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Representations of Gender in Scouting and *Lumberjanes*

Ever since scouting was established in the first decade of the twentieth century, scouting has made an impactful presence in popular culture including literature, movies, and comic strips. Their presence in these creative expressions has often reflected the ideals of the American population of the time. This can be seen in many movies in which a group of scouts comes to the rescue, saving the day like the film *Scouts to the Rescue* in which a group of scouts go on a mission to rescue an abducted baby. These popular culture depictions of both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts contributed to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes that were enforced by the activities and missions of the Boy and Girl Scouts exemplifying the ethos and ideals of the American standard. This was reflected in various ways including the activities prescribed to each gender and the way certain books were marketed to appeal to, or forced upon each gender separately. Boys were likely to be encouraged to be independent and self sufficient whereas girls were expected to work as a group and not individualized, an expectation that appears in popular culture scouting. This includes *Lumberjanes*, a comic series which focuses on a group of female scouts, which reflects the change in culture and gender in literature and the scouting organizations while embracing the tradition of scouting in popular culture and reframing the cultural standards including a changing perspective of what should be feminine and/or masculine. The scouting movement and scouting literature historically were used to educate children of both genders on the expectations of them as when they grew up; for boys, an emphasis on hyper-masculinity, for girls, a focus on being a good wife and mother. The modern *Lumberjanes* borrows ideas from the tradition of scouting organizations teaching children about gender and their role in society and adapts the tradition to include expanded opportunities for all

genders and gender fluid identities. *Lumberjanes* also celebrates the undocumented cultural history that is a large part of what it means to be a scout.

The original Girl Scouts were intended to encourage young girls to be courageous and independent. For the past hundred years, the Girl Scout's "singular mission" has been to "inspire girls to improve the world around them" (*Celebration*, 19). During World War 1, Girl Scouts mobilized to serve in "Wake Up, America" rallies, sold treasury bonds, rolled bandages, taught food conservation efforts and sold cookies to help the war effort, all examples of the Girl Scouts community spirit and patriotism. Although this originally mission has largely remained the same in the past century, the basic laws of Girl Scouts- and Boy Scouts- have changed. The Girl Scout Laws from 1917, five years after the inception of Girl Scouts, were about trustworthiness, loyalty, helpfulness, friendliness, courtesy, kindness, obedience, cheerfulness, purity and thrift. Interestingly, the Boy Scout Laws from 1911 were nearly the same with the exception of purity and the addition of reverence and bravery. The wording is similar between the two organizations but not identical. For example, under the "a scout must be cheerful" law, Girl Scouts are instructed to "never grumble at hardships, nor whine at each other nor frown when put out. A scout goes about with a smile and singing. It cheers her and others, especially in times of danger" where as the boys are instructed to "smile whenever he can. His obedience to orders is prompt and cheery. He never shirks nor grumbles at hardships." The differences between these two laws is subtle but it seems that the Girl Scouts are being encouraged to be cheerful for the benefit of others compared to the Boy Scouts who are told to be cheerful because compliance to order is part of being a scout and complaining is not befitting. The contrast in doing something for the benefit of others instead of doing it for the benefit of the self (developing a strong work ethic) are important because they have gendered influences on the male and female scouts that instruct how

they are to act in society: “Developmental theories explain that children learn gender expectations to help them to respond appropriately within their social environment. This influences their understanding of who they are and encourages them to behave in a way that is conventional for their gender” (Underrepresentation in STEM). Performing gendered expectations for children through scouts and literature limits the young participants or readers to performing within their gendered expectations. Social Cognitive Theory rooted in psychology analyzes attempts to explain that part of an individual psychological processes are influenced by social interactions one has as a child, including “socially shared activities in which children participate... and how this participation leads to the development of certain aspects of individual human cognition” (Apprenticeship). In her argument, Barbara Rogoff explains that children are not active agents in creating their identity and that children undergo an “apprenticeship” that teaches them emotional and social skills that they will eventually learn to do on their own. She also makes the distinction that children are not only receptacles for adults to pour information into, but active learners, growing individually as well. In regards to scouting, social cognitive theory can be observed in activities offered to scouts. By gendering camp activities and badges, limiting kids of either gender to a prescribed list of socially shared activities, scouts are limiting the scouts to one way of developing their individual cognition.

The original Girl Scouts discussed “careers, nature, first aid, and team sports such as basketball” (*Celebration*, 20). Although this sounds promising and progressive, the female scouts were not always taught in standards that would fit in with modern feminism. In the handbook *How Girl Can Help Their Country*, Juliet Gordon Low, founder of the American Girl Scouts writes:

“girls and women [have a] peculiar power and responsibility, for no Girl Scout or other honorable women... could use her influence as a women except to strengthen the characters and to support the honor of the men and boys with whom she comes into contact”

In a following section titled *Help Their Country: Employment*, the scouts are instructed to “stick to it! Professions of nursing, teaching, stenography, and type writing and clerking... are many occupations for women.” Granted, the early 19th century was not a time that encouraged women’s societal advancement, but even still, scouting was meant to “develop womanly qualities in girls”, not to “subvert gender norms” (Striking Camp, 71). For example, to earn the rank of first class scout, girls must “know how to set a table properly for breakfast, dinner and supper... Must be able to dress and bathe a child two years old or younger... must know the simple laws of sanitation...” in addition to various other tasks. To earn the Golden Eaglette award, which was the equivalent of today’s Gold Award, the highest award that can be earned in Girl Scouts, a girl must have achieved the Ambulance, Clerk, Cook, Child-nurse, Dairy Maid, Matron, Musician, Needle-women, Naturalist, Sick-nurse, Pathfinder, Pioneer, Signaler, Swimmer, Athletics, Heath or Civics, but not the Aviation, Automobile, Electricity, or Marksmanship merit badges which are arguably the more masculine gendered badges. The Boy Scouts equivalent of the Gold Award is called the Eagle Award and was founded in 1912 as the highest award above the Life and Star Scout awards. The original Eagle Award has evolved since it was first created, now requiring scouts to hold a leadership position within their troop for six months, participate in a scoutmaster conference and successfully plan and execute a service project that engages other scouts in service in addition to earning twenty one merit badges with thirteen specifically required. The original Eagle Scout was completed after a scout earned a

specific set of badges which included Camping, Cooking, Swimming, Business, Firemanship, Poultry Farming, Chemistry, Conservation, Ornithology, Angling, Handicraft, and Music. The original Eagle Award requirements were more oriented towards outdoor activities, bird study, farming, camping etc. and scientific pursuits compared to the original Golden Eaglette that focused almost entirely on domestic skills like needle working and basic nursing. Today's Gold Award does not include earning badges but instead requires girls to complete a Journey before beginning their gold award which is a smaller service project designed to foster leadership and organizational skills before carrying out a larger Gold Award project that will benefit the community in some way.

However, the scouts have been constantly evolving organizations for many decades. Since the original set of Girl Scout Laws that were composed in 1912, there have been four different variations. Today's version reads:

I will do my best to be
Honest and fair.
Friendly and helpful,
Considerate and caring,
Courageous and strong, and
Responsible for what I say and do
And to
Respect myself and others,
Respect authority,
Use resources wisely,
Make the world a better place,
And be a sister to every Girl Scout.

Compared with the original laws, today's Girl Scout Laws place less of an emphasis on a girl's purity and innocence and more of an emphasis on encouraging leadership traits for young girls. The differences between the original Girl Scout Laws and today's and the differences between the Boy Scout and Girl Scout Laws are important to understanding the significance of

the Scouts as a form of education or socialization because original scouting “materials reinforce... for both boys and girls, a subordinate role for girls in our schools and society” (Baily in *Gender in Context*). Socialization goes beyond scouting manuals and into scout based texts, including *Lumberjanes* however, the Lumberjane’s pledge is more similar to today’s Girl Scout Laws than the original Laws reading:

I solemnly swear to do my best
 Every day, and in all that I do
 To be brave and strong,
 To be truthful and compassionate,
 To be interesting and interested,
 To pay attention and question
 The world around me,
 To think of others first,
 To always help and protect my friends,
 [redacted]
 And to make the world a better place
 For Lumberjane scouts
 And for everyone else.

Scouting in popular culture serves as a way to educate young individuals not only about their role in society but also about gender expectations, because those involved in scouts are often held in high regard as examples of what children should aspire to. *Lumberjanes* works within this tradition of promoting a positive role model for young children but also reflects an evolving and modern views on childhood and gender and non-binary genders which includes placing equal emphasis on leadership and strength in all organizations.

In *Lumberjanes*, the characters themselves demonstrate the modern values and feminist ideas to young girls because they are five, strong yet distinct female characters. Mal, Molly, Ripley, Jo and April have their own personalities, their own strengths and contributions to the group dynamic. These character represent a “visual gamut of possible gender expressions, from the exceedingly androgynous, to non-binary... to the outwardly cis-gendered” (Striking Camp,

76). *Lumberjanes* is “dedicated both narratively and structurally to avoiding gender binarism”. This can be seen in the diversity of the main group of characters in addition to the lack of uniforms in the comic books: uniforms being a staple in other pop culture representations of scouting. This break from cultural tradition exemplifies the variations of femininity- in previous examples of scouting “Girl Scouts... tend to be interchangeable; their power is as a mob” (Striking Camp, 76). In the *Lumberjane* comics, the roles are reversed from typical scouting literature in that the girls have individualized outfits and the Scouting Lads are all neatly in uniform. Interestingly, the reversals are not limited to their appearances and general interests: In the 1917 edition of the Ambulance badge, knowing how to cure poison ivy is one of five needed skills to earn the badge. However, the *Lumberjanes* contract poison ivy and the girls have no idea how to cure their poison ivy. It is the Scouting Lads that have the know how to get rid of the girl’s poison ivy. This is interesting because it re-genders one of the basic requirements of being a Girl Scout in the 1910’s, the boys are coming to the rescue, similar to early male scouting novels. However, they “rescue” the girls domestically, an attribute typically assigned to female scouts.

Although the five main characters are portrayed as individuals, they may also perpetuate a stereotype that holds girls and women back from their true potential. The number of female characters in literature increased from 1930 to 1970 but as the volume of female characters increased, so did the magnitude of the harmful feminine stereotypes. Even since 1970, the proportion of male to female characters has improved but is still disproportionate. With an increase in the amount of female characters, females are significantly less likely to appear alone, always portrayed with a group. “Appearing alone is a marker of independence and autonomy, whereas appearing in groups is thought to convey dependency, a stereotypical marker of

traditional femininity” (Denny, 29). The *Lumberjanes* frequently rely on each other and consult the others in order to achieve their goals. For example, April was the one with the foresight to write down the clue of “beware the kitten holy” but it was Molly that was able to solve the riddle by ripping up the pieces of paper to spell out “*in the tower by the lake*” (Chapter 3). It can be argued that this collaboration encourages teamwork and positive interactions with other people, it does not encourage the female readers to be independent and decisive on their own. “Providing girls with proportionally more others-oriented and artistic activities than self-oriented and scientific activities is an example of the communication or a version of traditional femininity” (Denny, 42). The encouraging of female scouts to participate and achieve as a group can be seen in both actual Girl Scout badges and the fictionalized badges of the *Lumberjanes*. Thirty percent of Girl Scout badges involve some sort of group involvement activity in order to complete the badge. Boy Scouts on the other hand, have seventeen percent of their badges involving a direct recommendation to complete the badge as a group (Denny, 36).

In *Lumberjanes*, the first badge the girls earn, the Up All Night Badge, has specific instructions: “to obtain the Up All Night badge, a Lumberjane must have enjoyed the sunset on a cool crisp afternoon with a group of cherished friends” (Chapter 1). However, this is not how the girls achieve the badge. *Lumberjanes* includes the ideas of female kinship and the idea of serenity as desirable in the badge book, but ultimately covers up these requirements with photos of their adventures they go on while achieving each given badge. The group of five finding alternative ways to achieve the Up All Night Badge, mirrors the alternative way that scouting is represented in *Lumberjanes*. *Lumberjanes*, therefore, represent the current state of Girl Scouts in the representation of the pledge and the badges offered to the scouts, but also represents the non-institutionalized side of Girl Scout culture represented by the inclusion of the *Lumberjanes* rules

and handbook, and the scrapbooking of the handbook with the polaroid's represent the non-institutionalized culture of Girl Scouts and Lumberjane Scouts that is just as much a part of Scouts as the rules and badge earning.

Something that remains constant among the original Girl Scouts, today's Girl Scouts and the *Lumberjanes* is the "try attitude". Today's Girl Scout Promise starts out with "On my honor, I will try..." The *Lumberjanes* pledge starts "I solemnly swear to do my best..." The importance of these word choices is that it encourages a "try" attitude instead of an "achieve" attitude. The first line of the *Lumberjanes* pledge is mirrored from the Boy Scout Oath: "On my honor, I will do my best..." However, the Lumberjane characters do not, in my opinion have a try or an achieving attitude. Through out the first installment of the comic series, the badges that the girls earn are mostly earned on accident. This suggest to me that they aren't 'trying' to achieve anything specifically, the badges are just a coincidental perk for their adventures. This does not fit with the Girl Scout motto of "Be Prepared". This suggests a lack of goal orientation and ambition within the female characters. For example, when the girls went their first overnight adventure, the girls did not intend to earn the Up All Night badge, it came as an afterthought from Rosie after the completed the requirements. When April makes a "tipping" joke when warning Jo about not tipping the boat over, Jen awards April saying; "Congratulations, you've earned the Pungeon Master Badge" and the badge appears on the page like a coin earned in a video game. The most of the badges are freely awarded, and not given much forethought by the characters. However, this does not stop them from going forth and otherwise applying their knowledge to succeeding in their adventures.

Modern day girl scouts have made strides in providing badges that expand opportunities for girl scouts to achieve. However, they follow niche trends with the intention of making badges

more fun and desirable by using alliteration, word play in the names of badges and the badges themselves looking bright and colorful. As a result, the badges are gendered towards one brand of femininity and excluding some girls who may not prescribe to a specific brand of femininity. For example, Girl Scouts badges are almost twice as likely to include art based projects as boy scouts and the Boy Scouts are three times more likely to have a badge involving a science project which projects that girls are misaligned with scientific pursuits and boys steered away from artistic pursuits (Denny, 36). Additionally, the seventy three percent of Girl Scouts involve some form of alliteration - like Frosty Fun or Rocks Rock badges but the Boy Scouts have zero percent of their badges labeled with alliteration or wordplay. The whimsical titling the badges indicates that they are not as serious as the male equivalents. Girl Scouts also offer more gendered badges that focus on female appearance like the Looking Your Best badge. There is no equivalent for this badge in the Boy Scouts.

The *Lumberjanes* falls into the trope of using wordplay that is seen in the Girl Scouts in the titles of their badges: Robyn Hood Badge and Everything Under the Sun for example. However, both these badges, in addition to the Naval Gauging badge, involve outdoor skills and mathematical pursuits that are not commonly associated with the female organization.

Lumberjanes as an extension of scouting literature reproduces nostalgic ideas of what it means to be a scout. For example, in the first chapter of *Beware the Kitten Holy*, “Up All Night Badge”, the scouts sneak out of their cabin late at night, accidentally earning the Up All Night Badge. This is sentimental of childhood behaviors when everything seemed different and strange once the sun set and the moon rose up. In *Lumberjanes*, these late night adventures allow the group of girls; Mal, Molly, Ripley, Jo, and April to experience the “off the record” Girl Scout experience. In her recollection of her camp experience with the Girl Scouts in 1940, Ginger

Green Gorno describes a night in which the campers spent the night outside after an a canoeing trip saying “It was so quiet and dark, and the stars were all out. It was a beautiful night.” Being at a stay away camp makes scouts believe they are invincible and older than they are due to the new and exciting environment of the wilderness. This sense of invincibility also translates to how the younger scouts respect their elder scouts. Green Gorno describes a time that she and a fellow scout peeled ten pounds of potatoes just to spite their leader which “put [her] in a tizzy” “the poor leader must have wanted to desert the whole lot of us.” This disregard for their leader’s wishes is reflected in *Lumberjanes* treatment to Jen when they sneak out of the cabin and try to charm their way out of punishment before being forced to Rosie’s cabin, when they ask an annoying amount of questions, provoking a distained look on Jen’s face. Given that there is a reflection of this cliché overnight camp experience recounted by Green Gorno within *Lumberjanes* encourages the idea that the comic book is reminiscent of the Girl Scout culture of the 1940’s that has prevailed through the decades.

Lumberjanes therefore builds off of the modernization of scouting in recent decades by including the unsanctioned and noninstitutionalized aspects of scouting that were reminiscent in Green Gorno’s account by inverting gender stereotypes and including characters on various points on the gender spectrum. The book includes opportunities for girls to share their stories beyond the establishment of the scouting organization and encourages more opportunities for girls within scouting through the development of increasingly non-gendered badges and awards. Although the comic is not perfect, including a trope of girl group power, the series revitalizes the tradition of using scouts and scouting fiction as a tool of gender socialization by reverting and ignoring other stereotypical and institutionalized assumptions about young boys and girls. The implications of expanded gender roles in scouting have larger impacts on society at large. As

mentioned, scouting is a socializing agent used to educate children about their roles in society, so having impartial expectations expands the opportunities for all children, regardless of gender beyond just childhood and having impacts on their adult lives.

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