a pity that all British boys cannot have the same sort of training before they are allowed to call themselves men—and the training that we are now doing as scouts is intended to fill that want as far as possible.

Robert Baden-Powell (*Scouting* 152)

The continued reprinting of such a singular yet dated cultural artifact over the course of a century—one with numerous social, political, and ideological upheavals—attests to *Scouting For Boys*' significance as something more than an amusing slice of frozen time. The movement outlined in *Scouting For Boys* not only persists but thrives, having recently celebrated the centenary of its foundation (albeit in a much more liberal and undisciplined fashion, one that Baden-Powell would barely recognize<sup>13</sup>). The persistence of the movement, and republications of Baden-Powell's text affirm not only its place in the cultural canon of Britain and North America, but also the necessity of a textual critique that uncovers the latent assumptions about human nature that form the core foundation of this globally-dispersed activity. The understanding of the masculine subject that the movement was founded upon—and the text makes clear its explicit concern with the *problem* of manliness—is bound by a singularity of perception, based on Baden-Powell's own biases and cultural beliefs.

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<sup>13</sup> While it is true that Scouting's continued contemporary significance is due in large part to its movement away from a number of the foundational commandments, an investigation of these changes would be a serious undertaking in itself, and as such, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Even when the performative imperative of the text's exhortations is not directly addressing the topic of masculinity, its roundabout analyses of other topics, from reading signs in the wild to the naming of Scouting bands and troupes, are burdened by an intense anxiety over impure or corrupted identifications. This anxiety, which underscores the entire 400 page text, is its very *raison d'être*. The promotion and consolidation of a very specific idea of British masculinity is a technique that Baden-Powell uses to suppress the classist, sexist and sometimes racist presumptions about the decline of manly qualities in Imperial Britain. Every act of Scouting proposed by the text, every suggestion made about the self, and every skill that is instilled in the Scout bears the burden of Baden-Powell's paranoia about the decay of masculinity. For as much as the skill sets presented in the Scouting manual are presented as tips for wilderness survival and moral living, all the aspects of this system are underscored by the division presented between a Scout and a tenderfoot or a savage (or woman, for that matter). This split, as Baden-Powell compulsively suggests, is indicative more generally of the difference between a "waster" and a proper man. This ultimately performative suppression of the inherent pluralities and contradictions of the modern British subject is enacted via a militaristic devotion to honour and duty, qualities that are explicitly linked to an obedience of Baden-Powell and his approved purveyors of Scouting dogma.

The potential within each individual for mutable and multiple, even contradictory, identifications and tendencies is the bedrock of Goffman and Butler's theoretical stances, and is—ironically—the impetus behind Baden-Powell's use of commanding, dictatorial rhetorical strategies in the text. The semiotically-significant regimentation of the Scout uniform, as well as the aesthetics and mechanics of the male body are reactions to a fear



that the fall of the nation, and its many imperial colonies, was correlated to the health and appearance of the youths of Britain. That masculinity is fused with the nation's health is the subtext of Baden-Powell's entire system—even the most presumably innocuous and benign activity such as learning to erect tents of foliage, or signal in Morse Code are steps toward self and nation building—is a key assumption of the constructs of performativity explored in this thesis.

In her introduction to the Oxford edition of *Scouting For Boys*, Elleke Boehmer suggests that

the argument might in fact be made that *Scouting For Boys* protests too much, too excessively, about masculinity: the need to train it up, the need to preserve it. The frequency and urgency with which 'manliness' is pressed upon British boys, as has been seen, let slip that the masculinity, or strength, of the nation is far from settled or certain. (xxxiv)

Boehmer's note highlights the very mechanics of performativity that are operating within the text, both repeatedly and implicitly. One of the key rhetorical strategies employed here is the use of shaming to divide classes of boys, but this division, according to Baden-Powell's instructional methodology, is able to be transgressed for the good of the Empire. Repeatedly Baden-Powell urges the boy to "develop himself," and this development indicates that he believes that on some level, growth and change are possible and necessary. If a tenderfoot could not conceivably discipline himself to become a Scout, then the instructional content of *Scouting For Boys* would be worthless. Performativity's

key locus is within and around such fissures, where internal states and external pressures collide or coalesce. This is the impetus for the excessive use of semiotic-rich uniforms to tangibly highlight and contour the limits of proper British masculinity, and for the obsessive breakdown and cataloguing of the Scout's body as an avatar of national health, both of which are exploited by Baden-Powell but can also potentially undermine his cause. Scouting is an unwitting yet superb example of performance theories, which underlies the anxiety present in *Scouting For Boys*.

As Boehmer and other critics have noted, the text is burdened with fear over the state of masculinity in Britain. I have argued that even in the apparent gaps in the text, where stretches of instructional diegesis have little overt concern for gender roles, the nation-body anxiety exists. Baden-Powell's prescription for this anxiety is a form of manliness that is healing balm and imperial antidote. These gaps in the text, in combination with the superficial, singular treatment of the notion of masculinity by Baden-Powell, emphasize that the performative element of identity-formation—the mutability and potential for plurality and inconsistency—is both exploited and disavowed. The very heart of the movement's success depends upon the potential of each subject for direction, and yet the naturalization of gender characteristics, their reduction to inherent, predetermined essentialisms, cannot be and is not contested nor theorized in any manner. James Adams notes in *Dandies and Desert Saints* that “the properly ordered [Victorian] male body functions as a ground of authority opposed to the claims of abstract rationality—whether it be political economy, Tracterian theology, or philosophical reflection generally” (153). The peculiarity of Baden-Powell's manual is that for a text so fixated on the manifestations of masculinity, Baden-Powell does not



actively engage with the concept. By naturalizing masculinity, it is rendered both immutable and concrete: something that *is*. The narrative voice of the text itself, according to Adams, assumes the uncritical stance that characterizes the masculinity that it is instilling in its target audience: the performative function manifesting itself at the levels of both instructional content and discourse itself.

The precision with which Baden-Powell regiments the use of the clothing and body of the Scout not only encourages the particularly Butlerian conception of performance, but attempts—discursively—to flatten the body and the individual's identification into the same surface, and in doing so transforms the slippery, problematic issue of masculinity into an element of the self that is clearly sign-posted with unambiguous, empirically measurable tells. The guidelines for “good citizenship” that constitute the core of the text support the suggestion that they are performative by the nature of the movement itself. As Kathryn Kent has noted, the primary discursive mode of the Scouting texts and movements is one of recruitment and the constant reinforcement of the guidelines by self monitoring and surveillance of others to maintain the coherence of a group front. These modes necessarily entail the possibility for pluralities, and shifting identifications; the outlines proposed by Baden-Powell are aspirations toward which the British boy must struggle, in spite of the text's own naturalization of these “manly” qualities. The irony produced by Baden-Powell's reliance on a pseudo-scientific, mathematical taxonomy of material signifiers attached to both clothing and the flesh of the British youths is that the distance he places between theoretical considerations of masculinity and his practical consideration of this element reveal the inherent contradictions of individual identities.

The intensely close reading of the body and uniform's signifiers, paired with the shame-inducing rhetorical labeling practices, establishes a binary social system wherein the core disavowal of the ideology—the rejection of the feminized, urban dwelling, often poverty-stricken man—also establishes the parameters of performance and in fact allows for the recognition of an other. By merely existing, the tenderfoot simultaneously validates the Scouting credo (they are the identification against which the scout is to measure what he is not), and invalidates the core assumption of Baden-Powell's program (that masculinity is an inherent and natural set of specific, measurable traits). This oppositional disavowal of undesirable others, which is the catalyst of the text's ideology, validates the performance frameworks suggested by Goffman, Butler and others by illustrating that Baden-Powell's very own ideological methodologies, to which he devoted his life and energies, concurrently undercut those same ideologies, weakening the already problematic and outmoded perceptions of the self and subject formation.



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