D. Nicole Farris · D'Lane R. Compton
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Gender, Sexuality and Race in the Digital Age

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Anxious Publics, Disruptive Bodies: Online Discourse About Transgender Children

Kate Henley Averett

1.1 Introduction

In late October 2011, local and then national press picked up the story of Colorado seven-year-old Bobby Montoya's unsuccessful attempt to join a local Girl Scout troop. Bobby, who is referred to by her mother as a boy but who news reports say "self-identifies as a girl," was turned away by the troop leader (Goodin 2011). Bobby's mother, Felisha Archuleta, told one news anchor that the troop leader said "'It doesn't matter how he looks, he has boy parts, he can't be in Girl Scouts. Girl Scouts don't allow that [and] I don't want to be in trouble by parents or my supervisor'" (Bolton 2011). As soon as the local news reported on this event, Girl Scouts of Colorado and Girl Scouts of the United States of America quickly pointed out that the troop leader did not, in fact, act in accordance with Girl Scout policy on this issue, which is that any child who identifies as and presents as a girl is welcome to join a troop. Even as this happened, media outlets throughout the country and even abroad continued to report on the story, and as they did, people took to the comment threads of various news websites to express their thoughts about the story.

Though the piece started out as a local interest story in Colorado news and was picked up by parenting blogs and websites, it also received much attention from mainstream network and cable news. Interestingly, this story was framed as being one of national importance. A report on the Fox News website (2011), titled "Colorado Girl Scouts Say Boy Welcome To Join," was filed on the site under "U.S.: National Interest," and another story (Chiaramonte 2011), "Transgender Girl Scout Controversy Sheds Light On Organization's 'Inclusive' Policies," simply under "U.S. Home." WTSP (2011), a local news station in Tampa Bay, Florida, published the online version of its report, "Boy wanting to join Girl Scouts told 'no'" under "Top Stories." New York Daily News published its story, "Transgender boy's

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attempt to join Girl Scouts initially rejected because 'he has boy parts'" under "News: National" (Jaccarino 2011).

Why would such a story – a local report of a transgender or gender non-conforming child wishing to be a Girl Scout – be of national interest? And further-more, why would it elicit such strong, critical reactions from those who interacted with this story by commenting on online reports? I argue that, though certainly not representative of the reactions of all news viewers, the comments responding to this story can help us understand some of the reactions people have to the actual or imagined presence of a transgender or gender non-conforming child in public and private spaces.

It is important to note that, in nearly all of these pieces, what is emphasized is Montoya's status as "male-bodied."[1] Most do this by referring to Montoya as a boy and using male pronouns to refer to her[2], and many also place some focus on the troop leader's reported comment about Montoya having "boy parts." In most cases, the stories are accompanied by pictures or videos that show Montoya, with shoulder-length brown hair, bangs, and a little braid on one side, wearing a very stylish girls' outfit, posed with or playing with various dolls: in other words, they show her pre-senting as female. In short, these articles frame the child as a "boy dressed up as a girl." The juxtaposition of the visual of a little girl with words describing a boy seems intent on producing a certain amount of cognitive dissonance in the reader. It is sensational.

These articles are examples of a particular style of news reporting, which seeks to involve the audience through crafting specific emotional responses. Referring to the tone of more "belief-driven" cable news that has become the norm in the United States, Chris Peters writes that "such tones are not accidental – they are crafted with a certain experience in mind that is designed for a specific audience" (2011:306). In fact, Peters notes, much of American news reporting today focuses very carefully on the emotive experience of the audience, seeking to form what he terms "an experi-ence of involvement" in the audience, in which the audience feels a sense of partici-pation in the news story through emotional engagement (2011:307). In the case of

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[1] The term 'male-bodied,' while often intended to be a term that respects gender diversity by acknowledging that gender identity and bodily sex do not always align, is a highly problematic term in that it affirms a binary notion of sex – that there are only two sexes, male and female – and locates the deciding factor of sex in external genitalia rather than hormones, chromosomal status, secondary sex characteristics, or any number of other factors that could be interpreted as 'bodily' markers of sex. I use the term here to point to the trend in these comments to use the penis as signi-fier of male embodiment, but place it in scare quotes to acknowledge its problematic status.

[2] Because none of the news reports I have encountered, nor interviews with the family that I have watched, report having actually asked Bobby what her preferred pronouns are, or in fact whether she identifies as a girl or as a boy who likes girls' things, the question of whether to refer to Bobby as male or female is not entirely clear-cut. The Associated Press style guide states that transgender individuals should be referred to using the pronouns of their affirmed gender, but most news reports have followed the lead of Bobby's mother in using male pronouns. However, because in the interviews I have seen, Bobby presents as female, I will err on the side of assuming that Bobby's gender presentation is indicative of a female gender identity and will refer to her using female pronouns throughout this chapter.

these news stories, then, it would not be a stretch to argue that the cognitive dissonance felt by the reader at seeing a girl but reading about a "boy" is precisely the emotional reaction intended by the news outlets reporting these stories.

Beyond inviting audience interaction through emotional involvement, however, many news outlets now also invite audience interaction through online participation in the news. Television newscasts regularly invite viewers to go to their website for more information about a story and to express their own opinions about the stories in the news. Though they are certainly not representative of the reactions of all viewers, the comments on news websites can nonetheless help us to understand some of the range of emotional reactions experienced by news viewers.

In order to understand the emotional response that "a boy in Girl Scouts" triggered, I examine the online comments responding to one article about this story: "Bobby Montoya, 7-Year-Old Transgender Child, Turned Away From Girl Scouts, Later Accepted,"[3] which was published on October 26, 2011 on the Huffington Post (Praetorius 2011). I focus on this particular event for several reasons. First, the Huffington Post has a reputation for being a more liberal news source, so its comments represent a wider range of viewpoints than those on other, more mainstream or conservative news sources. Second, at the time of the article's publication, the Huffington Post placed great emphasis on interaction with news stories; readers were encouraged to respond to pieces, and many articles on its front page at any given time had their number of comments highlighted as an important piece of information about the story. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the Huffington Post's commenting policy, which, unlike many other news websites, does not allow for anonymous posting. At the time the article was published, in order to comment on a story, a reader had to create an account with the website, and comments showed the commenter's username, a link to their user profile, and various statistics about the quality of their commenting, as judged by other site users. Because of this policy, it is easy to determine whether a comment comes from an account that was created specifically to comment on that particular article – evidence, it could be argued, of "trolling" by individuals or groups intent on creating inflammatory conversation on web forums – or by someone who regularly interacts with the news on this site.

This article received 4671 user comments, most within 24 h of the story being posted.[4] The comments ranged from very supportive of Montoya, her mother, and

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[3] This may not be the original title of the article. The Huffington Post article notes that it was published on October 26, 2011 and 'last updated' on October 31, 2011, though the content of article updates is not noted. However, user comments indicate that the original version of the story referred to Bobby Montoya as a boy and used male pronouns, but that at some point, due to user feedback about this perceived misstep, the article was edited to refer to Bobby as transgender and to use female pronouns.

[4] All comment counts are as of December 2, 2011. This is a higher-than-average number for the site. For comparison, the "related content" articles that the site suggests the reader look at after finishing this article, all with content related to transgender and/or gender non-conforming children or adults, had an average of 35.75 comments each, ($n = 4$, min = 8, max. = 68) and the "Most Popular" articles on the front page of the Huffington Post on the evening of December 2, 2011 had an average of 4288.5 comments each. ($n = 6$, min. = 1012, max. = 11,822)

the Girl Scouts of Colorado's quick response welcoming Montoya to join a troop, to highly critical of the child, her family, and the Girl Scouts, and supportive of the troop leader's initial reaction. My analysis focused specifically on the critical comments, as I was interested in exploring the substance of people's anxieties about transgender children. Thus, the analysis I present in this chapter is not an exhaustive analysis of all perspectives that internet users – or even the users who responded to this article – have about transgender children. First, I coded each comment as supportive, critical, or neutral/other, and then used an open coding process to identify themes among the critical comments. In what follows, I will discuss three themes that emerged in my analysis of anxious publics: (1) The insistence on binary gender that is consistent with bodily sex, especially genitalia, (2) The use of age as a way of delegitimizing the child's claim to being transgender, but the simultaneous use of age and race to insist on the child's sexual precocity, (3) That the events described in the story are evidence of the deterioration of country/society. In the following sections, I discuss how these responses together constitute an "anxious public response" of the type discussed below – a response characterized by anxiety over the disruption of binaries that constitute the identity of those responding, and a response that reveals contradictions inherent in the construction of the good American citizen.

1.2 What Are "Anxious Publics?"

In this section, I use a critical intersectional approach to the study of bodies and space to argue that public spaces, and "the public" in general, are constituted such that an anxious response is demanded of citizens when those perceived as not belonging enter a space. This response is the outcome of several overlapping processes that lead to both the construction of normative bodies within spaces, and to the surveillance of bodies that deviate from this norm. Embodied responses of anxiety should not be understood as individual or idiosyncratic, but rather, that these emotional and embodied reactions, in the words of Mick Smith and Joyce Davidson, "both replicate and express…something of the underlying cultural logic of contemporary society" (2012:46, see also Bordo 1993).

The construction of normativity is a process based upon inclusion and exclusion, in which oppositional binaries are used to define what is normative and thus, what is not, in a particular space or place (Fellows and Razack 1998). Along the various axes of these binaries, certain behaviors come to be defined as proper or respectable, and the bodies associated with those behaviors are given position of privilege within spaces. The somatic norm – the "anonymous" or "generic" body that is assumed to occupy various spaces, that is itself raced and gendered – plays a central role in this process. Spaces constructed around a somatic norm – including the general space of "the public" – thus become more open to certain bodies than to others, marking some bodies as belonging and others as trespassing (Puwar 2004).

The normativity of certain bodies is further reinforced when spaces then also shape the bodies that inhabit them. Samira Kawash (1998) notes that the policies and practices that define both public and private spaces shape specific experiences of embodiment, or "modes of corporeality," in those who are differentially positioned in those spaces, effectively inscribing these differences in and on the body. These embodied differences then act as cues through which others can read the body to assess its level of belonging in certain spaces. Surveilling the bodies of others is an act that is encouraged, even demanded, of those who fully "belong" in the space. As Sara Ahmed (2000) argues, if the space itself is constituted by the oppositional relationship between the one who belongs (the citizen) and the one who does not (the stranger), both parties must, paradoxically, be "present" in order for the delineation of the space to make sense. In other words, there must exist a stranger – an outsider – that is contrasted with the citizen in order for the category of the citizen to exist. The stranger must then be expected, but not belonging, within the space in order for these categories to hold.

This constant expectation of intrusion creates a particular posture toward the other. This posture of surveillance is built upon the expectation of intrusion in public space, an expectation that causes the public body to rely on its own physical and emotional responses – *anxious* responses – as the indicator of the presence of an unbelonging body. The "good citizen," then, has a body that is alert, focused outwards, and prepared to scrutinize others for cues that raise suspicion. Exactly which bodily cues are to be seen as suspicious is left for the citizen to decide, relying on "common sense" notions of difference that use the somatic norm of the community, and its unacknowledged racial, gendered, and behavioral characteristics, as the measure against which bodies in the space are compared. This posture of surveillance may be especially salient in the United States, with its particular history of settler colonialism (Smith 2010). The insistence on the belonging of the citizen must be emphasized when the citizen body first entered the scene as the unbelonging outsider, as evidenced by the particular violence with which these binaries were imposed on Native peoples.

Ahmed notes that spaces (or societies) are constructed as places where some bodies belong and others do not, as evidenced by the need for good citizens to be on alert for signs of intrusion (2000). This expectation of intrusion, though, implies that such spaces are more fluid and permeable than by definition they would like to be. People *will* enter the boundaries of spaces where they do not belong; if they did not, there would be no need to articulate a sense of who *does* belong in the first place. But the anxiety felt over the presence of an unbelonging body is not just anxiety over the exposure of the permeability – or instability – of the constructed space, it is also an ontological anxiety, in which the subject's own identity and its relation to the place or space is called into question. Because the individual and the space are mutually constituting, the threat posed by the appearance of what Puwar (2004) refers to as a "space invader" is not just a threat to the structure or the space, but to the individual who occupies that space as well. And because the good citizen is one who is always ready to spot a threat in the form of a stranger, the good citizen is also one who is constantly confronting this terrorizing threat of the destabilization of his

or her identity. What is created, then, is a public filled with anxious individuals – a public constantly awaiting the intrusion of a threat to its own stability.

These anxious responses are not limited to the spaces physically inhabited in the moment by those who respond. Rather, these responses also extend to both imagined physical spaces, which the responder does not currently inhabit but perceives as a space in which s/he "belongs," as well as to the public space of the internet. Researchers are increasingly paying attention to the way in which the internet can be, and is, used to develop communities and spaces of belonging – and thus, of un-belonging – in which "people craft and execute individual and communal body projects" (Boero and Pascoe 2012). Thus, this analysis brings to light not only the ways in which embodied responses, such as the response of an anxious public theorized above, occur online, but that the internet is used in a such a way that transmits and amplifies these responses beyond their localized settings.

The elements of this anxious response of an anxious public are evident in the themes found in the responses by Huffington Post community members to the report of Bobby Montoya's unsuccessful attempt to join her local Girl Scout troop and the aftermath of that attempt. It is to these themes that I now turn.

1.3   "A Boy Is a Boy": Reinforcement of Binary Gender

> *No. HE is a boy who likes to play with girl toys and dress as a girl…this does NOT make him a SHE!* (User littlelexie, 10/26/2011)[5]
>
> *wow. this world is seriously messed up. if my daughter was in his girl scout troop i would pull her out immediately. it's called GIRL scouts for crying out loud […] IF YOU'RE BORN WITH A PENIS YOU ARE A BOY. YOU CAN CUT IT OFF AND WEAR A DRESS BUT YOU ARE NOT A GIRL. SORRY TO BREAK IT TO YOU.* (User chess173, 10/26/2011)
>
> *Male parts: Male Child. Can't 'progress' beyond biology on this one.* (User Abcd474, 10/26/2011)

One of the most consistent and common reactions to Bobby Montoya's story, illustrated in the comments above, was to reaffirm binary gender by asserting that "male-bodied" status unequivocally made Bobby male, and that nothing – not identifying otherwise, behaving otherwise, or even having an operation to remove male genitalia – could change that "fact." Such a reaction to the calling into question of the male/female binary can be understood as an expected response of an anxious public.

As Puwar (2004) notes, the normative "public figure" formed in the context of the colonial nation-building projects of the West was constituted on both raced and gendered terms. Women were figured as outside the social contract as a means of constituting the public/political sphere as the domain of men – specifically white men. The male/female binary, then, was an essential aspect of the formation of the

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[5]All usernames cited are pseudonymous in order to protect the identity of the commenters. In all comments I have retained the posters' own grammar, spelling, and formatting. I use bracketed ellipses […] to indicate where I have removed part of the poster's original comment.

American nation and its (white, male) American citizenry. Central to this process was the establishment, not just of binary categories, but of normative gendered behaviors. Andrea Smith (2005) further explains how, in the context of the colonial United States, colonizers used the racialized and sexualized bodies of Native peoples as a foil against which to construct normative, "proper" white masculinity and femininity, and to establish white masculinity as dominant over white femininity and other subordinate, racialized masculinities and femininities.

One such practice that colonizers used to assert the dominance of white masculinity was through disciplinary practices against the bodies of Native children or adults who would, in today's (normative/white) parlance, be understood, similarly to Bobby Montoya, as gender non-conforming or transgender, or as "male-bodied" individuals with a feminine self-presentation. Scott Luria Morgensen details several examples of forced conformity to male presentation, ostracization, punishment, and disappearance of *boté/badé* individuals. One practice that was especially common was the use of "colonial education [to prevent] a new generation [of *badé*] from being raised, so an entire way of life could appear to have passed" (2010: 115). This practice specifically targeted the bodies of Native children in order to render genders outside the male-female binary "impossible" (Morgensen 2010:116).

Given its historical precedent in the context of colonial America, then, reinscription of binary gender through the forced masculinization of female-identified, "male-bodied" children seems an almost obvious first line of defense against those bodies perceived as calling this binary into question, and thus the frequency of this type of response is unsurprising.

1.4   Too Young to Know? The (Non-)Agentic/Precocious Child

He's a tad young to be making decisions. How about we give him a loaded gun and he can go explore life downtown, would that be a good idea too? Start with letting him decide what cartoons to watch, not whether he'll be a man or a woman before he's even knows what kind of food he likes and has to be told to make sure he finishes his vegetables. (User glass1331, 10/26/2011)

Very sad post..Yes we are all human beings...But letting a child of 7 choose what they want is ridiculous…Why would his mother even consider putting him in Girl Scouts..I just don't get it..Why didn't she guide him to the Cub Scouts….Little kids..Just little kids… This world get's stranger every day in the parenting world... (User SCOTT SMITH, 10/26/2011)

A second theme in the responses to this story is that a seven-year-old is too young to "know" or to "decide" about their gender identity. Such responses tap into ideas that children are unknowledgeable and non-agentic, in need of protection and direction, and unaware of, not to mention unable to assert, core aspects of their sense of self. To these commenters, children's interests and ideas are but fleeting phases or imaginative fancies that are not grounded in reality. As in the first comment above, analogies are frequently made that compare a child claiming a gender

identity with a child "wanting" to do some other strange, cute, or dangerous thing, such as playing with guns, being a superhero and jumping off buildings, eating ice cream and candy for breakfast, or pretending to be a puppy.

In her analysis of discourses about childhood evoked in discussions of child prostitution, Julia O'Connell Davidson (2005) points out that, like the binaries of male/female and black/white, the adult/child binary is a construct that is crucial for upholding our current sense of order in modern Western society. In this binary, the adult is one who has both agency and sexuality, and the child, its opposite, is one who lacks agency and sexuality. According to Davidson, this binary is important in modern Western societies for two principle reasons. First, the non-agentic child is imagined as existing outside of the social contract and allows adults to hold on to relationships with children as sacred, as the only non-contract, non-instrumental, non-commercialized relationships remaining in an increasingly contract-driven society. And second, as with other oppositional binaries, in order for the always-agentic neoliberal subject (the adult) to exist, its opposite – the never-agentic object (the child) is needed.

A child who asserts that her gender identity differs from the gender assigned to her by society is not a non-agentic object. The transgender child, then, not only calls into question the male/female binary, but the adult/child binary as well, by revealing herself to be a child with agency. In so doing, the transgender (agentic) child reveals the weakness of these binary constructs and destabilizes the category of the agentic adult – a moment that would, following the theoretical argument outlined in this paper, induce the very ontological anxiety characteristic of the anxious response of an anxious public.

It is important to note, however, that the adult/child binary that Davidson describes, in which the adult is sexual and agentic and the child is non-sexual (innocent) and lacks agency, is itself racialized – that is, it is not applied equally to white children and children of color. Jessica Fields (2005) argues that:

> Purity, sexual and otherwise, is routinely linked to whiteness…Since its "invention" at the turn of the twentieth century, adolescence has been the purview of Euro-Americans and the upper and middle classes: "a 'savage' youth was considered fully sexually mature, sexually active, at an age when the 'civilized' adolescent was just beginning his most strenuous period of mental and spiritual growth."

The fact that childhood innocence does not apply to children of color the way it does to white children explains the otherwise perplexing fact of the appearance, alongside comments that assert her childhood lack of agency, of comments that assume a (hetero)sexual motivation for Bobby Montoya – who is presumably read by these posters as a Latino male – wishing to join Girl Scouts. Consider the following comments:

> *Well if the scout has any ball he will sleep with as many of the girls that are available,i if not he is to sweet to worry about* (User effit369, 10/26/2011)
> *So, when little Bobby discovers that his "winky" works, and decides to implant it in a little girl Scout, who sues whom?* (User fsorenso7, 10/26/2011)
> *I agree to an extent, but then I remember Girl Scout Camp. Not sure how I'd feel about this if my daughter was in the troop with him/her.* (User BWJones, 10/26/2011)

REPLY:*What do you think will happen? What is your fear?* (User mark71917, 10/26/2011)

REPLY: *I guess my fear would be that my daughter would be exposed to a penis in the flesh years before it would be appropriate. How's that for ya?* (User BWJones, 10/26/2011)

Here we see, in the same comment thread as many comments that argue that a 7-year-old could not possibly know the first thing about gender, several comments that frame the same child as a would-be sexual predator, infiltrating the Girl Scout troop in order to sleep with, rape ("implant" his "winky" in), or flash his genitals to young, (presumably white) innocent girls. These comments do not explicitly invoke Montoya's race, but they do not need to. As Fields argues, race can go unmentioned in discussions of youth and adolescent sexuality because of the presence of taken-for-granted assumptions of things that "everybody knows" – that is, racialized and gendered understandings of sexuality in which race is used to categorize "the world as composed of girls-who-do and girls-who-don't, good boys and bad boys, students we can save and those who are unsalvageable" (2005: 563). Because the above comments do not presume childhood innocence on Montoya's part, they can be understood as relying on perceptions of Montoya as one of the racialized "bad boys," a child who is sexually "unsalvageable." Such responses work to uphold the racial subordination of certain children, while allowing, for white children at least, for the adult/child binary to remain intact.

1.5 The Decline of American Society

This kid can cross dress or look the girl-part all he wants, however, when he drops his Fruit of the Looms, he is a male! He should be denied entry into the Girl Scouts. Just another example of our society going down the commode (User catsteig99, 10/26/2011)

And the world becomes more freakish every day. Tragic. (User MR89RM, 10/26/2011)

I disagree. It is a big deal. […] Now the scout leader is put in the position of having to explain to the troop why this boy child, who thinks he's a girl, is now a Girl Scout, but has boy parts. It's enough to make my head spin. I can't even imagine how this would all play out if it involved the NFL, Major League Baseball, etc. Heck as far as I know major league sports still have their competitions by gender. Next we will be seeing Muslim women wearing their burkas playing professional tennis against a man who thinks he is a Muslim woman. What a country! (User Susie1948Q, 10/26/2011)

The third theme found in the responses to this story, expressed in the comments above, is that of a society in decline. These comments are marked by the idea that a transgender or "male-bodied" child joining Girl Scouts is evidence of "society going down the commode," or the decline of American greatness. In order to make sense of this theme, it is important to understand the relationship – historically and in the present – between Girl Scouting and American identity. Laureen Tedesco notes that, "the Girl Scouts developed as a patriotic organization" (2006:354). To this day, patriotism remains an important part of Girl Scouting, as evidenced by the endurance of service to country as a fundamental aspect of the Girl Scout Promise,

which includes a statement that Girl Scouts with "do their duty" to "God and my country" (Auster 1985:361).

Beyond simply encouraging service to the nation, however, Girl Scouting has historically focused on the construction of bodies fit for such service. The emphasis on bodily health and hygiene throughout the history of Girl Scouting reveals the way in which Scouting aims to shape particular kinds of bodies – bodies that are active and healthy. This aim is not one that is solely concerned with the health of individual girls, but rather, that the health of the body is discursively linked to the health of the nation. On the patriotic significance of personal bodily health, Tedesco writes that the parts of the Girl Scout Handbook "devoted to the reader's own health emphasize the patriotic significance of the material… True citizenship, according to *Scouting for Girls*, lies in good health, vigorously pursued… The emphasis on 'controllable' factors, on taking personal responsibility for one's health, typifies the handbook's approach" (2006:360–361). This emphasis on individual responsibility was in part an attempt to encourage independence from the welfare state: as the 1920 handbook states, "'if it is a question of being a help to the rest of the world, or a burden on it, a Girl Scout is always to be found among the helpers." Girl Scouts are to do a good turn daily so each can "be a *giver* and not a *taker*"' (Tedesco 2006:357, emphasis in the original). In this context, the health of the body was quite literally related to the financial health of a nation plagued by worries that immigrant populations would demand too much of the welfare state. By constructing healthy and strong bodies, Girl Scouting sought "to offer, every year, larger and larger numbers of healthy and efficient young citizens to their country" (Tedesco 2006:353).

Though it is debatable whether this particular aim of early Girl Scouting is still an explicit goal of the organization, there is evidence that Girl Scouting, perceived as a quintessentially "American" activity, still works to construct girls' bodies as "American" bodies. A 2007 *New York Times* article about Muslim Girl Scouts explains how Muslim girls feel that when they wear their Girl Scout uniform they are perceived as more American – and thus are treated differently – by members of the public. Girl Scout Asma Haidara, for example,

> has discovered that the trademark green sash – with its American flag, troop number (3009) and colorful merit badges – reduces the number of glowering looks she draws from people otherwise bothered by her traditional Muslim dress. "When you say you are a girl scout, they say, 'Oh, my daughter is a girl scout too,' and then they don't think of you as a person from another planet," said Asma, a slight, serious girl with a bright smile. "They are more comfortable about sitting next to me on the train" (MacFarquhar 2007).

When strangers see that Asma is a Girl Scout, they become more comfortable with her presence because they understand her as being like other girls that they know – as being American, and thus familiar and un-strange. Girl Scouting, for these girls, has the effect of de-Otherizing them, providing them with a means of being read as *belonging* in American public spaces. Because these girls are read as belonging, the anxious response of the public, usually quite hasty to label Muslims as un-belonging outsiders, is lessened.

Perhaps the fear over a "male-bodied" child being allowed in Girl Scouts, being able to claim the status of "normal American girlhood," is actually the fear of transgender children being incorporated into this norm. This fear over the decline of American society, then, can be understood as anxiety in the face of shifting norms, the redrawing of sacred boundaries that call into question fundamental aspects of American identity. When a Muslim girl or a transgender Latina child can be understood as fully American, the oppositional binaries of race, gender, and age, among other binaries central to the American project, are unsettled.

1.6   Conclusion: A Story of "National Interest"

Smith and Davidson argue that emotion plays an important role in boundary maintenance, noting that "disgust…mixes with fear to express the danger posed to boundaries, perhaps especially the boundary between nature and culture, but also the boundary between embodied self and non-self" (2012:63). I argue that such emotional responses are also rooted in the construction of the anxious body, one that is primed to respond to a variety of boundary violations as a condition of belonging within a society or space. Particularly, I propose that the "good citizen" is constructed as one who is constantly alert and ready to respond to the presence of bodies that threaten the binary constructions that form the discursive boundaries of place and space in American society.

Through analysis of the themes evident in unsupportive responses to the story of Bobby Montoya, it is clear that such responses, in various ways, serve to reinforce the binary constructions that are unsettled by Montoya's imagined presence in a Girl Scout troop. That is to say, those posters in online forums who respond anxiously to this story are playing the expected role of the "good citizen" by responding to Montoya's boundary violations. In their anxious response, then, is evident fear over the tenuous and permeable boundaries not only of gender itself, but of American society. This case reveals the presence of fears over shifting definitions of what it means to be an American. In this sense, then, perhaps Fox News was correct in filing its story about Bobby Montoya under "U.S.: National Interest," as the public response to this story reveals that, in addition to being a story about a transgender child who wanted to be a Girl Scout, it is also a story about the state of ideas about belonging in the United States today.

This work makes clear that the anxious response to boundary violations does not only take place in the physical spaces where these violations occur, but that it also happens online. For those who publish written work on the internet, "never read the comments" is something of a sacred motto. Comments sections on news websites and blogs are famous for being the stomping grounds of internet "trolls:" mythical creatures who find pleasure in inflaming the passions of others by making controversial statements. And if you do read the comments, friends will advise you to at least not "feed" the trolls by responding and giving them what they want. This

analysis, however, reveals that online forums are not (just) places where trolls go to feed. They are also spaces in which people express and negotiate their anxieties about the unsettled nature of our increasingly public lives. Internet spaces are no less important to study than physical spaces when we seek to understand the ways that people negotiate these anxieties and police the boundaries of their public worlds.

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Chapter 2
Cybersexism: How Gender and Sexuality Are at Play in Cyberspace

Gabrielle Richard and Sigolène Couchot-Schiex

2.1 Introduction

"You see that all the time on social networks. When a boy posts a picture of his bare chest, girls will obviously comment and say: "You look good". Boys too. But when a girl posts a picture of herself in a tank top or in a bathing suit, everyone will say: "Look at that slut". This 15-year-old French girl we had met during focus groups on cybersexism was adamant: girls and boys are not treated the same when it comes to showing off their assets online. While boys and girls are expected to showcase their attractiveness online (whether it be by exposing parts of their body, showing off their fancy clothes or exciting outings), expectations are much harder to reach for girls. "A girl must show more self-respect if she doesn't want to be considered damaged goods", explains a younger peer.

These teenagers are not the only ones to underscore the difficulties of navigating cyberspace and social conventions that can be hostile to girls and women. In its 2015 report *Cyberviolence against women and girls*, the UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development suggested that cyberviolence overwhelmingly targets women and girls because ""physical" VAWG [violence against women and girls] and "cyber" VAWG feed into each other" (2015: 7). Data gathered recently on French youth, though not all sex-segregated (Haddon et al. 2012), shows girls to be both more active Internet users (UNICEF France 2014) and consistently more likely than boys to report having been victimized online (DEPP 2014). Prior studies show instances of cyberviolence are massively gendered: not only because they affect boys and girls in different ways, but also because they are sexist, sexual or pornographic in nature (CHA 2014). Despite these findings, most studies have yet to offer real and thorough gender insight on these episodes.

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