

**From Boys to Men: Rhetorics of Emergent American Masculinity**, by Leigh Ann Jones. Urbana: NCTE, 2016. 147 pp.

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Despite much research and scholarship over the past two decades in the interdisciplinary field of masculinity studies, rhetoric and composition scholars have been slow to examine the ways in which language and symbol use invite participation in the social construction of masculinity and what possibilities open up for the teaching of writing as a result. Addressing this need, Leigh Ann Jones's *From Boys to Men: Rhetorics of Emergent American Masculinity* presents three historical case studies and a composition course design that explore the rhetorics of male youth organizations. Drawing on gender theory, nationalism studies, and constitutive rhetoric, Jones argues that mainstream male-dominated organizations in twentieth-century American society have presented boys as a metonym for Americans and crafted the transformation from boyhood to manhood in such a way that stabilizes hegemonic American manhood. Jones points to organizations whose members are in their formative years because rhetoric about the "process of moving from boy to man . . . is perhaps the most fundamental element of representations of masculinity in the United States" (2). Indeed, rhetoric about *becoming* a man can often be more revealing than rhetoric about *being* a man. Some methodological problems notwithstanding, Jones' book makes a groundbreaking contribution to the field of gendered rhetorics and extends constitutive rhetoric in an important new direction.

Building on the scholarship of Robert Connors, Luke Winslow, James V. Catano, and Lindsay Green McManus, Jones argues persuasively in chapter one for the study of masculine rhetorics, particularly through the lenses of Kenneth Burke's pentad and Maurice Charland's constitutive rhetoric. Linguistic, symbolic, and embodied acts that perform (and thus, construct) masculinity not only encourage feelings of group identification but also constitute what Michael Billig calls "banal nationalism," which he defines as "not a flag . . . being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" (qtd. in Jones 16). The masculine rhetorics used by the subjects of Jones's case studies—the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) in the early years of the twentieth century, the Sigma Chi (SC) fraternity in the 1960s and 1980s, and the U.S. army between 2001 and 2006—used identity appeals and embodied acts to hail boys and teenagers into a liminal state between boyhood and manhood. This transformative state is used "as an attempt to reconcile the ambiguities that arise in the process of constituting male identity" (5). While Jones offers minimal explanation for choosing the particular organizations and

texts that are subjects of her case studies, it is clear these organizations often promoted an image of American manhood as straight, white, Christian, and middleclass, despite varying degrees of racial, religious, and economic diversity in their memberships.

Amidst vast cultural and demographic shifts in turn-of-the-century American society, Jones argues in chapter two—perhaps the most cohesive of the three case studies—that the BSA rhetorically reinforced American hegemonic masculinity in both textual and visual ways. Jones defines hegemonic masculinity, in accordance with gender theorist R. W. Connell, as a way of doing gender that privileges men and maintains their power over women and over those who embody alternative masculinities (21). Founded in 1910 by William D. Boyce, the BSA shored up white masculinity by presenting scouting as comprehensive citizenship training for developing boys. Influenced by the British boy scouts, formed two years prior, and by President Theodore Roosevelt, the BSA emphasized physical conditioning, character building, and militarism. To support her claims, Jones consults the BSA oath, the organization’s motto (“Be Prepared”), scout law, scout uniforms, badge-earning rituals, and the 1908 scouting handbook, *Scouting for Boys*, which tells the origin myth of Boyce getting lost in a fog during a visit to London when a British boy scout suddenly appears, calmly helps Boyce find his destination, and then, just as suddenly, disappears. Jones highlights the ambiguities in the early years of the BSA, particularly a debate in scouting magazines about whether scouts should be taught to use firearms (52-54).

Jones then turns our attention to fraternities. Chapter three examines the rhetoric of becoming and exclusivity embodied in the SC house at Columbia University, focusing specifically on the fraternity’s handbook, *The Norman Shield*. This handbook describes the importance of—but not the details of—an initiation ritual and emphasizes ideals or “god terms” such as brotherhood, tradition, merit, and democracy. Much like BSA’s handbook, *The Norman Shield* tells the story of SC’s origins: In 1854, six members of Miami University’s Delta Kappa Epsilon broke with that fraternity over a disagreement of principles and formed SC. Because of the parallels between the forming of SC and the American Revolution, writes Jones, “Sigma Chi . . . is a scene of firmly held principles that echo the deepest-held principles of American national identity” (78). To see these principles in conflict with racial and gender equality, Jones highlights significant debates in the fraternity’s history, specifically the 1960s when civil rights supporters criticized SC in the campus newspaper for being racially discriminatory in its membership, and the 1980s when a student group advocated desegregating Greek life by gender. Members of the student group argued that single-sex fraternities created what we would call today a “rape culture” and SC countered with vague ideals about tradition.

Although in many ways the chapter was richly compelling, I felt its analysis would have been stronger had Jones used the editions of *The Norman Shield* contemporaneous with the controversies in the 1960s and 1980s, rather than using a more recent edition of this text.

The final case study presented in chapter four is of the U.S. army's "Army of One" campaign, which, Jones writes, relied primarily on before-and-after images of new recruits (i.e., directionless high school graduates) and experienced soldiers, embodying American manhood, to present the army experience as transformative. Jones extensively analyzes the visual and textual rhetoric of two brochures produced by this campaign to highlight its appeal to individualism and self-actualization (90-100). While somewhat persuasive during peacetime, the "Army of One" messaging became increasingly problematic during the ramp up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The army attempted to mitigate the individualism of the campaign with a rewriting of the "Soldier's Creed," which Jones analyzes closely, to include references to more wartime camaraderie and the addition of four lines called the "Warrior Ethos Statement" (100-4). Ultimately, the "Army of One" campaign failed to produce strong widespread identification and, Jones suggests, Americans came to see soldiers' individuality less in terms of self-actualization and life-meaning and more in the context of nightly news reports about casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan (108-9).

In chapter five, Jones relocates the reader away from a London fog, the fraternity house, and the battlefield and into the writing classroom where she advocates writing teachers explore with students the function and appeal of organizations like the BSA, fraternities, and the US army. When exploring these issues with students, Jones writes, "the most useful pedagogical approach we can take is to engage students in an understanding of why such organizations, myths, recruiting tactics, and creeds appeal to so many of us and how they fit into a historical context" (112). The remainder of chapter five comprises an overview of a course Jones teaches titled "The Rhetoric of Emergent Masculinity in American Youth Organizations." Jones provides the theoretical lens, readings, learning goals, means of assessment, and a condensed sample syllabus of this upper-division course, and likewise suggests how the syllabus might be modified for graduate student and fyw audiences.

The book concludes by suggesting avenues for further research on masculinity, nationalism, and constitutive rhetoric. Specifically, more work should be conducted on other male youth organizations like the YMCA, the Civil Air Patrol, and so on, as well as organizations whose male memberships are aging. Such research, she argues, should answer questions such as "how do organizations like the Freemasons, the Knights of Columbus, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and other[s] . . . negotiate members' aging as a part of masculine identity?" (123). Finally, Jones suggests that subsequent research ought

to focus on organizations that target men who identify with alternative and non-hegemonic masculinities and on the ways in which women and girls respond to, and resist, male youth organization rhetorics.

As a graduate instructor who has been teaching an intermediate composition course themed around masculinity studies for a couple of years, I can appreciate the interdisciplinary approach and Trump-era timeliness of *From Boys to Men*. Engaging college students about how they are positioned and shaped by the rhetorics of masculinity can lead to productive, meaningful discussions and writing. Students can engage specifically with the rhetorics of fraternities, for example, and generally with those of the “residue of at least a century and a half of dominant white masculinity in this country . . . [which has] always asserted itself most strongly as a response to fear,” as Jones said in her *Studies in Writing and Rhetoric* interview, recorded one week after the 2016 presidential election (“SWR Interview”). Despite Jones’s emphasis on student gains—which I find to be a strength of the book—I was disappointed with the lack of discussion of student work, or a substantive explanation of how Jones has modified her syllabus (117-19) for different levels, or how it might be modified for different institutional contexts. Nevertheless, the book’s limitations and strengths speak to the dual need for, and the promise of, more historical case studies of masculine rhetorics and more explorations of masculinity/ies in readings, classroom discussions, writing assignments, and pedagogical strategies.

Overall, this book demonstrates the persuasiveness and pervasiveness of rhetorics that constitute boys and young men as hegemonic men-to-be. Masculinity and national identity are often imbricated in rhetorics we and our students observe in big events, such as presidential campaigns, and banal rituals like wearing Greek letters. Jones attunes us to the rhetorical power of emergent masculinity and the need to examine it alongside our students. I primarily recommend *From Boys to Men* to any writing teacher who incorporates gender analysis into their course design, and secondarily to writing teachers using Burkean or constitutive rhetoric. Ultimately, Jones offers writing and rhetoric teachers historical context for many masculine rhetorics of identification that persist today in the lives of our students and cause for using the classroom as a space to facilitate intervention in those rhetorics.

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