Keep your brands off my body: A feminist analysis of the Girl Scout cookie sale

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KEEP YOUR BRANDS OFF MY BODY:
A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE GIRL SCOUT COOKIE SALE

By

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The Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA) is the largest organization for girls in the world, boasting over fifty million past and present members worldwide. It is also home to one of the most recognizable fundraisers in the U.S.: the Girl Scout cookie sale. The 2002-03 cookie boxes and sales material reflect state-of-the-art marketing practices, leaning heavily on a set of training programs called “Brand Voice” that are designed to standardize and market Girl Scout values to external audiences. The cookie box images feature professionally photographed, ethnically diverse, happy and active girls who either wear Girl Scout uniforms head-to-toe, or feature the approved Girl Scout “Brand Voice” logo and tagline. The intended effect of these messages is to show the world the opportunities that the organization offers girls who join it. However, the effectiveness of the corporate “Brand Voice” should not only be judged by an analysis of the cookie boxes and its impact outside the organization; there are also two important unintended effects on audiences inside the organization, which have to be considered. The first effect was from staff, who voiced a tension between their commitment to service for girls and dependence on the sale as a fundraiser. The second effect was evident in Girl Scout focus groups. Their comments about the boxes indicated some did not identify with the branding practices that were so visible in the cookie boxes. Among other things, they said that the boxes overemphasized young girls, and that the girls on the boxes didn’t seem like “real” people. A paradox is at hand: a program designed to promote the interests of the organization has potentially alienating effects upon the very people who it is ostensibly serving. Of course, this is not to say that managers and directors at GSUSA cynically exploit girls for their own narrowly-defined organizational interests. On the contrary, GSUSA’s willingness to experiment with recent programs like Studio 2B (a program that is designed to reduce the hierarchy between Girl Scouts and their leaders) makes it clear intends to remain a place “where girls grow strong.”
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CHAPTER ONE:

A CASE FOR GIRL SCOUT RESEARCH

“When you talk about women people couldn’t care less, but when you talk about their daughters they get fire in their eyes,” said Sarah Harder, former president of the American Association of University Women and Women’s Studies professor. She was speaking to me about the reaction of people around the world on education and health care issues during her visit as a delegate to Beijing, China in 1997 for the International Women’s Conference. Her words have hung with me for years. From her wisdom and from other experience I’ve learned that it’s difficult to get people to care about challenges facing girls in the United States. For organizations that have achieved a national voice, support has traditionally been galvanized using a single argument that appeals to investing in girls to benefit the good of the whole, but never for the need to empower girls because it benefits girls themselves (Orstein, 1994; AAUW, 1990). I find there is one notable exception—Girl Scouts.

Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA) is state-of-the-art girl power. Today the organization boasts over 50 million past and present members worldwide (National Historic Preservation Center, 1997), dedicating itself “to the purpose of inspiring girls with the highest ideals of character, conduct patriotism, and service that they may become happy and resourceful citizens” (GSUSA, 2000, p. 7). Yet under closer examination, GSUSA is not just a neutrally charged organization dedicated to the empowerment, education, and independence of girls. Evidence suggests it is a mixed bag of political ideology, in
which a number of different stakeholders have investments, and is fraught with a 
handful of social tensions imposed by the politics of gender (Perry, 1993; 
Cornelius & Heller, 1998; Manahan, 1997; Revzin, 1998; Rothschild, 1982; 
Ruskin, 1998; Saxton, 1982; Strickland, 1979). This claim is best addressed by 
examining an aspect of the organization that makes it most public: the Girl Scout 
cookie sale.

The study that follows is a critique of marketing in one of the biggest 
fundraisers for nonprofit organizations in the country. My rationale for doing this 
research is rooted in Girl Scout history, feminist scholarship, and the kind of 
critical scholar that I am. All of these interests collectively deal with gender 
issues. Historically, gender has always been a controversial economic, political, 
and cultural issue for the organization. Audiences have handled the presence of 
this all-girl organization in different ways since its inception in 1912. Some argue 
that the organizational vision for girls is explicitly feminist (Kjesbo & Hafen, 
2001; Harper, 1997). Some simply allude to the organization as having some 
feminist values (Cornelius & Heller, 1998). Others have a far more conservative 
view of Girl Scouts’ role of promoting and producing girlhood (Harper, 1997). 
These tangled interests of Girl Scout stakeholders are represented on 
organizational artifacts; none more visible than the Girl Scout cookie boxes.

Little is known about how practitioners at GSUSA interpret the cookie 
sale and the images on the boxes. However, existing literature on Girl Scout staff 
usually includes testimonials from former Girl Scouts, Girl Scout camp 
counselors, and present-day staff members about scouting experiences. Their
voices surface in women’s studies texts and other less-scholarly realms. Still, the articles are rarely about the Girl Scout cookie sale, and center around female friendships, love relationships, and familial bonds from participating in an all-girl environment (Manahan, 1997; From a Concerned Girl Scout, 1997; Harper, 1997). These published and unpublished manuscripts may also be considered fairly “underground”—which is to say they are often photocopied and passed from friend to friend, cherished by certain audiences, and threatened by others (Manahan, 1997; Kjesbo & Hafen, 2000).

Furthermore, the Girl Scout cookie sale provides an interesting context for organizational communication research. Not only is it a positive public relations event for the organization, but it also serves as the financial backbone of the organization, “filling in where the United Way leaves off,” promoting money management skills and entrepreneurship for girls, and interacting with the American public (From a Concerned Girl Scout, 1997, p. 165). These aspects of the national endeavor by GSUSA are fascinating, but it’s also the carefully chosen images of girlhood and organizational packaging of this concept that piques the curiosity of feminists in organizational communication. Commodification is an issue for feminist practice because women have a greater possibility of being objectified. In this case, girls have a greater possibility of being objectified as the commodity “prepared as goods and services for domestic consumption” because their faces are used on promotional and sale materials (Fraser, 1989, p. 125). The images GSUSA uses to market the organization and promote membership
therefore make this event the perfect opportunity for an organizational study seeking to make sense of various political interests at work in defining girlhood.

I also come to this project with specific interests for Girl Scout research, mainly due to two projects I completed in undergrad. One project entitled, "Deconstructing Girl Scout Rhetoric: Its Feminist Roots and Skeletons," co-authored with my undergraduate advisor, was a rhetorical analysis of several artifacts focusing on historical context, the women's movement, and gender (Kjesbo & Hafen, 2001). This study opened my eyes to the rich gender subtexts that are inherent in the organization and the rhetorical devices that the Girl Scout organization has employed since its inception. The second project entitled, "Girl Scout Conformity: Critical Theory and Organizational Consent" (Kjesbo, 2000) catalyzed my realization that the Girl Scout cookie sale most exemplified the struggles and gains of the organization. As a graduate student, I continued my scholarly interest in the Girl Scout cookie sale by using two boxes of the 2002 sale in a feminist rhetorical analysis (Kjesbo, 2002). However, I felt that a comprehensive study on the cookie sale and Girl Scout organization deserved multiple methods and sources of data. If I was going to understand and analyze one of the most recognizable fundraisers for nonprofits in the country, I realized I needed to include artifacts, interviews of paid staff, volunteers, and even hear from girl members themselves. This seemed especially important given my personal curiosity about what it means to be a Third Wave feminist and a Girl Scout at the same time.
Today popular feminism tells us that girls are as active and possess as
many choices as boys; and moreover they can/should take pride in being “girlie.”
One common perception is that “using makeup isn’t a sign of our sway into the
marketplace and the male gaze; it can be sexy, campy, ironic, or simply
decorating ourselves without the loaded issues. What we loved as girls was good
and, because of feminism, we know how to make girl stuff work for
us” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 136). However there is a decade worth of
interdisciplinary literature that suggests the contrary (AAUW, 1991; Orstein,
1993; Pipher, 1992). Girls still struggle with body image like they did in 1912,
consent to values of heterosexism, and worry about pleasing others like their
parents (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Findlen, 1995). Additionally, their
experience of girlhood might further be complicated by branded images produced
by national organizations such as GSUSA. Consequently, how organizations
(most notably their staff members) mediate and interpret the production of
branded images of girlhood is of some significance. I provide background for
three broad research questions to explore these ideas: (1) What images of girlhood
does the Girl Scout cookie sale construct and reinforce? (2) How do paid staff in
the organization interpret the cookie sale? and (3) How do Girl Scouts interpret
images on the boxes and their role in the cookie sale?

Answering these questions requires a diverse background reading to
understand the data from an organizational and societal level, which is why an
overview of the literature on organizational communication, feminism, and
marketization is in order. Organizational communication scholars now debunk the
container metaphor, which implies a distinct “inside” and “outside” to fixed boundaries of a formalized group (Stanley, 1997; Tretheway, 2000). If organizing is now a matter of relationships, “shifting centers,” and fuzzy social arrangements, there is need to understand organizational communication processes in multiple terms of individual and collective experience, organizational rhetoric, and larger social discourses (Tretheway, 2000, p. 205). Communication research is also ideal for this analysis because of its ability to consider multiple audiences, phenomenon, and interpretations about the way the world works.

Consequently, it is important to examine multiple sites and audiences in GSUSA. In this chapter I discuss the history of the Girl Scout organization and social movement, provide a theoretical background for this project, as well as explain my methodology. To do so I will first provide contextualized history of the Girl Scout cookie sale and the organization’s marketing practices, followed by an overview of marketization and its contribution to the alienation of women using commodity logic.

Review of Literature

The history of the Girl Scout cookie sale and GSUSA’s progression toward corporate branding practices found in today’s competitive marketplace are the first topics I discuss in the review of literature. The next section of the review of literature covers marketization, commodity feminism, and alienation as a critical rhetoric, which sets the stage for methodological decisions and analysis of artifacts, interviews, and focus groups.
The present-day structure of GSUSA is a bottom-heavy and pyramidal organization. It is has a national headquarters in New York with executive leadership and 500 employees, connected to 334 “councils,” or jurisdictions throughout the United States (GSUSA, 2000; Harper, 1997, p. 156). Each council maintains itself semi-independently of the national headquarters, with a CEO, board of directors, and paid staff. There are 750,000 volunteers nationwide including troop leaders, “cookie moms,” and of course, 50 million past and present Girl Scout members worldwide between 5 and 17 years old who also participate in the organization (National Historic Preservation Center, 1997).

Since the primary method of raising funds for troops and councils is the Girl Scout cookie sale it is not surprising that a lot of time and effort goes into constructing noticeable images on the product itself. Therefore, the most obvious choice of artifacts in the Girl Scouts is the cookie boxes used in the cookie sale, as well as a collage of posters and other ads. They provide the best illustration of a Girl Scout brand voice. For those who are unfamiliar with the details of the cookie sale, it is an event that occupies a huge amount of time for paid staff at the local level of a council, commands intensive professional marketing strategy at the level of the national office, and
solicits the help of thousands of adult volunteers, not to mention kids (or adults) that sell cookies. The most compelling reason for my choice to use the Girl Scout cookie sale is, of course, the audience for the sale itself. The Girl Scout cookie sale is a big enough event to captivate organizational members’ attention, to involve volunteers, troop leaders, cookie moms, and girls in handing a product designed by corporate marketing techniques into the hands of mainstream America. The images of girls on the boxes reach audiences of all kinds, as do the ads and posters that line schools, office buildings, and billboards on the highway.

It is important to understand the history of the Girl Scout cookie sale. The first time GSUSA began using girls’ faces on the front of cookie boxes was in 1970 (GSUSA, 2003). Until this turning point in Girl Scout marketing, the boxes
demonstrate a progression towards the professional marketing techniques consumers are conditioned to expect today, from plain paper bags to colorful packaging. Each U.S. decade had a "zeitgeist" of the times, and this is reflected on the box designs.

The earliest Girl Scout cookies sales began in 1917 with a troop called "mistletoe" in Muskogee, Oklahoma. The girls baked cookies in their homes and brought them to high school to sell as a service project in the winter (GSUSA, 2003). The endeavor went national in July 1922 when a woman named Florence Neil (then a director of a council in Chicago) published a cookie recipe in *The American Girl* magazine, a periodical of GSUSA. Ingredients for six to seven dozen cookies usually totaled 26 to 36 cents, and once baked and packaged, could be sold by troops for 25 or 30 cents per dozen (GSUSA, 2003). Sometimes the published recipe was used, but from this point onward Girl Scout troops began baking their own sugar cookies with the help of their mothers during the 1920s and 30s and sold them for the same price suggested by Ms. Neil. Their packaging consisted of "wax paper bags, sealed with a sticker," and sold in the traditional door-to-door method (GSUSA, 2003).

The humble beginnings of Girl Scout cookies progressed to where individual councils were producing manufactured cookies. Philadelphia in 1934, the boroughs of New York in 1935, and finally the national Girl Scout headquarters in 1936, found ways to commercially bake cookies (GSUSA, 2003). One council creatively packaged their cookies for the first time by "buying its own die in the shape of a trefoil...and using the words *Girl Scout Cookies* on the
box" (GSUSA, 2003). As one of my respondents told me, GSUSA got involved and the organization began to license commercial bakers to produce the cookies en masse; in 1937 one hundred twenty five councils nationwide held sales of their own using these products (GSUSA, 2003).

The 1940s brought World War II, butter, flour, and sugar shortages, and a hiatus in Girl Scout cookie sales (Personal communication, March 15, 2003). During this time Girl Scouts sold calendars to maintain funding (GSUSA, 2003), and according to a former Executive Director who boasts over 51 years with the organization, Girl Scouts focused their time and attention to war efforts. Though they were not selling cookies, they partnered up and went door-to-door in their neighborhoods to collect for another effort:

The need for glycerin...meant that grease—like bacon grease—was a component that could be rendered out into glycerin for bombs... The town was laid out in a grid. And each girl or pair of girls was assigned to a particular block of homes and we pulled a wagon. And every Saturday collected cans of grease from households. We went door-to-door collecting their week’s collection of bacon fat. And then what I’m really proud of is the fact that my mother took all of the cans and jars and whatever the grease was in, melted them down and strained them into a... huge five-gallon bucket from a packing company. And then we delivered that to the packing company. And from there I’m not sure where it went, but it eventually was supposed to be glycerin for bombs.

When the war ended, annual cookie sales resumed. Girls abandoned their grease collection (and calendar sales), and by 1948 the number of licensed bakers grew to 29 (GSUSA, 2003). Up until 1951 there was only one national variety of Girl Scout cookies, but this changed with the advent of the sandwich cookie, the shortbread, and the famous Thin Mints (GSUSA, 2003). The packaging of the
cookies gradually became more colorful, and displayed the three cookie varieties on the boxes.

The girls of the baby boom generation flooded the Girl Scout organization during the 1960s and as a result “cookie volume increased significantly” (GSUSA, 2003). Packaging also turned a corner when the licensed bakers “began wrapping ... boxes in printed aluminum foil or cellophane to be protect the cookies and preserve their freshness” and they began to offer even more varieties of cookies (GSUSA, 2003).

Then came the 1970s—the decade for GSUSA that introduced girl imagery to cookie boxes. It was also the decade that witnessed a streamlining of bakeries from fourteen to four in the interest of low prices and uniformity of product (GSUSA, 2003). Girl Scouts of the USA began supplying licensed bakers with a standard cookie package layout and pictures” (GSUSA, 2003). One retired staff member who dedicated 47 years of service to the organization remembers being concerned about the drastic decrease in competition and choice (Personal communication, March 14, 2003). For the first time in history all Girl Scout cookie boxes featured the same designs and depicted scenes of Girl Scouts in action, including hiking and canoeing. In 1979, the contemporary Girl Scout logo—three faces of women within the trefoil—appeared on the cookie boxes. “Cookie packaging became more creative and began to promote the benefits of Girl Scouting” (GSUSA, 2003).

Decorative tins emerged in the form of Girl Scout cookie “gift samplings” during the early 1980s, and the four bakers were required to manufacture up to
seven different kinds of cookies. Three of these cookies (classic Thin Mints, a sandwich cookie, and the shortbreads) were mandatory, and four other varieties were allowed more flexibility from year to year (GSUSA, 2003). The boxes still reflected girls on the move, participating in various activities (GSUSA, 2003).

The number of bakers fluctuated slightly during the early 1990s, going down to two, up to three in 1998, and then down to two again by 2003 (GSUSA, 2003). The consolidation of bakers is what lead to the Promise Group, a number of Girl Scout councils that banded together in recent years in order to get a better price when purchasing cookies and services from the bakers, to create long-term sustainability for councils using cost control, and to increase the flexibility for local councils (Thoren Neal, 2002). Some of the CEOs told me that while council's often lose “frills” associated with individual service, that the National office always has control over the images and packaging, working closely with the two bakers to ensure consistency nationwide.

However, the Girl Scout cookie sale is just a slice of a bigger picture when it comes to managing and exporting organizational identity and mission for GSUSA. The organization has begun to move toward more commercial marketing practices, drawing from its many corporate affiliations. For instance, in 1998 GSUSA contracted Siegel & Gale, a public relations (PR) consulting firm for its upcoming millennium campaign, which resulted in a revitalizing image campaign video called, *Creating a Brand Voice*. Their purpose was to “clarify and energize the image of the Girl Scouts” by highlighting the strengths, issues, outside image, and positioning of the organization, as well as “sharpen and refresh the image of
Girl Scouts, and to bring it in line with the organization’s exciting reality” (Cornelius & Heller, 1998; Kjesbo & Hafen, 2001, p. 3). An official publication from a Florida national convention intended to train CEOs and other practitioners on the subject conveyed that the Brand Voice had the potential to “communicate unity, strength, belonging, aspiration, and spirit; empower people to create communications material that is familial, not cookie-cutter; help guide and tailor communications to various audiences; and bring consistency in style of imagery, communications, and messages to strengthen the brand image” (GSUSA, 1999, p. 4). The organization builds their Brand Voice using a position statement at the beginning of the manual, which is a very short paragraph that articulates “clearly, credibly, and relevantly...what an organization stands for, what makes it different from others, and why people should be involved with it” (GSUSA, 1999, p. 8).

GSUSA’s current positioning is:

The Girl Scouts is the world’s preeminent organization dedicated solely to girls, where in an accepting and nurturing environment, girls build character and skills for success in the real world. In partnership with committed adults, girls develop qualities that will serve them all their lives—like strong values, social conscience, and conviction about their own potential and self-worth. In the Girl Scouts, they discover the fun, friendship, and power of girls together; and through the many enriching experiences provided by the Girl Scouts, they can grow courageous and strong. Girl Scouts. Where Girls Grow Strong (GSUSA, 1999, p. 11).

The manual reads like a workbook thereafter, giving practitioners the opportunity to reframe example activities for girls into language consistent with the organizational positioning stated in earlier pages. For example, if the activity for girls is cookie sales, then the perception of an external audience might be “tedious, selling, only for money, old-fashioned, and bake sale” (GSUSA, 1999,
p. 12). Practitioners are encouraged to reposition the idea in published material using words like “self-reliance, self-sufficiency, earning, planning and succeeding, teamwork and marketing skills” to be more in-line with the positioning provided by the Brand Voice (GSUSA, 1999, p. 12). Meticulous instructions are also provided for the use of the official tagline of the organization—“Where Girls Grow Strong”—as well as the Girl Scout logo featuring a green trefoil with the silhouette of three women’s faces in the center. For instance, instructions for the tagline come with a caveat that outlines territory for the organization in relationship to other nonprofits, or even like-minded companies. GSUSA tells readers that, “because being strong is a positive characteristic for girls these days, other organizations might also use this word in their tagline or positioning. Girl Scouts can own Where Girls Grow Strong for a variety of reasons: 1. It is part of the Girl Scout Law, 2. We have a proven track record of developing leaders, 3. We have more ‘salespeople’—girls, leaders, supporters—to promote the tagline, 4. We live the tagline legitimately through every activity in every council” (GSUSA, 1999, p. 15). Use of the Girl Scout logo is no different. Lockups, or the use of the logo along with the latest tagline, are to be handled with strict precision to ensure consistency with font, color, and arrangement (GSUSA, 1999, p. 52).

Besides wording and brand imagery, pictures of girls are treated with equal care. This set of criteria is probably the most significant to an analysis of the Girl Scout cookie sale images of girls. The manual tells practitioners:

The photographs you select can make all the difference in the world in conveying your message. Everyone can help. For example, volunteers can
learn some basic photography tips. Avoid the traditional 'line-em up and shoot 'em' photo of a group of girls. By the time the photo is reprinted and reduced, no one will be recognizable. Instead, get in close and photograph their faces all together. It'll be more fun and spirited, and a lot easier to see. When possible, use a professional photographer. But make sure he or she understands the Girl Scout brand voice qualities before shooting! If you don’t have access to a professional, or don’t have the budget, find out who [sic] the best photographers are in the local high school or college art program. Give them an assignment. Inexpensive doesn’t have to mean poor quality. Be a good photo editor. Look for the shot that shows action and energy. Don’t worry if someone is blurry. Learn how to crop for details and emphasis. Close-ups and tight cropping add intensity to a scene. Rather than formal or posed portraits of Girl Scouts, alumnae, or volunteers, use images that allow their personalities to come through. *Posing a model in an unrealistic manner does not respect the girls’ individuality*. Use images that capture action, demonstrate accomplishments, or portray an event or activity that relates to the story you are telling. When you don’t have an appropriate photo, or the budget to take a new one, consider simple line or halftone illustrations (GSUSA, 1999, p. 28-29, italics added).

I would like to draw attention to the italicized sentence, which gives credence to girls’ (and adults’) individuality. I note that GSUSA makes an effort to recognize that each one of the organization’s members has an identity and makes her (or his) own contribution. I also respect the authors of the Brand Voice literature for having the foresight to make that idea part of the training. However, there are still serious questions to be asked about how the implementation of the Girl Scout Brand Voice impacts the organization and the issue of commercialization of nonprofits in general. Just because this sentence exists in the training manual does not mean all photographs are juried equally for cookie boxes—especially if they are sent from the council level to the national level—or that the Brand Voice is applied consistently at all levels of the organization. For instance, if there are over 334 Girl Scout councils in the United States and only one corporate office (situated in New York City), there is a fair likelihood that
many policies handed down from "the top" and disseminated throughout the organization could be used, interpreted, or discarded with little or no control from headquarters. Organizational communication theory tells us that a bottom-heavy organization such as the Girl Scouts may struggle to maintain consistency with a Brand Voice because of its innumerable, and complicated, social arrangements and interpretations of meaning (Weick, 1993). Given this, the preservation of individual identity of girls in photographs is much more complex and political than believing the training manual at face value. Certainly there is no "culprit" masterminding the use of girl images on cookie boxes, but then the job of an analysis such as this one is to piece together evidence from rhetorical artifacts, stories of paid staff and Girl Scouts in order to make sense of a bigger picture.

After reading the manual and viewing the Brand Voice video completely, I learned that guiding communication and behavior of practitioners, troop leaders, and other volunteers is the number one goal of the Brand Voice (GSUSA, 1999, p. 18). The manual is explicit about the fact that such training "influences imagery, language, media choices, messages, and actions; serves as a guideline for leaders in their actions and behavior; allows for creative empowerment and individual creativity 'in voice'; and offers guidelines for writing style and image selection" (GSUSA, 1999, p. 18). There is even a chart provided in the manual that shows the extent to which the categories, and elements of the Brand Voice are specified for staff members at GSUSA. The same chart is reproduced here as Figure 2, showing how the most compliance required from paid staff and volunteers begins at the top of the chart and decreases toward the bottom. Overall,
these are the guidelines required from those who wish to publish or export material under the Girl Scout Brand Voice.

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*Figure 2. Girl Scout Brand Voice Guidelines (GSUSA, 1999). Text box is a useful guide for practitioners to interpret the Brand Voice.*

Part of the reason for cultivating the Brand Voice stems from research produced by the Girl Scout Research Institute and partnering scholars. They note the problem with retaining girl members as they get older, recruiting new members, is that “traditional stereotypes of scouting eclipses new programs. Girl Scouts is an American icon, misunderstood, under-appreciated and under-leveraged. It is an old fashioned operation in a modern world” (Cornelius & Heller, 1998). In particular, older girls sometimes tend to turn away from the organizations due to lack of relevance to their lives. The video points to films like *Ever After, Mulan,* and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* and the television show named most by girls, *Xena Warrior Princess,* as examples of strong, powerful
female images available to girls today. Girls’ heroes are now female athletes, not just female models. But the image of Girl Scouts is not courageous, but “nice.”

The new Brand Voice was introduced to correct this problem, as well as to provide consistency and recognizability for an organization that is consciously attempting to use popular culture to empower and engage Girl Scouts. However, research by the Girl Scout Research Institute and other parts of the national organization indicate “the current Girl Scout image and brand is a barrier for reaching today’s girls 11-17 for three main reasons. Girls’ overall image of the Girl Scouts is that: 1) It is for younger girls, 2) It is not for girls of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, and 3) It is out of touch with what today’s girls want” (Schoenberg, et. al., 2002, p. 9; italics added).

The Girl Scout Research Institute’s recommendations for action in 2002 were to engage in outreach and marketing initiatives that “inform and educate girls and adults about the needs and issues facing today’s girls and show contemporary images of Girl Scouts as smart, exciting, and fun” (Schoenberg, et.al, 2002, p. 9). The report also recommends modifying the Brand Voice images that reflect diversity of age and ethnicity, but most importantly they advocate for “product development, image, and product names” that should “be created by girls, for girls” (Schoenberg, et. al., 2002, p. 9).

Due to this research, Girl Scout program (a.k.a. curriculum) has attempted to match the Brand Voice initiative by strengthening traditional activities, but also by debutting Studio 2B—a very innovative and progressive program in 2003. According to the Girl Scout Research Institute, Studio 2B is “a direct result of the
New Directions for Girls 11-17 research. The research revealed that the names Cadette and Senior, which Girl Scouts began using in 1963, do not appeal to girls today" (GSUSA, 2003, p. 1). Studio 2B was created to correct the problem. It is a program for older girls, which attempts to breaking rank and provide girls with the freedom and flexibility by allowing them to create a Girl Scout experience for themselves—one that meets their needs and shatters the idea that Girl Scouting is for old-school stereotypes. By breaking rank, GSUSA means that girls can opt out of the “Cadettete” or “Senior” label, organize by whatever topic they choose (under the umbrella of Studio 2B and Girl Scouts), replace “troop leaders” with “advisors,” and earn charms instead of traditional badges for their awards (GSUSA, 2003). Like other Girl Scouts of traditional programs, Studio 2B girls are not required to wear the Girl Scout uniform, although the National organization is trying to design other clothing that enables them to express their belonging to the Girl Scout organization and social movement (GSUSA, 2003).

The most recent handout I could find explains:

The ‘studio’ in STUDIO 2B is a limitless space teens create for themselves to explore their interests in. The space can be created when a group of teens meet to talk about college applications, when one teen job shadows someone she admires, or when a few friends come together to research and plan their summer vacation. The four Girl Scout program goals—become, belong, believe and build—help create the essence of STUDIO 2B: a space where a teen has the freedom to explore who she wants to be and what she wants to do. STUDIO 2B is filled with elements of whatever a girl’s intentions are—from fashion magazines and design sketches for the fashion hound to computer programs and laptops for the computer whiz (GSUSA, 2003, p. 1).

I was encouraged to find that the Girl Scout Research Institute has its ear out for internal dialogue of girl members, specifically on how the Brand Voice
affects their perceptions and participation. I was also delighted to read about Studio 2B, which I personally find to be an exceptional program. The research cultivated by GSUSA and Studio 2B is evidence of the best this organization can provide; it is visionary, strong, and informed. However, there are others like myself who have begun to critique the new curriculum and brand management in recent years for its ties to popular culture. For instance, a 1998 news release by Commercial Alert displays the headline, "Nader, Commercial Alert Urge Girl Scouts to Drop Program that Promotes Shopping, Fashion" (Ruskin, 1998). The article mentions that "Ralph Nader deplored the way that the Girl Scouts of the USA is taking part in a nationwide project with Limited Too which fosters the obsession with looks, fashion and consumerism which are the source of such much emotional and financial pain” (Ruskin, 1998). The author was quoted as saying, “If the Girl Scouts were teaching [girls] how to deal with the manipulations of the commercial culture—the way it fosters obsessive body image for example—that would be one thing, but they aren’t arming girls against the wolves. They’re delivering them to the wolves” (Ruskin, 1998). Like this critique, my intention is to pick up where the Girl Scout Research Institute leaves off regarding their observation that girls don’t identify with the Brand Voice. I intend to explore why this may be the case by examining artifacts of the Girl Scout cookie sale and talking to paid staff and Girl Scouts in order to make suggestions of my own. I also remind readers that my intentions for this critique of marketing are purely aligned with my love for the Girl Scout movement.
Though critical, I am identified—I write from the perspective of one lifetime Girl Scout to an audience of many others.

Now that I have provided an overview of the history Girl Scout cookie sale and the development of the Girl Scout Brand Voice, I would like to move into theoretical territory. Clearly, the size of the cookie sale and the number of people involved in its execution demonstrate the magnitude of this business-like operation. Furthermore, the use of Girl Scout images on the product adds another dimension to the event. These are both good reasons to explore theories about marketization and its influences on the alienation of women, both core concepts to be explored in the rest of the review of literature.

**Theory of the Market & the Alienation of Women**

All documents produced by GSUSA tell Girl Scout cookie consumers the sale is first and foremost a program for girls, intended to hone a number of different skills: building self-confidence, learning to meet new people, setting goals, and managing money. They state one of the perks of the sale is to raise funds for troop and council program activities. Yet given my interests as a critical scholar I was curious about the market-driven aspects of the sale that the organization was not likely to disclose and the concrete ways commodity logic was reinforced. The following section provides a definition for marketization and commodity logic, and focuses on three ways in which the social and economic systems of the market are interdependent. I also provide a definition for the feminist perspective on alienation as a critical rhetoric and point out its connections to Third Wave feminism and the Girl Scout cookie sale.
Marketization

Marketization can be defined as the increasing identification with a consumer orientation, for individuals and organizations on the whole (Cheney, 1999). It means that worker productivity and participation is associated more frequently with demands imposed externally from the organization (Cheney, 1999, p. 34). These external demands may be articulated by the ways in which social and economic arrangements are interdependent based on the Market. According to Cheney (1999), organizations like GSUSA are subject to these arrangements in three ways: assumed rationality, diminished participation, and socially constructed symbols.

First, he points out a common misunderstanding about the rationality of the Market. Often, the Market’s own development will undermine commonly set goals (Cheney, 1999). Given this, I wondered if the images on Girl Scout cookie boxes were actually a detriment to the overall mission of the organization since they used images of girls on them. Market concepts seem to be nebulous things to study, but according to Robert Lane (1991, 2000) the market should be held accountable by whether or not it increases happiness for people in general (Cheney, 1999). I thought this was a good comparison for my own critique of marketing, only I saw there was potential to use the concept of “happiness” as a way to analyze market concepts from a feminist perspective. After all, the analysis at hand makes gender the focal point in the critique of marketing.

Second, tremendous growth and innovation may not always be desired in cooperative, or nonprofit contexts. In this regard, participation and “voice” may
be at stake for practitioners and Girl Scouts (Cheney, 1999). After all, using girl images may seem like a good idea at the time because it fits with the commonly held values of the market and prescription for action, but the consequences may lead to restricted participation (Cheney, 1999). In the end I wondered if featuring images on cookie boxes nationwide only robbed the individuality or identity from the girls who were supposed to reap the most benefit from the experience of being Girl Scouts, which is a concept brought to light by some critical scholars (Cheney, 1999; Griffin, 2000). If I asked marketing specialists from GSUSA about putting girl images on cookie boxes, I also wondered if they would reply ‘The Market made me do it’ which Cheney (1999) describes as an almost universal justification for action.

Barber (1992) mentions such justifications contribute to the “McWorld” phenomenon, or the homogenization of culture on a global scale. Marketization might also costs organizations like GSUSA its independence, sense of community and unique identity, which Barber notes is usually based on difference (Barber, 1992). In terms of the global market, this means tranquility, order, and freedom are valued the most. Human rights get lip service under the guise of free trade and free press, but unfortunately citizenship and participation are expendable (Barber, 1992). According to Barber (1992), “no more social justice and equality than are necessary to promote efficient economic production and consumption” (p. 3-4).

His understanding of McWorld underscores Cheney’s (1999) second Market concept because it shows how participation and social consciousness slowly turns into a business contract for organizing trade (Barber, 1992). Since
similar markets require a similar language, it is not surprising that GSUSA might be trying to communicate with a globalized world in a language dictated by the market using symbols packed full of meaning for eager consumers (Barber, 1992).

Finally, the way we understand the market is based on symbols, or rhetoric, that describes economic arrangements in our everyday lives (Cheney, 1999). Such symbols should not be taken as transparent, but analyzed for how they shape understanding about political and social issues (Cheney, 1999). As social constructions they also contribute to an overall understanding of what constitutes ‘the Market’. After all, it too is an ideology (Cheney, 1999).

This idea is tied directly to the larger critical analysis offered by Deetz (1992) reminding scholars that corporate interests have the authority to market and shape decision making and contribute to organizational consent at large, not just product images. At the heart of this discussion is the concept of hegemony, originally developed by Gramsci as the “complex web of conceptual and material arrangements producing the very fabric of everyday life” (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p. 191). It is also referred to as the common sense in organizations, reinforced by reward systems, rumors, formal and informal punitive measures (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996). Organizational consent is a product of workplace hegemony. Such consent is a result of decision making practices, notably those affected by the decisions that do not come from the desires or interests of those affected by the decision (Deetz, 1992). Gaining consent from employees and other participants is much more effective form of social control than coercion
(Deetz, 1992). While it appears very natural and individual for each person, consent is actually quite ideological (Deetz, 1992).

However, Cheney cautions scholars and practitioners about subscribing to the image of the market and shaping their organizational practices accordingly. He warns:

Organizations in every sector are appealing to an overarching image of the market as their guiding principle, and that point of reference may limit what is seen as ethically and socially possible given the dictates ‘it’s just business.’ As long as the market is used as the primary frame within which to view issues such as the dignity of the human person, an organization’s commitment to its employees, corporate social responsibility, environmental preservation, and overall quality of life, there will be a strong temptation to commodify social values and reduce human labor to the status of a mere instrument (Cheney, 1999, p. 141).

Based on this I am concerned about the commodification of female images and what it means for Third Wave feminism. Communication literature is emerging in this area as well. In 1991 a group of scholars began writing about the concept of “commodity feminism,” to identify and critique the way advertisements contain commodity narratives for wide audiences, particularly women and girls (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991, p. 333). Most often these narratives have to do with the desire for self-identity and the comfort offered by living within the codes of patriarchy.

In the case of the present day Girl Scout organization, there is a compelling collage of evidence that suggests commodity feminism and the processes in which Third Wave feminism both celebrate and critique have indeed made their way into the identity politics of the organization—for staff, volunteers, and members alike (Ruskin, 1998; Cornelius & Heller, 1998; Manahan, 1997;
Kjesbo, 2000). GSUSA’s overt attempts to play with popular mediated images of girls’ tastes in order to solve a membership dilemma, as well as manage an outdated image with a wide American audience, relates to Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein’s (2001) concerns about whether such conscious attempts at manipulating images of women (and girls) constitute a mainstreaming of modern feminism (p. 196; Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Is Girl Scouting in the context of GSUSA, which boasts accessibility for “every girl, everywhere,” drawing from modern feminism or does it fit the definition of commodification at the expense of a women’s movement?

My concern lies in the way GSUSA talks about popular cultural notions of “girl power in its noblest expression” as a corporate marketing strategy to reach Girl Scouts and parents (Siegel & Gayle, 1998). I’m inclined to side with Buzzanell (1994), Shugart (1999), and other feminists who worry that such a commodification of girlhood, depicted through images like Girl Scout cookie boxes and developed into a sales campaign, could have profound effect on the clientele of Girl Scouting as well as on mainstream American discourse surrounding girlhood. Moreover, brand imagery, logos, and many other aspects of organizational life contribute to workplace hegemony and consent, which helps to perpetuate the status quo. In the case of women centered organizations like GSUSA, this means reinforcing the hegemony of patriarchy (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p. 214).

Therefore, theories about marketization, organizational communication, and commodity logic should make us wary of about the growing importance of
selling images—especially to women and girls. The literature also provides a language to speak about domination, which I argue is linked to the rhetorical significance of “alienation” for women in late capitalist market democracies like the United States.

3rd Wave Feminism & the Alienation of Women

What does third-wave feminism have to do with Girl Scouts today? Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein (2001) write that the latest wave of the women’s movement is characterized by girls and women who place a high value on individual identity formation and not a regard for collectivity as past Second Wave feminists had done (p. 195). Third Wave feminism is characterized by “its embeddedness in popular culture” and focuses on the way the fashion industry, television shows, and other mediated images influence an American public. On the one hand the Third Wave feminists make the argument that we have entered a “women-centered phase” where media representations allow women to examine their socialization, honor their own values, and reclaim positive aspects of being female. This branch of feminism attempts to reconstruct the world for both men and women, so that neither sex is oppressed by negative implications of masculine and feminine stereotypes (Buzzanell, 1994). On the other hand, some Third Wave feminists argue that media representations also maintain stereotypes, which constrain human growth (Buzzanell, 1994). Such critical and cultural scholars wonder if these media representations of girls and women are a barometer of social change—a credit to the battles of Second Wavers. Or are these media artifacts really masquerading feminist values—are they “slick media
conventions” selling feminism back to the masses in the form of image representation (Shugart, Wagonner, & Hallstein, 2001, p. 196). Feminists are drawn to a critical perspective because of the way it straddles rhetorical criticism, market domination, and the co-opting of female identities (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991; Buzzanell, 1994; Shugart, Wagonner, & Hallstein, 2001; Shugart, 2003).

One of the earliest feminist writers concerned with girlhood, Mary Wollstonecraft, provides an intellectual bridge between the indicators of Third Wave feminism and critical theory. Her publications from the late 1700s predate the First Wave of the women’s movement, but are still relevant today. She raised the issue of naturalization in our everyday lives, which accounts for the way “a social formation is abstracted from the historical conflictual site of its origin and treated as a concrete, relatively fixed, entity” (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p. 199; Griffin, 2000; Wollstonecraft, 1787). Meaning that by implementing managerial decisions (like deciding what images to put on the cookie boxes and sales material) and routinely asserting them as normal and natural fixtures, it is possible to gain control and disperse a particular ideology throughout the organizational framework, as well as disseminate messages about the organization/social movement to consumers (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p. 199). Wollstonecraft’s work laid the foundation for understanding the alienation of women in the economic world based on naturalization.

Griffin (2000) exposes the rhetorical implications of her work by terming the theory “a critical rhetoric of alienation.” She provides an overall explanation
of the way rhetoric functions to erase the place of women in Marx’s traditional
writings and reinforce gender roles. She notes this is largely accomplished by the
concept of alienation, or “a discursive problem encouraged by the interpellation of
women as passive objects rather than acting subjects” (p. 520). In other words, it
is a concept that has to do with robbing women of their identity. Dominant voices
in society can be attributed to creating identification for them (individually and en
masse). Doing so realizes women as material objects that are exchanged as
commodities (Griffin, 2000). Critical rhetoric seems the most appropriate choice
for artifacts like the Girl Scout cookie boxes, since they have a material presence
that is linked to a larger social context mixing gender ideology and market
capitalism. More specifically though, the concept of alienation is central to this
analysis because Girl Scout identities are chosen, laid-out, printed, and sold to a
wide audience. Recalling that Shugart’s (2001) description of the Third Wave
includes a wide identification with pop culture to determine feminist values,
alienation as a critical rhetoric is the ideal treatment for artifacts that have the
potential to support or tear down feminist values.

Alienation also describes how women and girls’ identities are often
molded so as to fit the male gaze (Griffin, 2000). If this sounds strikingly similar
to original Marxist thought, it is. Alienation as a critical rhetoric claims its roots
from socialist feminists, and is traceable to original Marxist scholarship. Griffin
(2000) explains:

Wollstonecraft argued that what was considered ‘natural’ for women was
their ‘dependence’ on men and their want of protection. ‘Natural’ was
thought to be women’s inherent ‘fondness for dolls, dressing, and talking,’
her ‘cunning’ ways and her subservience ‘to love or lust.’ ‘Natural was the
belief that a woman should ‘gratify the appetite of man,’ be ‘naturally a coquette,’ and desire to ‘propagate the species.’ ‘Natural’ was that women ought to aspire to acquire feminine virtues ‘lest them should be hunted out of society as masculine’ (p. 519).

These normalized expectations from society should be cause for concern. After all, patriarchy is about domination of men over women, which Wollstonecraft argues “starts with women as property” (Griffin, 2000, p. 518). Ironically, GSUSA is not foreign to this problem plaguing girls. The organization has long since acknowledged what Griffin (2000) also theorizes: “Women and girls of all shapes, sizes, and colors may struggle to accept an identity that has been assigned to them. Ferreting out the political, material, and theoretical aspect of one’s identity is no easy task” (Griffin, 2000, p. 521-22). An evaluation of marketing practices is necessary from the perspective of alienation, because under this theoretical lens there opens up the “possibilities of additional forms of domination within these new identities” even if GSUSA supposes their images are progressive, heartfelt, and representative. (Griffin, 2000, p. 521-22).

Now that I have provided my theoretical framework that draws largely from marketization and the critical rhetoric of alienation, it is important to consider methodology. Trethewey (2000) points out that choosing methodology as a feminist writer is just as contentious to other scholars as is locating feminist epistemology and theory: “debating the relative merits of particular methods...have forced feminists of all stripes to be much more careful about the assumptions they make about their positions as researchers, the nature of the relationship between researchers and participants, and the emancipatory qualities
of research” (p. 203). This was apparent during the stages of my method design and rationale, which in the next section discusses my epistemological stance, use of methodology, and research questions.

Methodology

According to Dallimore (2000), good feminist research should “be defined by both its goals and its methodology (p. 158).” She argues that “feminist research can be accomplished through the use of a variety of research methods; however, preferably, methods used will allow researchers to capture the experiences of participants using participants’ own voices. One way in which this can be accomplished is through collaborative research which frequently ‘includes the researcher as a person’ in the research and/or ‘attempts to develop special relationships with the people being studied’ through interactive strategies (Dallimore, 2000, p. 158-159).

I carefully and consciously chose the methodology of the study based on several strongly held beliefs about my own positioning as a scholar and the nature of the subject matter. First I will begin by providing the epistemological assumptions used in the design of this proposal, followed by the methodology used to address two main clusters of my research questions, as well a discussion about generalizability.

Feminist epistemology is at the forefront of this study. It describes an innovative critique of how one knows what she knows, and more importantly, challenges dominant patriarchal perspectives about the way the world works (Narayan, 1998). Based on the historic exclusion of women from more visible,
prestigious domains, feminist epistemology maintains that simply adding women to these domains is not the answer. After all, adding women does not just expand the number of details to an academic field, but stands to critique a more insidious problem about the creation of knowledge by altering the very nature scholarship and researcher self-awareness" (Narayan, 1998). Sandra Harding (1998) says that researcher self-awareness is vitally important to a feminist epistemology because it is part of a complicated equation intertwining theory and politics—particularly for new social movements looking to become more democratic (Harding, 1998). She points out under standpoint theory that individuals are situated in their lives by gender, race, class, and sexuality. Not only are these ways of identifying with the world embedded in the fabric of society, but they also are a part of systems of political hierarchy (Harding, 1998). Researchers are no exception. Dallimore (2000) recommends that whatever kind of method employed for feminist research, it should somehow “allow researchers to capture the experiences of participants using participants’ own voices. One way in which this can be accomplished is through collaborative research which frequently includes the researcher as a person in the research and/or attempts to develop special relationships with the people being studied through interactive strategies” (p. 159).

This is especially the case in my own situation. Even though I am positioned as the researcher, I am also a card-carrying Girl Scout. I am a lifetime member of the organization. I have held many different volunteer and paid positions and I have often been a policy maker for local Girl Scout councils. As a
result I see myself in the role of telling stories, as well as telling my own story, through scholarship. Denzin (1996) helped clarify my evolving belief system. He wrote, “the new social science writers divide into two groups—the ethnographic realists and the cultural phenomenologists. The realists see stories in society, waiting to be written, and the phenomenologists write from the inside out, their own stories become cultural texts” (p. 201). Generally, I align myself in the middle between these two approaches to scholarship. This project is a marriage between the type of information gathering found in discourse analysis (ascribed to ethnographic realists, as Denzin would say) and the rationale provided by cultural phenomenologists to produce work and use texts that are explicitly persuasive and indulge in social criticism (Denzin, 1996, p. 201, 208).

In order to address the research questions this project engages in three types of information-gathering strategies: textual analysis of artifacts, conversational analysis of one-to-one interviews (many were conducted over the phone), and conversational analysis of focus groups. I conducted individual interviews with four Girl Scout council CEOs (two current and two retired), four membership specialists, two product sales specialists, and one council registrar. I also conducted three focus groups with twenty Girl Scouts under the age of eighteen. My flexibility to choose who I wanted to interview, where I wanted to interview, and how participants were interviewed was a luxury that I can only attribute to the kind-heartedness and complete trust given to me by the organizational members, who I am fortunate to know through my previous work with the organization. I considered each one of my interviewees as key
informants, who were able to provide me with information about specific aspects of the cookie sale. Some, like the CEOs, were also able to give me their take on processes at the National level. Given the geographic distance between many of my two participating Girl Scout councils, some of these conversations were conducted over the phone and recorded with a recorder that allowed me to transcribe the interviews after they took place.

Some may wonder why there are no interviews from professionals at GSUSA in New York. There are a couple of reasons. My personal connections with the organization traverse a handful of councils, but none at the national level. Therefore getting an interview with someone from that location proved extremely difficult, given the critical nature of the project. I did not expect to call the New York office and receive a warm response after saying, “I’m doing a critique of Girl Scout marketing for my master’s thesis. Will you help me?” I did call and was put in contact with an employee who worked in marketing. Her response to my brief introduction was short and hurried. “I don’t have time for this,” she told me. “Have you checked our website? All of the images on the Girl Scout cookie boxes are backed up by years and years of professional research.” I thanked her and decided to move on to richer interviews. Although knowledge provided by key informants helped me to fill in a bigger picture. I argue that their perspectives are just as valuable as a national employee, since I often noted that they offered what I call “bridges” between the corporate decision makers and fieldworkers, executives and troop leaders. They provided me with information about local opinion, along with their perceptions about national issues.
All the interviews and focus groups rely upon orthographic transcription of interviews, which describes the process of cultivating ideas while reliving the interview in one’s mind, listening to the tape, as well as typing out the words that are said, in order to determine common themes coming directly from organizational constituents (Wood & Kroger, 2000). More specifically, the method I seek to use draws from the characteristics of criticism, or an inherently interdisciplinary method that “seeks to discern connections between language and other elements in social life which are often opaque” in order to “figure within social relations of power and domination, how language works ideologically” and contribute to “an emancipatory knowledge interest” (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. 230). Since I’ve already pointed in the literature why identity is a highly fractured and constantly reproduced concept for individuals and organizations, it is important to take a close look at the images that appear in the hands of a mass audience the way cookie boxes are intended to be. They are handled by girl members, “cookie moms,” professional Girl Scouts, and the American public. However, younger Girl Scouts are more consumers of the order forms than the boxes. They carry them from door-to-door and crunch numbers and tally boxes in order to complete their sales, which is my main reason for featuring these artifacts as part of the collage of images.

The flat front of 2003 Girl Scout cookie boxes and the cookie order forms served as the primary artifacts used for the textual analysis in order to answer my research questions. This material was selected based on what is made available by the cooperating Girl Scout council in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, since the staff freely
opened their main office to my search requirements over the month of January, 2003. Like in the Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002) study, textual analysis serves this project in a number of ways. First, the method complements orthographic analysis. While orthographic transcription attempts to find patterns in conversation, textual analysis mines the less obvious, hegemonic, and “latent content of texts through a study of their signification” (Wood & Kroger, 2000; Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002, p. 147).

Other research questions are addressed by the focus groups held for different Girl Scout troops on-site at their troop meetings. The purpose was to ask the girls’ questions of their opinions about the images they see on the 2002 Girl Scout cookie boxes used in the textual analysis, as well as have them show and describe pictures of them participating in their favorite Girl Scout memory. Using this data I hoped to find out if the images on the cookie boxes represented traditional or contemporary images of Girl Scouting, how the girls assessed the Girl Scout cookie sale, what they thought of the images on the cookie boxes and other cookie sales material, if the images were representative of their experiences, and what they got out of being in Girl Scouts.

Although all three councils agreed to participate in the focus groups and two of them offered the services of their membership specialists to coordinate troops of any age desired, it was not possible to collect this information in the given time frame. Instead, I facilitated, recorded and transcribed three focus groups in Wisconsin. My selection of these two groups of girls could not have been more ideal. In Girl Scout terms, such age groups correspond to five different
levels of “rank”: Daisy Girl Scouts (kindergarten), Brownie Girl Scouts (elementary), Junior (early middle school), Cadette Girl Scouts (late middle school) and Senior Girl Scouts (high school). The only exception to these different ranks was the Studio 2B program.

In total, I was fortunate enough to interview four Senior Girl Scouts, seven Cadette Girls Scouts, and nine girls from a Studio 2B Troop, which equate to the age of Cadette Girl Scouts. Each focus group met in different locations. The Seniors met me at a local restaurant near their rural community, just off a major highway. They were all seventeen years old and drove themselves to the event. One girl told me she will be graduating from high school in May. The Cadette focus group met with me during one of their regular troop meetings in the basement of a church. They appeared to be extremely young for Cadettes, but I found out they recently made the transition from Juniors to Cadettes. They regarded themselves as a traveling troop. Currently, their focus was earning their way to England. I was also fortunate enough to attend the first meeting of the Studio 2B troop in the suburban home of one of girls. The home was quite conducive to the setting and size of most Girl Scout troops, since their regular meeting places must be venues that accommodate a sitting (or playing) area for children, per Girl Scout safety guidelines. Given the nature of children and their willingness to stimulate other into conversation (rather than sit mutely with a single researcher), I chose this approach over one-on-one interviews. Babbie (1999) offers that the spontaneous conversations that happen in focus groups are much less likely to occur in one-to-one settings, which provides information that
would never have come about in the first place. I wagered that children and young adults at play in their conversations would produce the richest amount of information for my topic.

In this study, generalizability is tricky business. Most decisions made and services provided are at the council level, meaning that a researcher’s ability to generalize based on the collection of data from a few sites is problematic, but not impossible. According to Dallimore (2000), generalization in this case can still occur because it is part of “the in-depth study of a particular phenomenon through an inductive process, one which allows ‘categories and hunches’ to be refined... with those of like phenomena” (p. 170). It certainly cannot reflect the same kind of generalizability “claimed by functionalists” and the “breadth-of-applicability” need not be the primary feature of ‘worthwhile’ research” (Dallimore, 2000, p. 171). At first, my project attempted to address the issue of generalizability in two ways: through the geographic spread of in-depth interviews and the selection of national artifacts for analysis. Both of these attempts to generate some generalizability are based on issues of representation (fairly and critically analyzing messages from artifacts and organizational interviews) and reliability (the diversity of the organization across the country). It seemed important to preserve the importance of paid staff and Girl Scout experience through interviews, but not limit my collection of voices to one area of the country. It seemed equally important to choose a collage of texts representative of GSUSA’s “national” voice, as well. This collage of texts, coupled with an interview with a marketing executive from GSUSA, enhanced
generalizability because of the decision-making process of girl images described in the results section. In all, there were three types of information-gathering strategies: textual analysis of artifacts, conversational analysis of one-on-one interviews (many are likely to be conducted over the phone), and conversational analysis of focus groups.

Doing the analysis was another matter that required self-reflection. Leff (1994) wrote that “distance is a technical term that refers to a stance a critic takes in relation to the object of study...where more recently, fashions have changed and critics often emphasize the value of ‘engagement.’ Objectivity is no longer assumed to be either possible or desirable...and critics are asked to abandon the role of disinterested spectators and to recognize their function as rhetorical advocates” (p. 324). As a self-identified critical/feminist scholar, I am one of those advocates. I also recognize that my dual-interests as scholar and Girl Scout volunteer form a sort of “tough-love” for the Girl Scout organization and will certainly impact the way I analyze the artifacts and interview data.

I used a general form of textual analysis for the 2002/2003 cookie box covers and a cookie poster. This enabled me to thematically analyze an aggregate form of evidence from the array of boxes and promotional material. I also made an attempt at self-reflexivity when I analyzed the interview data gathered by individuals or focus groups. During the in-person or phone interview process I wrote notes of my own thoughts and preliminary analyses. I also did the same for the focus groups, recording girls’ responses on tape so that I recorded my own notes in real time, rather than after-the-fact. I transcribed the interviews with a
close attention to detail, owing to the orthographic process. Themes and sparks of inspiration came through as I typed, relived the interview experience in my mind, and compared it to other powerful statements in memory. After each interview I made even more notes and recorded my constant stream of analysis as I put each interview in written form. From that point each transcript was read repeatedly. My plan was to first arrange interview comments under categories of each research question, which I did. After this first round of organization, I created a thematic analysis of each category to identify recognizable patterns addressing each question. A thematic analysis required a repetitive reading of transcripts to identify patterns of keyword searchers to find recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). "Recurrence" ensured that I would be able to find "the same thread of meaning," between interviews, even if the wording is slightly different (Owen, 1984, p. 275). This criterion allowed me to loosely group, and then analyze, similar phrases under each research question. I also counted words during analysis to relying upon "repetition," which strictly refers to the "repetition of key words, phrases, or sentences" (Owen, 1984, p. 275). Lastly, I was able to validate my notations during and after each interview, long into the transcription process, with "forcefulness". This criterion of thematic analysis "refers to vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from other locations...it also refers to the underlining of words and phrases...the increased size of print or uses of colored marks" (Owen, 1984, p. 275).
A women-centered organization like the Girl Scouts is impressively up-to-date with their marketing practices. The last chapter detailed the historical progression of fundraising within the context of the Girl Scout cookie sale and the emergence of the Brand Voice for the organization. The chapter also covered relevant theories to be applied to this study on the Girl Scout cookie sale, notably marketization and the rhetorical alienation of women. I hoped to show my careful planning at executing the study by wrapping up the chapter with a discussion about methodology. Armed with history and organizational theory of the Market, this study is ready to move into the second chapter analyzing the images of Girl Scout cookie boxes and promotional material.

The rest of the study is spent in analysis of artifacts, interviews with paid staff, and Girl Scout focus groups. Chapter two seeks to apply theories about marketization, commodity logic, and the rhetorical alienation of women by looking at artifacts from GSUSA: cookie boxes and sales material. Specifically, I analyze the artifacts for overarching themes in content, ranging from what the girls are doing on the covers to the kind of wording, clothing, color, and iconography present on the boxes and sales material.

Chapter three introduces the opinions of paid staff, producing interesting findings on what they think about the images analyzed in the previous chapter as well as their role in the cookie sale. I wrote about how practitioners framed their role in the decision making process for selecting cookie box pictures of Girl Scouts, the duties of the National office, the favorite part of their job with the
cookie sale, as well as their least favorite aspect of the event. They reveal many organizational dimensions about the cookie sale, which I explore.

Chapter four appeals to three groups of Girl Scouts for their insights on the cookie box and poster images that are supposed to represent them. The girls also speak to the experience of being Girl Scouts and where they see the organization moving in the future. Each group is markedly different in their responses, which enhances the analysis in this chapter. Their perspectives are also critical for this analysis because, after all, they are the constituency being served and also marketed at the same time.

Finally, chapter five wraps up all the analysis sections with a discussion about the theoretical implications of the findings, drawing together the big picture on marketization, commodity logic, and the rhetorical alienation of women. This chapter also provides suggestions for future research and organizational practice—an essential ending for any feminist analysis.
CHAPTER 2:
IMAGES OF GIRL SCOUTS IN ARTIFACTS AND REPRESENTATIONAL PRACTICES AT GSUSA

In this chapter I analyze the images on cookie boxes and promotional material arguing that they contribute to rhetoric of alienation for girls featured on the boxes. I do so by using the literature on alienation that may occur with contemporary branding practices. What follows is an analysis of the manufactured photographs presented by GSUSA on the cookie boxes and sales material, interpreted through my own rhetorical lens, the opinions of paid staff, and girl members. First, I will give an overview description of all 2002/2003 Girl Scout cookie boxes and one promotional poster from this year’s sale. I will then identify common characteristics of the boxes and sales material, linking the observations to the literature on rhetoric of alienation. Finally, I will connect the images of the boxes and sales material with the issues of commodification and marketization in order to set the stage for analysis of paid staff and Girl Scout focus groups in later chapters.

Figure 3. Thin Mints; Figure 4. Shortbreads; Figure 5. Animal Treasures. Girl Scout Cookie Boxes 2002/2003.
Girl Scout Cookie Boxes

Thin Mints, Caramel Delights, Peanut Butter Patties, Peanut Butter Sandwiches, Aloha Chips, Ole Oles, Lemon Pastry Cremes, Animal Treasures, and Shortbreads—all part of the Girl Scout cookie family. Each kind of cookie is safely packaged in a box that is both ornate and well thought out. All the boxes from this study came from the 2002 & 2003 cookie sales. They represent the complete set of boxes from the only two bakers contracted by GSUSA, ABC Bakers and Little Brownie Bakers, in order to ensure a complete range. To look at them as a set is to notice their consistency in coloring, branding, and wording, as well as their political imagery.
No matter which bakery it came from, or what kind of cookie is contained, consumers of Girl Scout cookies will be sure to find a few constant features on every box. For instance, all boxes approved by GSUSA will be marked with a blue stripe at the top of each broad side that dons the Girl Scout brand logo—a "trefoil" that resembles the silhouette of three women—and beneath the logo, the current tag “Where Girls Grow Strong.” Consumers can also find a close up photo of the cookie featured around the bottom of each broad side, with the name of the cookie printed above it with carefree lettering (see Figure 8, for example). Each narrow side of the box consistently provides nutrition information on one panel and the phrase “You’d be surprised what a Girl Scout Cookie can build” followed by a list of virtues: strong values, strong minds, strong bodies, strong spirit, strong friendships, strong skills, strong leadership, strong communities. This list is accompanied by an icon for each virtue, the first being the Girl Scout trefoil (brand logo) and the words “Girl Scouts” followed by the recognizable
The bottom of every box (the flap that reads “open other end”) indicates that all packaging comes from “100% Recycled Paper,” the name of the cookie in the same whimsical lettering, and the signature logo of the baker. The ABC Bakers logo consists of a blue and white box that has stars emerging from the top, with small red “abc” lettering. Little Brownie Bakers makes its mark with a sideways oval outlined in red. In the center of the oval, on top of a white background, is an elf face and the words “Little Brownie Bakers” traced in red, as well.

The most noticeable aspect of the boxes is the color and imagery. Color is another variation that is observable on the Girl Scout cookie boxes. I can only speculate that designers collaborating between GSUSA and the bakeries said, “think rainbow!” Every primary color, and a range of color-combinations, is represented: fire-engine red (see Figure 16), hot pink (Figure 5)
pumpkin orange (Figure 18), canary yellow (Figure 12), lime green (Figure 13),
sea foam green (Figure 9), emerald green (Figure 3), sky blue (Figure 4), and
grape purple (Figure 10). Not only are they eye-catching because of their
vibrancy, but they also have the potential for easy sorting during large-scale
delivery. There is also no clear “front” or back” of the broad panels, but there is a
pattern governing an image’s placement. Every cookie box has two views: a
close-up photograph of Girl Scouts engaged in an activity on one side, and a
group photograph of the same event on the other. No matter what, Girl Scouts
depicted in each photograph are playing outdoors, smiling, having fun, and
wearing the Girl Scout trefoil (logo) or uniform, with only one exception—girls
working cameras at a television studio. Two themes on the boxes appear to be
especially significant: racial diversity and activity.
Interestingly, it is clear that racial diversity was a top priority based on the composition of girls on the boxes as well as evidence from two Membership Specialists who told me that race was indeed a priority for the organization. African-American girls are displayed as the focal point in close-up photographs on five of the ten boxes, including the most recognizable top-seller, Thin Mints, featuring a close-up of an African American girl playing on a ropes course (see Figure 3.1). Four of those five boxes are GSUSA “mandatory” cookies, which means that both cookie companies are required to manufacture that item, since it is considered a traditional part of the sale. Other major categories of race and ethnicity are displayed on the boxes, including: Asian-Americans, Hispanics and Caucasians. To achieve this look on the boxes, one Membership Specialist told me:
I would suspect that they would go to a couple selected councils that have big populations that show high levels of diversity, whether it be age or ethnicity or whatever and do shots that way.

Another CEO also said that:

The Nation’s focus right now is on the growing population and the growing population are Hispanics right now. The Hispanic population is growing at the rate and is so fast right now that eventually they will become a majority, so of course, if you were a smart business person you would look at the trends that’s happening in the country and you will market to that, you know, and is it a tradition for Hispanics to eat Girl Scout cookies? Well, maybe not, but then you need to develop that. It’s difficult to market Girl Scout cookies to Asians, because Asian’s aren’t people who normally do like cookies, okay. But you need to find a way that you could market and develop a cookie that might appeal to them. The second largest growing population, of course, are the Asians and they are growing really fast, but not as fast as the Hispanics.

Her testimony reinforces the organization’s commitment to diversity and its heightened awareness of growing populations. This is significant on two levels. First, it shows that GSUSA is interested in market research that articulates who possible members could be and the kind of Girl Scout program it should offer. Second, it demonstrates the organization tailoring a product to changing populations.
demographics. These comments help to further illuminate the rainbow of diversity found on the Girl Scout cookie boxes.

Activity

Figure 18. Peanut Butter Sandwiches; Figure 19. Peanut Butter Patties. 2002/2003 Girl Scout Cookie Boxes.

Activities displayed on the boxes also have some variety. I categorized their activities in three ways for description in this analysis: civics, sports, and technical/educational opportunities. My “civic” activities category blended traditional Girl Scout program with other icons of “freedom and heroism”—especially since these images are significantly more potent since the events of September 11th 2001 in the United States. Girls participating in civic activities included: wearing a fire helmet and playing with a hose (see Figure 10), raising the American flag, (see Figure 11), and holding hands in a Girl Scout friendship circle while in full-uniform (see Figure 12). Girls engaged in sports are shown to play soccer and basketball (see Figures 14 and 19), and also negotiate ropes
courses (see Figure 3). Girls participating in technical or educational opportunities include: running cameras at a television studio (see Figure 17), learning about owls (see Figure 18), and shooting photography (see Figure 5).

I would like to clarify the word "activity" is markedly different than my use of the word "image," for a few reasons. Activity references the kind of things the girls are doing on the cookie boxes and sales material. Image references the way the girls look, what they are wearing, and how their activities are captured and printed on cookie boxes and sales material. The distinction enables scholars and practitioners to separate content from process in the search for understanding market practice in for GSUSA. I contend this distinction provides a third theme—image—which will be taken up in significant detail later, after the discussion of the Girl Scout cookie sale poster.

The description of the boxes above serve to explain what the average consumer of cookie boxes will find on his or her doorstep when girls are delivering orders. What about other promotional material for the sale? The following is a description of my final artifact for analysis—a Girl Scout cookie sales poster.
Girl Scout Cookie Posters

During the preliminary meetings at the council office in Wisconsin I was given a pre-fabricated packet of cookie sales material. This packet contained the same material that any troop leader would receive during an annual training in preparation for the event. When I opened the packet I found two different cookie posters and was struck by their images. Even though both posters contained the same kind of information on one side and two-thirds of the same material on the other side, each composition was vastly different regarding girl images. One form was to be used as an “older girl” order form, and the other meant for an “elementary school” aged consumer.

The “older girl” poster is composed in thirds. The bottom third of the horizontally rectangular page has a band of light blue color as background. Each of the 2003 Girl Scout cookies were arranged in a zigzag pattern, with each of
their names written above the cookies in white lettering. The Lemon Pastry Cremes were labeled “Reduced Fat,” the Shortbread cookie was labeled “classic,” and the Animal Treasures carried the subscript, “Fudge-Dipped Shortbread.” The blue band of featured cookies diffused to a white background occupying two-thirds of the page. Against the background stand four embracing, laughing Girl Scouts in traditional uniforms. The first Girl Scout standing on the left is leaning in to the picture holding a Girl Scout Thin Mints cookie box. This order form is reflects more traditional images of Girl Scouting, because of the uniforms involved.

The second “elementary school aged” Girl Scout cookie poster is of some note and serves as the last artifact in this analysis. It was also broken up into thirds like the first poster. It had the same format as the first form, although the images of the girls were significantly different. A hot pink band of color created the backdrop for the same line of Girl Scout cookies depicted in the “older girl” form. The names of the cookies also appeared above them, complete with subscripts. Diffused to the white background, five Girl Scouts appeared across the cover to occupy the remaining two-thirds of the page. However, if the first girl on the left was not holding a box of Shortbreads this group would never have appeared to be advertising Girl Scout cookies, since they were not wearing traditional uniforms.

Instead this group of five was dressed in costumes representing different nationalities or ethnicities. From left to right, one could discern that the little girl with the long dark braids, red dress, white blouse, and sombrero represented the
Mexican (or more broadly, Hispanic) ethnic category. The next little girl with olive skin and her dark hair pulled back wore an Indian-style dress, with necklace and gold earrings, and had a little red dot on her forehead. The center focused on a blond, toothless, Caucasian girl with ringlets, dressed in a white “Pollyanna” style dress. Second to last was an Asian girl—also growing her two front teeth—wearing a delicate white veil and gold-embroidered pink robe. Finally, the last girl in the photograph represented the African style of dress. Her hair was pulled back in a stylish head-wrap of yellow and black, and she wore a necklace of wooden shapes against a gold, red, and black dress of various patterns.

There are probably very few people, besides those invested in their creation, who have taken a long, hard, look at the images on the boxes. After all, most people are more concerned with the boxes’ content than the external appearance. (I know most of the time, I am too). Both cookie boxes and posters stick closely to the Girl Scout Brand Voice—featuring activities that appear fun, interesting, and progressive. Both sets of artifacts also appear to be well designed with an eye for color and wording. Despite these similarities, the descriptions and examples above are useful in the following analysis to explore the concept of alienation as a critical rhetoric within these artifacts.

Cookie Boxes: Active and Passive Imagery

The pride I feel for the organization and the belief I hold for the remarkable program it displays is at odds with the knowledge that Girl Scouts has to sell itself using girl images. It seems the smiling, bouncing, questioning, adventuring, kids on the boxes have given away their individuality—their
authenticity—to a camera lens and a composer who knows exactly how to put
together an aggregate Girl Scout experience. This kind of aggregate composition,
I argue, creates a kind of “alienation” from individual experience in Girl Scouting
since identity of Girl Scouts is shaped in certain ways for cookie boxes and can be
specifically seen in terms of the Girl Scout uniform and other outfits branded with
the trefoil logo. On one hand I do believe the images presented on the boxes and
poster convey the Girl Scout movement’s spirit and remarkable program. That’s
why the first part of the analysis will be spent analyzing the active, or what I
would argue more authentic and individualized, messages present in the images
on the cookie boxes. In order to demonstrate a need to look at a larger societal
discourse facing the commercialization of nonprofit organizations and feminist
values I will spend the second part of the cookie box analysis looking at the way
the images convey a passive, or alienating, view for the girls and the organization.
The final part of the analysis extends the critical view of the cookie boxes by
drawing an association between the cookie poster and the use of marketing in
consumer culture to galvanize membership from a certain age of Girl Scout with
for the possibility of selling more cookies nationwide.

Active Girls—Strong Bodies, Strong Minds, Strong Sisterhood

When I was growing up and climbing the ranks of Girl Scouting, I could
easily have been called a “Scoutie,” which means I was fairly invested in Girl
Scout culture and did a lot of things with my troop and the local council. In
reality, it went much farther than that. I traveled. I was introduced to the “Fortune
500” of my region. I was provided with a plethora of mentors to choose from who
would expose me to careers I would never have dreamed of in my blue-collar upbringing. In many ways I realize I owe Girl Scouting for my feminist consciousness and much of my early self-confidence. The Girl Scout cookie boxes convey every bit of girl-power I experienced growing up, and then some. In fact, there is only one box that has an image of something I did not participate in as a Girl Scout in my youth: the Thin Mints (ropes course). Every other activity rings true— the friendship circle, the trip to Beaver Creek Reserve (to see owls), the trip to the fire station, the posting of the colors (flag ceremonies). All of these activities were part of my Girl Scout experience, and therefore I can feel their validity. My experiences aside, all of these images convey active, engaged, curious young girls.

The images on the boxes also convey nontraditional gender roles and career options to girls and the American public. The civic images, sport images, and technical/educational images I noted above are evidence of this. For example, firefighting has been a career traditionally dominated by men, and as a result of the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center more attention has been given to this profession and its “mystique” of heroism. The front of the Caramel Delights box features the close-up of a Brownie Girl Scout wearing a fire helmet, smiling, in a white turtleneck with the Girl Scout trefoil on the collar. The group photo on the opposite side shows four Girl Scouts in logo t-shirts getting their hands sprayed by the fire hose, but most important aspect of the picture is the grown woman holding the hose. She is wearing a yellow fire coat, making the reader of the box assume she is a mentor firefighter for the girls, and importantly,
playing with and teaching impressionable young girls. Another prime example of nontraditional images is the Peanut Butter Sandwich box. The close-up on the box shows an African-American girl in pigtails feeding a burro. Her gaze meets the camera. The opposite side with the group picture features the same girl and two other Girl Scouts clad in Girl Scout sweatshirts and pants watching an owl at close-range. The owl is being held by an African-American man who appears to be in a khaki uniform, leading readers to believe that he is the expert staff member at perhaps a wildlife refuge. In this picture, it demonstrates that Girl Scouts are exposed to fields like wildlife biology and the natural sciences, which are traditionally dominated by men. All of these images suggest Girl Scouting makes an outward attempt to inspire its members and the general public about the possibilities for girls these days. One Membership Specialist told me during our interview that:

I know that they try to keep things pretty contemporary. Just like you look at the kids from the eighties pictures and they all have big hair and blue eye shadow and all of those kinds of things. Kids nowadays don’t look like that and so they try and keep it along those lines. I’m thinking about one of the cookie boxes in particular. I think it’s the peanut butter patties...has girls that are in sports. And the girls always on all the packages are active. In whatever they’re doing and they always have Girl Scout ware on, whether it be the full uniform, or the Girl Scout t-shirt, or...something along those lines.

GSUSA would probably like to deviate from the notion of “cookies, crafts and cookies,” but outdoor scenes on the cookie boxes keep with the camping tradition of Girl Scouting by conveying that girls are not are not delicate house ornaments, but active agents of the world. There are girls on the court, girls on the field, girls flying through the fresh air, and girls kneeling in the leaves (see
Figures 16, 25, 15). In fact, all but one of the boxes shows images in the out-of-doors. The notable exception is the Ole Ole box, which is clearly the setting of a television studio. Girls with headsets are “wired” for broadcast and look through the screen of a large camera.

It may have been implied the whole time, but I should also make it explicit: Girl Scout cookie boxes show girls with active bodies. Girl Scouts can be seen sailing through the air on ropes, bending, crouching, kneeling, touching equipment, hanging on each other, standing at attention, getting messy, running, kicking soccer balls, dribbling, shooting basketballs through hoops, and interacting with animals (see Figures 12, 14, 16, and 19). The most obvious expression of active bodies is on the famous Thin Mint box (see Figure 25).

Figure 25. Thin Mints 2002/2003 Girl Scout Cookie Box.
The close up image displays a girl swinging from a ropes course harness. Her arms and legs are flung open wide and she seems to be shouting with excitement. The group photo shows ten girls (about ten years old) with their arms around each other casually gathered around a rope ladder. One should note that all ten of these girls are also photographed smiling with their mouths open, seemingly calling out to the camera in unison. This tells readers that not only are Girl Scouts in charge of their bodies and feel free to use them, but they also feel free to speak their minds out loud.

All of these characteristics are the antithesis of what conventional gender norms for women (and girls) once were—especially for the period Juliette Low, founder of Girl Scouting, once fought to negotiate with her social movement. The images of action, strength, and intelligence could not be further from the traditional definition of femininity provided by Wollstonecraft’s famous words. If anything, I suspect GSUSA’s attempt to play up all the possibilities for girls in Girl Scouting on their promotional material is one of the best indicators of inherent feminist values in the organization. Even though some might disagree with me on this claim, there is something undeniably progressive about liberating girls from their intellectual and embodied insecurities. Once there may have been the presupposition, “I can’t do science” and now there is the image, “I’m going to be a wildlife biologist. See me with this owl!” Once there may have been a shadow of doubt, “I’m not strong enough and what would people think if I was swinging around?” and now there is the picture, “Watch me fly!”
Passive Agents of the Brand Voice

My acceptance of the images as they appear—as edgy, progressive, powerful artifacts of role modeling for girls—is tempered by my concerns about hegemony and the market. More specifically, I am concerned about the effect branding may have on the ability of the organization to accurately and ethically represent Girl Scouts themselves. Worse yet, will branding make the things that make Girl Scouting distinctive all slip away? I will argue that much could be lost by pursuing the brand voice too heavily, specifically by making the Girl Scouts on the cookie boxes wear clothing branded with the logo, as well as the trouble in manufacturing the ideal photo shoot.

I have been careful to mention exactly what girls are wearing in each picture: a white turtleneck with a trefoil embroidered on it, full uniforms, Girl Scout brand pants, shorts and leggings, sweatshirts, etc. Every girl on every cookie box is wearing approved Girl Scout regalia from head to toe. Some are dressed more formally than others, but even in the simplest photo there is a girl donning at minimum the Girl Scout trefoil. I counted eighty-seven girls pictured in the range of boxes. Of those eighty-seven, I noted that twenty-six of them were wearing the official Girl Scout uniform. That means the remaining sixty-one girls pictured on the boxes were wearing brand ware, which I designate as clothing that features the Girl Scout trefoil or other Brand Voice design.

There are some observable similarities and differences between the Girl Scout uniform and what I have termed “brand ware,” which is pertinent to this analysis. Both the formal Girl Scout uniform and the approved brand ware serve
the same purposes—to make the organization identifiable to an external public, create uniformity amongst members, and to allow members to demonstrate their achievement and identification with the organization and social movement. This is accomplished with the use of symbol and color. For instance, Brownie Girl Scouts were long identified in their formal uniform by their brown jumpers, sashes, triangle “try-its” and beanie hats. Junior Girl Scouts wore green in the same fashion. Until recently, Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts wore dark blue uniforms. Some aspects about color and badge placement have changed over the decades, but the overall purpose has stayed the same. Brand ware shares the goal of recognizability with the formal uniforms by drawing from the use of symbol (like the Girl Scout trefoil).

However, there are also some differences that should be pointed out between the uses of each type of clothing. For instance, brand ware is a departure from traditional Girl Scout uniforms because of its use of color and style. Brand ware consists of colors that are not typically found on the formal uniforms, usually take the shape of leisure clothing like sweatshirts, t-shirts, accessories, and leggings, and unlike the formal uniform is not meant to accommodate merit badges, pins, or other kinds of recognitions. Overall, brand ware is much simpler in appearance than what is often found on the traditional uniform and is geared for high-recognizability using the Brand Voice.

The unity in attire forces critical readers to step back and consider the overall issue of “authenticity” on each box. I mentioned before that each of the activities rung-true to my experience in Girl Scouting, but I asked myself, “Why
does it still seem fake?” Most of the pictures appear staged. First, most kids in the background and foreground are super happy. Though, I would not expect Girl Scouts of the United States of America to select images for their boxes that contained frowning scouts, or kids that looked like they were having a miserable time. The only noticeable exception is the Shortbreads box (see Figure 5), where girls are saluting and raising the American flag. Reverence shows on their somber faces, and one girl even has her fingers laced together held up by her chest. It appears she almost could be praying.

Upon closer examination, one also notices the fantastic stop-action photography and impeccable composition of the photographs. I am personally bothered by such perfection. It teaches the girls assembled for such presumed photo-shoots that it is worth the occasion to get them together in a semi-artificial way to get the right shots, instead of teaching them their troop photographs of activities and adventures are enough. It teaches them that “flawless” will always be in fashion and that it takes the meticulous photographer to create the right look, as if they were models from the more traditional beauty industry. The concepts of normalization and alienation are pertinent here.

Implications of Girl Scout Images

The implications of photographing girls using Brand Voice criteria are three fold. First, Cheney (1999) might consider this display of emotion evidence of a market value disarming assumed goals for the organization, since women have historically felt pressure to do an enormous amount of emotion management (regulating emotion) and emotional labor (displaying particular kinds of emotion
on-command) to appear friendly, happy, and nice, as well as act “appropriately” in response to rules and regulations of a patriarchal culture (Kemper, 1990). In fact, Jill Perry (1993) wrote about this phenomenon in the Girl Scout organization. Her work documents this preoccupation with happiness. She wrote: “In the early 1930s...reflecting the larger culture’s drift away from the ideals and rhetoric of the first woman’s movement, national Girl Scout administrators changed the focus of the program. From emphasizing ‘achievement,’ they shifted the program’s focus toward ‘happiness’” (Perry, 1993, p. 75). It seems even though the Girl Scout program champions the endeavor to provide a program (and images of that program) that will appeal to the strength and intellectual abilities of girls, they still may be hegemonically reinforcing the tragic “niceness” associated with the all-female movement and thus continuing the notion of cookies, crafts, and camping.

Second, it has become normal to expect that an organization will brand its members with their logo if any of them appear on sales material. It has also become normal to expect that an organization would rather collect perfect images of its members rather than solicit images from real-time occurrences (Cheney, et.al., 2003). These normalized expectations from society should be cause for concern precisely because of Wollstonecraft (1787/1995) and Griffin’s (2000) argument that it alienates women and girls and that branded images create the possibility of alienation.

Third, I argue that girls featured on the cookie boxes wearing brand ware and being photographed by professional photographers place their identities up
for exchange in a late capitalist market. Their identities are featured as commodities, which results in degradation of women (and girls) and their alienation from any sort of “truer” experience that exists for the Girl Scout organization (Griffin, 2000). Mainly, this is accomplished when the girl members participate in the assumed photo-shoots for the cookie boxes. They somehow acquire full-Girl Scout uniforms, both formal and casual, for the pictures to be taken, agree to be photographed, and engage in an activity that is likely pre-arranged at a designated site.

Given this, what do Girl Scouts who participate in the photo shoots think about wearing all the same thing? Gathering together not for the primary purpose of play, but to be photographed while they play? I suspect that the most complicated struggle to accept identity in this situation may surround the Girl Scout uniform, wearing the logo, and the difficulty negotiating uniformity with feeling pride at wearing any type of regalia, though I can only speculate. After all, I take great pride in wearing my adult Girl Scout uniform and when I was younger it meant something important when I sewed on the badges I earned and wore them to a formal event, like a Girl Scout Court of Awards. However, this analysis is about the marketing of the organization and therefore I think it is important to consider the multiple possibilities there are for “additional forms of domination,” especially the ones that are the most taken-for-granted during the normalization process.

Overall it is possible to point out where subtle, mediated gender cues may be at work in the images presented on the Girl Scout cookie boxes (Shugart, 2001;
Not only is this dangerous because of the messages’ transparent, normative, qualities, but also because organizational and individual identities may be at stake. The erosion of images that reflect a more accurate depiction of Girl Scouts in their element is something that can be traced to the ideology of the market, where traditional practices are traded for modern ones (Barber, 1992). In the case of the Girl Scout organization using member’s faces on the boxes, this may mean trading uniqueness and individualism for homogeneity. This could be considered a process of alienation for the Girl Scout organization, as well as for individual members.

Now that I’ve discussed the active and passive visual elements of the Girl Scout cookie boxes, a description of the Girl Scout cookie poster is in order. I would like to point out its similarities to the American Girls Collection, specifically with reference to the dolls, and begin to merge the rhetorical analysis with what I learned from paid staff in the organization about Girl Scout marketing and branding practices.
Implications of Girl Scout Cookie Poster

The cookie poster described above was chosen out of a number of different posters, order forms, table tents, and other materials advertising the 2002/2003 cookie sale. I selected it because the artifact did not adhere to the same dress code that was so thoroughly present in the array of cookie boxes. In fact, the little Brownies (first through third graders) in the poster were wearing no distinguishing Girl Scout regalia whatsoever. The only indicator that the poster existed for Girl Scouts (besides the bottom banner slogan “Girl Scouting for Every Girl, Everywhere: Celebrating the Future”) was a girl in Mexican costume holding a box of traditional Shortbreads in her hands. Then I realized this poster’s corporate connection to its intended demographic. The girls were dressed like American Girl dolls! I note for this analysis that the visual similarities between the poster and the toys represent diversity, color, and activity, much like the Girl Scout cookie boxes. This demonstrates a similar visual rhetoric, which I would like to discuss in terms of commonality rather than direct representation.

For those who are unfamiliar with the product for kids, Pleasant Company manufactures an experience in American history and girlhood that started with a line of dolls dressed to reflect different ethnicities and races. The American Girl Collection began with a fair-skinned doll named “Kirsten,” whose fictitious life dated back to the mid eighteen hundreds. Today many more doll personalities have been produced, including “Kaya,” a Native American doll, “Josephina,” a Spanish doll, “Addy,” an African-American doll, and several other Caucasian dolls. I’ve selected these characters because of their striking similarity to the Girl
Scout promotional poster described above and also represent the variety of racial and ethnic diversity for the American Girl Collection. For each comparison that I make, I am drawing from the images displayed on the book covers representing each doll. All of the books are published as part of the American Girls Collection.

It is worth mentioning that children can purchase the identical clothes and accessories for all of Pleasant Company’s products. Kids can even bring their dolls to “American Girl” play lands, where they can get their hair done as well as their doll’s. High tea with your doll is also part of the experience. It is not surprising, as mentioned earlier, that due to its diversification of products and experience that American Girl now dominates over 40 percent of the doll market and is likely to command the attention of younger Girl Scouts in general (Acosta-Alzuru, & Kreshel, 2002). I estimate that the toothless girls in the Girl Scout poster are Brownie Girl Scouts and the prime age of most American Girl consumers. I was not the only one to notice this association. During my interviews with paid staff, one Product Manager pulled out the poster and after looking at it for a few moments she said:

The one that I see and that sticks out to me and I know that they’ve gotten…they’ve gotten much more diversified since I would’ve had them, but she totally just pegs me as like the Kirsten doll or something like that. She had ringlets?

Color, diversity, and arrangement seem to be the most prominent visual cues that contribute to a similar rhetoric between the cookie poster and American Girls Collection. For instance, the outfits and hair of both sets of girls are similar in color. “Kaya” of the American Girls Collection has long dark braids, and so does the “Mexican” girl in the cookie poster (Shaw, 2002; Tripp, 2000). One of
the first American Girl dolls, “Kirsten,” is shown with blond ringlets and a white Victorian dress and so is the middle Girl Scout in the cookie poster (Shaw, 2000). Hot pink is a major color on the cookie poster, as well. The “Asian” Girl Scout is wearing this color on her dress and the bottom panel of the poster also features it, which is a similar color found on “Addy,” the “African-American” doll character (Porter, 1998). Finally, the American Girl doll “Josefina” has similar visual coloring on her outfit as the “African American” Girl Scout in the cookie poster (Tripp, 2000). Both are wearing a patterned dress featuring yellow and black.

Diversity of Girl Scouts featured in the poster and its similarity to the diversity of American Girl dolls is also noteworthy. First of all, there is a limited set of racial and ethnic categories produced by Pleasant Company. “Addy” represents the only African-American in the American Girl doll collection. The same is true for “Kaya” and “Josefina.” According to my background research on the subject, there are several Caucasian dolls, but “Kirsten” was one of the first in the collection. These rigid categories are mirrored in the Girl Scout cookie poster, though not exactly. The poster features a “Mexican” girl dressed in a traditional red dress and sombrero, an “Indian” girl dressed in a gold, orange, and yellow sari with a red dot on her forehead, a “Caucasian” girl dressed in a white, lacy, Victorian frock, an “Asian” girl dressed in a pink and white kimono detailed in gold with a white veil on her head, and an “African” girl dressed in a black, yellow, and red dress, yellow head wrap, and wooden beads around her neck. All of the girls in the poster portray very traditional images associated with each
racial and ethnic group, much the same way the American Girl dolls are dressed to represent diversity in the United States.

Arrangement is the last prominent visual feature that contributes to a similar rhetoric between the cookie poster and American Girls Collection. Although I do not intend to say one girl represents another, it is worth mentioning certain arrangements between characters in both sets of artifacts that were strikingly similar. For instance, “Kaya” is one American Girl character depicted with long, dark braids. The cover of the book *Kaya and Lone Dog* (2002) even has her positioned in much the same way as the “Mexican” girl on the cookie poster. Both characters are holding an object (for Kaya it is her dog and for the Girl Scout it is a box of cookies), positioned at a slight angle, and wear her dark braids in front of her shoulders. There are other visual similarities between veiled “Josefina” and the “Asian” Girl Scout. Although both convey racial differences, it is hard to miss the veils draped over both of their heads.

The age of the girls in the cookie poster signify they are probably Brownie Girl Scouts, or between first and third grade in the traditional public school system—the same age range that would be likely to play with dolls. Based on the following observations, I would like to point out how the Brownies in the poster are doll-like in general. It’s a smart move, since doll playing is still one of those highly accepted and reinforced modes of child’s play for girls. For instance, I remember making yarn dolls at Girl Scout camp! So did one of the other Membership Specialists, who cited that doll playing was one of her favorite memories of Girl Scouting:
I just really enjoyed the meetings, when we’d all get together and sit around, cross-legged on the floor and play games or tell stories, or make sock dolls, while we were sitting on our little sit-upons. It was just so fun to get together.

Moreover, the association between American Girl dolls and the cookie poster uses a highly contemporary example. In this case it is worth revisiting what is known about commodity feminism. The way in which girls interpret persuasive message “depends on take-for-granted familiarity with the codes of patriarchy, along with a sense of commodity logic that has become second nature” (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991, p. 334). The taken-for-granted familiarity with codes of patriarchy is that little girls are supposed to play with dolls—either to mimic them or to mother them. In this case, it could be seen as the acceptability of mimickery, since the little girls are presumably dressed like the dolls. They are presented as ornamental, traditionally pretty, and photographed to represent products for sale.

The definition of commodity logic can be applied to this case, since the abstraction is the way Brownie Girl Scouts are dressed to reflect American Girl dolls. Manufactured desire is two fold. First, it suggests what little girls should look, act, or aspire to achieve: to be doll-like, happy, and all-American under the rigid categories of race and ethnicity provided in the poster. Using commodity logic, Brownie Girl Scouts are placed in binary equivalence with the American Girl Collection, a product image that focuses on (diverse) membership and sales. It is associated in terms of its object-substitute fetishism by blending the most recognizable visual codes: featuring girls of similar age who would have the most cross-over interest in Girl Scouting and American Girl dolls, dressing them like
the products of the fetishized doll craze, and labeling the poster with the Girl Scout brand logo.

According to an interview with a retired Director of Membership, whose experience with GSUSA at the troop, council, and national level spans 47 years, I was not surprised to learn this is not the first time the organization has drawn from commodity logic to appeal to a larger audience. She told me a story about one of her business trips to a GSUSA’s national convention held in a warm location of the country—not at Girl Scout headquarters in New York. Everyone in attendance knew there would be a vote counted at the convention that would radically alter the appearance of the Girl Scout emblem. At that time the Girl Scout “trefoil” consisted of a gold background with a highly detailed embossed emblem of an American Eagle on the front, along with the initials, “GS.” The proposed change would replace this older, more traditional insignia to what Girl Scouting knows today—the image of three women’s faces on a green background. Not only would this decision affect organizational rhetoric that would put Girl Scouts on the path to clarify its Brand Voice, meant changing the membership pin and other items that average members took ownership of donning proudly on their bodies to signify their belongingness and pride for the organization. In my own experience I can say that the membership pin is often regarded as the one piece of regalia, or Girl Scout uniform, that is worn most frequently and has the greatest sentimental impact to members of the movement. In fact, it is one of the first pieces young Girl Scouts acquire. (I feel lucky to have an old pin.) Her memory
of this historic vote bears great significance to this analysis, since she recalls it was a heated debate that solicited many comments. She told me:

The majority of people there did not want it, but there was a big display by the people who have designed Quaker Oats and Bell Telephone—you know all of these people who were involved in this new pin—and they were showing all of this. [Nationals] were saying that because these people had been so successful commercially that they should be successful with this [logo transformation].

Apparently, the National organization also reassured staff and voting delegates that they had the purest intentions for the new logo. In the former Membership Director's words, the marketing executives and national decision makers said:

We weren't going to...they used the word 'prostitute'...they said we are not going to prostitute the emblem anymore...by having it on all of the materials and mugs and you know on everything. We walked out. They opened the big doors...and there were several tables with everything you can think of: mugs, t-shirts. It hadn't even been decided. Now you know how long before they had to have decided that they were going to go that way regardless or they would never have been able to have all of that printed and available for a national convention. So...telling people they have a vote was a farce. Well there was a real uproar afterwards. 98% of the people who voted, voted against the new pin, but at the time there wasn't anything they could do about it. The new molds [for cookie making in the shape of the new trefoil] had already been made by the cookie companies. It had already been put into the forms in the cookie company. I not only worked for them for twenty years, I was a volunteer for twenty-five. There was never a time...[Nationals] ever asked us what we wanted on the boxes. So don't let anybody tell you—there are people who would like to sound influential and say 'oh yes this is all discussed with us.' They are full of bologna. Oh if National makes up [its] mind then it doesn't matter what anybody else wants, it is going to be what National wants. And you know the funny part of it is National wasn't that versed on a lot of things. How do you feel about extreme feminism that has been around? Well that crept in so badly that they just...and I know that is why we got the new pin. You see they were against the eagle and all of those kinds of things and when they put those three faces, we kept saying, 'what do they really stand for?' Ask a kid what they stand for—little kids. We went around and did a survey and said, 'what does this look like to you?' We didn’t put any input. We didn’t make any suggestions of what it was supposed to be or what we thought it was. We would get back 'it looks
like a lady looking in a mirror.' I said how do you know that they are looking forward or backward? Do you remember the rely tampon that was out at the time? That was almost like their emblem.

The veteran Girl Scout’s story reinforces findings in the last chapter. First, it seems to fit with the consistent branding of clothes for Girl Scouts photographed on the cookie boxes. This makes sense if applied to Lietch’s (1999) research on logo-centrism, which states that practitioners use focus groups and other forms of market research to seem credible with their recommendations. In addition to informal conversations with girls like the above quote suggests, it is well documented that the Girl Scout Research Institute, a division of the National organization, is at the heart of developing Girl Scout program and what girls want to see on the cookie boxes (GSUSA, 2003). One CEO told me that:

That Brand Voice is very, very, carefully monitored. We get special instructions through the mail on how to set up your own business cards. It has to have the Girl Scout image on there with the Girl Scout logo. If you put it in the corner it has to have so much space around it. I mean, there’s lots and lots of detail around projecting the image of Girl Scouts and lots of restrictions on how you do it. After ninety years that they pretty much got that down themselves. They might want to double-check themselves, but I know just because in the last two years when they’ve started doing the research on what girls 11-17 are looking for that they’ve taken a great deal of time and effort to talk to girls. So if they’re going to change their image, they want it to reflect girls and not marketing experts.

Even so, those recommendations are handed to a different team on staff that would deal with the creation of images and bakers. This may be the place where the identities of girls on the cookie boxes and sales material are unwittingly compromised. It may also be the biggest reason why there is a branded Girl Scout logo on every girl featured on a cookie box. GSUSA is a classic example of logo-centric business practice, regardless of their stellar girlhood research. GSUSA is
not only concerned about how things appear, but has broadened their branding to
include human behavior in the form of Girl Scouts flying through the air on a
ropes course, playing soccer, or hangin' at the fire station.

This chapter explored similarities and differences of Girl Scout cookie
boxes and promotional material. Cookie boxes held few differences, but
similarities that could be traced to the Girl Scout Brand Voice. The promotional
sales poster displayed visual similarities to a line of dolls from the American Girl
Collection, a manufacturer popular with children representative of Brownie Girl
Scouts. I argued in this chapter that while the activities displayed on the cookie
boxes display active Girl Scouts and a range of creative program activities,
crafted images for cookie boxes produced passive agents of the Brand Voice.
Alienation of girls’ identities is possible when photographic perfection is achieved
and uniformity of brand ware is mandated for every image. The same is also true
for the sales poster featuring girls in different ethnic attire. Only in this case, I
applied the logic of commodification in order to show the connection between the
posed girls in the poster with their visual similarity to American Girl dolls. The
implications of all this shows that a case for examining a critical rhetoric of
alienation can be made in contemporary contexts. It also suggests that GSUSA is
subject to the same kinds of market pressures as other organizations. The next
step will be to examine what organizational practitioners and Girl Scouts have to
say about the cookie sale in order to enhance these conclusions.

The rhetorical analysis of the cookie sale artifacts was my deliberate
attempt to provide my own critical insights up-front, as well as provide important
background reading for the audience of this paper. Both functions of the rhetorical piece help to set up the next two chapters of the analysis: the thoughts of paid staff and Girl Scout focus groups.
CHAPTER 3:
GIRL SCOUT STAFF ASSESSMENTS OF THE COOKIE SALE

The historic “pin decision” also helps to make the transition between rhetorical analysis and the opinions of paid staff. In fact, I would like to use the example as an overarching framework to provide context for the comments that will follow in the next analysis. I found that the opinions of paid-staff transcended the obvious. They all seemed to possess a shared understanding about the cookie sale and the goals of scouting in general. On one hand, they celebrated the program, images, and ideology of the sale. On the other hand, practitioners and organizational leaders told me they disliked, but understood, the need for fundraising and marketing the cookie sale. Most of the time comments like these were hesitantly conveyed. Staff wanted me to know up-front that Girl Scout program is at the heart of the initiative.

First, I will explain the staff’s comments on the need for corporate branding. In this section I will talk about their belief that images on the cookie boxes and sales material convey girl strengths and belongingness. The second section in this chapter discusses the criticisms staff had about images on the cookie boxes and the sale in general. Their main complaints centered around the tendency for councils to focus on the cookie sale as a fundraiser, as well as the unnatural depiction of Girl Scout experience using picture-perfect images for the cookie boxes.
The Need for Corporate Branding

Everyone I interviewed made it clear that they *love* their jobs. Only two of them mentioned they’d never been Girl Scouts before taking their jobs, but all struck me as people who were passionate about the Girl Scout organization and their commitment to what it does for children. I also gathered their level of identification with the organization was extraordinarily high given their positive comments and common ideology for the overall mission. Because of this, one very positive aspect came through loud and clear during the interviews: the images on cookie boxes and sales material are well done and necessary for the organization.

In general, there were four themes which emerged to convey their approval and need for the images as they were presented: the need to maintain traditional Girl Scout heritage, to convey girl strength and potential, to introduce Girl Scouting’s progressive qualities, and to convey belongingness.

Traditionalism and Sentimentality of the Girl Scouts

First and foremost, the images on the boxes—specifically the t-shirts and uniforms displaying the logo—convey the traditionalism of the Girl Scout organization and reinforce sentimentality by its recognition. One Membership Specialist told me:

I think that Girl Scouts is widely recognized in this country as a beneficial organization...and it has a good image. It’s well accepted...and if someone says they’re a Girl Scout, people tend to smile and be happy that they are.

Her comments associate Girl Scouting with the American context by referencing “this country” and also to its reputation as a “beneficial organization.” Perhaps
this awareness is a throw back to the widespread Girl Scout Americanization campaign at the turn of the century. The campaign was an idea developed by Juliette Low and other national executives that may have shaped this conscious link between Girl Scouting and patriotism (Hilton, 1987). Infused with the dominant ideology of the time—a sort of “protestant work ethic”—Low resisted socialism and communism, published a bulletin to the Department of the Interior, reinforcing that girls in the organization were doing all they could to “cooperate with city government to put an end to foreign labor mills falling prey to the epidemic of Bolshevism and industrial unrest” (1919, p. 8). The “good image” and association with happiness, not intellectualism, references the common notion that “Boy Scouts are necessary, Girl Scouts are nice” (Siegel & Gale, 2000; Perry, 1993). There were more of the same kinds of comments across the board. One of the CEOs eloquently explained the generational appeal of tradition in Girl Scouting:

Girl Scouting is right there with an American tradition. The American tradition is Girl Scout cookies. Girl Scouting happened in generations. If your mom was a Girl Scout, you would probably be a Girl Scout. If your grandmother was a Girl Scout, your mother was probably a Girl Scout and if you have children your daughters will probably be Girl Scouts.

In fact, most of the interviewees I spoke to told me that they mentored daughters, granddaughters, and even great granddaughters in Girl Scouting after their own scout experience. Selling cookies was certainly part of this life passage, which many remember fondly. One CEO told me about her granddaughter who was looking forward to becoming a Daisy Girl Scout (the youngest of all the ranks). Another Membership Specialist told me stories about her accomplished daughter.
who earned her Gold Award this year. Another retired member told me stories that dated back to the 1930's when she was a troop leader for her daughter. Today she looks forward to her great-granddaughter calling her on the phone to make her sales pitch for cookies. I understand she puts her great-granddaughter through her paces when she calls by asking difficult questions and requiring on-time delivery.

*Promoting Girl Strengths and Potential*

Not only do the images on the boxes and sales material reinforce traditional Girl Scout concepts and the generational sharing of mothers and daughters, grandmothers and great-granddaughters, but they also promote girl strength and potential. Every one of the staff members seemed clear in their minds about what the images conveyed about girlhood, as well as what merits the sale had for participating members. To quote a Membership Director about the images on the boxes:

> That's a good thing to point out in training. Look at these things on the box! Do you know what they stand for? Point it out to your customers. Look at what Girl Scouts are doing. These are not marketed, made up pictures. These are Girl Scouts doing their thing.

Others gave me a list of the strengths the images conveyed and the skills learned by selling cookies: talking to people, speaking in public, making a list of potential sales, keeping files of past sales, calling, organizing, managing money, retailing, selling, promoting, goal setting, asserting oneself, initiating contact. The catalogue was endless. Several also associated the cookie sale with teaching girls how to run a business and market themselves to employers and that most Girl Scout alumni who found themselves in leadership positions in their grown-up careers, or faced with difficult ethical dilemmas, often point to their Girl Scout
cookie selling experience to say how they got their start in the business world and made the right decisions.

Many council members, namely Membership Specialists, have a hand in training troop leaders and Girl Scouts about how to hone their sales expertise and gain confidence. For example, one of the councils I spoke to have been encouraging older Girl Scouts, those poised to graduate from high school, to make more corporate connections with their selling techniques and begin developing their presentation skills. The CEO told me:

It’s entrepreneurial, it’s being creative. It’s taking your own business and seeing where you can take it. It’s public speaking, especially for the older girls where they get to a point where they may go into a business and at this point we were talking about that for next year—having a team. Maybe a small team of maybe three girls, fifteen/sixteen year olds, go to a company and make a presentation to their...the owner or CEO of a company and then ask ‘can we come back’?

According to the staff members, these were the kind of high-minded activities and skills the images on the boxes were supposed to represent in the activity of selling cookies. There was certainly a strong linkage between the staff’s identification with the images on the boxes and their willingness to help girls succeed in their endeavor to sell cookies and learn how to market themselves for future employment. I also got the sense the staff members wanted to convey a real-life lesson about money to Girl Scouts involved with the sale. This was a lesson that was separate from what they mentioned the images conveyed:

The Girl Scout cookie sale is a program. It’s a program where girls learn how to manage money...they learn marketing techniques...they learn about safety...they earn a patch. They learn about goal setting, position making, so it is a program and the funds that we generate from the cookie sale come in as program income. It pays for training. It pays for camp. It
pays for programs, services to members, fundraising. It costs money to raise money.

The emphasis placed on marketing and the balance between program and fundraising for girls is related to the problems faced by staff members as they try to prepare the sale every year. Like most practitioners, fundraising is one of the least liked responsibilities facing any nonprofit organization. I gathered that was not the exception for these two councils. According to these practitioners, the cookie sale is partly a necessary evil—a fundraiser that ensures some degree of financial independence, which is a luxury that many nonprofits are not able to afford. At the same time, this comment about the cookie sale reflects a concern with the Market discussed earlier in that the Market is expected to achieve all organizational goals. As Cheney (1999) predicts, it doesn’t. Here the social and economic interrelated aspects of the Market don’t add up to achieving all goals: Practitioners feel the dissonance between speaking about the sale in economic terms, while the social benefits for girls are negotiated in other ways.

The third theme falls along similar lines. Speaking directly about the images on the boxes and sales material staff told me placing Girl Scouts in full-uniform or brand t-shirts and other clothing was necessary in order to bridge the gap between the modern and the traditional—although not in those exact words. One of them framed her analogy of GSUSA having to keep up with media conventions by using stereotypical scenarios of heterosexual dating practices, and the kind of economic transaction that occurs over looks, beauty, and money:

If a person goes out on their first date, they’re not going out in their sweats and their t-shirt. They’re going to dress it up and do their best to look
right. And so I think it’s all about first impressions and making everything look as positive as it is. And is this the reality in every single troop across the world of Girl Scouting? No. No! They fight and they get mad at each other and things go poorly and leaders quit and girls quit and… I mean that’s just the reality of life, but I think of course they would spin this in the most positive light and I think that any troop for the most part could have these images.

This comment made me think back to Cheney’s (1999) work, suggesting that practitioners can easily justify acts by saying “the Market made me do it” (Cheney, 1999, p. 31). Perhaps the lesson is that marketing techniques for nonprofit organizations, particularly the expectation of a polished look, is a taken-for-granted assumption of all work exported from office spaces. Moreover, the flawless appearance people come to expect from commodities may be so ingrained that it now appears in our analogies to other social situations, like the norms and expectations of dominant dating practices. This is just one example of many that reflect Cheney’s earlier observations that market concepts are characterized by social and economic interdependence. In this case the social (presenting well for a date or a product sale) and the economic (selling cookies and gaining credibility) are woven together.

**Belongingness**

The group of interviewees also said the cookie images convey belongingness for the girls who participate in the organization, particularly those who do a one-on-one program and do not associate directly with a troop. One CEO told me:

It depends on which cookie company you’re using. The order forms might be different. But I absolutely think that means you’re part of a bigger group. Those images mean that you’re not out there by yourself, that there’s [sic] girls who look just like you and are doing the same thing. And
as a matter of fact, they may not look quite like you if they have a
different uniform on, if their skin color is different. But you're part of a
picture. You're part of a wider sense than just your narrow little troop.

I concur with the staff's observations about belongingness. All of the cookie
boxes except one (Peanut Butter Sandwiches) portray girls of similar ages
interacting in an all-girl environment. The exception is the "owl" box, where an
African American man is holding a bird for Girl Scouts to see. Otherwise, no
males are depicted on the boxes. This observation recognizes Girl Scouting as a
social movement for girls and the organization's commitment to providing an
experience where girls can be themselves and explore new things without the
worry of being evaluated by male peers. External examples of this theme include
"Be a sister to every Girl Scout" which is part of the Girl Scout Law, as well as
the GSUSA publication entitled: *Gender Equity Module: Ensuring Unbiased
Behavior in an All-Girl Environment* (1994), which demonstrates the national
organization is concerned with media criticism. For example, the introduction of
the module states:

An effort to achieve gender equality may sound odd in the context of an
all-girl environment, but in fact our troop observations, research, and
field-testing have indicated that some work is needed in this area. Women
have been and still are being socialized in gender-biased environments in
school and at work. They have been silenced, portrayed as having virtually
no role in American history, and depicted in a biased and inaccurate
manner by the media (Pluralism Strategy, Research, Management

This is just one example reinforcing the staff's observation about promoting
belongingness through images of sisterhood. Similar passion and ideology
conveyed by staff at the council level seems to match at least some of the external
messages published by the national organization.
The next section discusses staff criticism for the images on the cookie boxes and sales material. They also commented about the sale as an entire process of selecting images and their perceived role in that process. Their comments contribute valuable insight into the workings of GSUSA at a national level and how the selection of images is handled at different levels of the organization.

Criticism of the Images

There were two thematic criticisms from staff regarding the images on the boxes and promotional material and one theme that stands out as ambivalent, but of some note. The first was the tendency for the organization to focus on the cookie sale as a fundraiser and not a program for girls. The second referred to the unrepresented experiences that go on in the trenches for council staff, Girl Scout leaders, and girls. The neutrally charged theme has to do with staff’s struggle to articulate GSUSA’s role in image selection.

(*The Cookie Sale is a Too Often a Fundraiser*)

Earlier I mentioned that staff made a pronounced effort to convey their passion towards the program aspect of the cookie sale. They emphasized the benefits it had for girls, the significance for a preserved American tradition, the solidarity it embodied for the social movement, and the mobility it gave troops that received funds. Afterwards, I was surprised to hear how much they had to say about the financial angst associated with planning and executing the sale. I noted that even though we were not talking about images directly, this conversation had everything to do with the way the cookie sale was packaged and produced. A CEO confided that:
Sometimes board members and adults and those of us who spend that money focus on...increasing the cookie sale because that will bring us more income so that we can do a better job at program. That should not be the focus of the cookie sale program. It’s not to make the council better, because then in fact you have girls raising money for their own programs. So we need to shift the attention of the adults away from increasing cookie sales to bring more revenue in to the fact that increasing cookie sales gives more girls an opportunity to practice business skills and to develop those program parts of the sale. That is actually more important than the money it brings.

This quote was representative of everyone I spoke to, demonstrating that no matter what position staff held in the organization they all held a kind of co-consciousness about the importance of the program for girls, but recognized the need for fundraising for financial solvency. Anything that could push sales up was a good thing. I asked what the cookie boxes and order forms meant to them.

Thinking I would get a response related to what the images represent, I was surprised when one Membership Specialist replied:

They pay my wages! [Laughter]. They keep me in a job and lots of things going. And to be honest that’s the way I look at them. And I know that there’s a program behind them and I promote the heck out of the program because I think that’s beneficial, but when I look at the cookie boxes and when I look at the cookie order forms it’s all about makings sure our council is going forward. I cannot deny that.

Her frankness was refreshing. There was definitely a pattern in the way others spoke about their least favorite part of the cookie sale. Addressing the issue head on, a Product Manager told me:

I know just because of the world changing that it’s...it’s much more focused on money than it probably once was. But it is a fundraiser and it has to be looked at that way for us. Even...if we don’t want it to be about money—and it is, you know—it is still the value that it once was. It still is all of those things, however, with change comes...the money issue as with anything.
Membership Specialists also told me they reflect these expectations by what they say and do on the troop level when they do leader training for the cookie sale or go talk to the girls. They actually do the math and suggest certain quotas for number of boxes sold in order for each troop to bring in a certain amount. This is also beneficial for council operations:

We actually...subtly encourage girls to sell at least a hundred boxes because then their troop earns an equal box more for every box that’s sold in the troop. And...When you get a hundred boxes you get the bubble clock, which is kind of a nicer item and then your cookie dough starts kicking in.

Interestingly, there was one interview where a Product Sales Manager told me about a second fundraiser that is extremely common for girls to do when they’re not selling cookies. These products are also provided by an external company, but resemble school magazine sales and do not deal with cookies. In this case, Girl Scouts go door-to-door in the “off cookie season” selling items like chocolate mints and Girl Scout tins. She told me that the product sale is a fundraiser that is:

definitely for the girls, whereas the cookie sale, you know gives us sixty plus percentage of our budget for the whole year. The council relies on the cookie sale more than the fall product sales because [the fall sale] is more for the girls. That’s why we keep it.

I gathered that Girl Scout troops make more money from the off-season product sale than they do from the cookie sale. I also gathered the cookie sale is a necessity for the operating budget of each council, which makes every penny coming in to the office a valuable commodity. Unfortunately, getting the money back—period—can prove to be difficult. Staff members consistently referenced the messy aftermath of the cookie sale in terms of collecting money from patrons, troop leaders, and volunteer parents. This was a reality for both councils.
According to one staff member, “Last year we actually had thirty thousand dollars of unpaid debt. Lots of bounced checks and what have you. Just amazing debt. And I got it down to fifteen thousand just by phone calls and tracking down bank statements and…deposit tickets.” Who would bounce checks to the Girl Scouts? Many people, actually. Often money gets displaced. I was told there are the rare occasions when something unusual happens to a leader, like a death in the family, and it is difficult to collect at that time. However, most of the lost funds actually come from folks who spend cash collected from the entire troop, plan to replenish the funds, and then fall behind creating an awkward dilemma for the Membership Specialist and the adult in charge. Ultimately, the person who ends up suffering most is the child: “Last year I got to confiscate cookies, so yes…” I asked this Membership Specialist, “So you had to take cookies away from people?” She said yes, “I found it very challenging.”

*Picture-Perfect Girl Scouting*

Yet another thematic complaint was that the images on the boxes were not representative of what girls were actually doing in real-life situations within their troops. I was told their apparel, as well as their behavior, was extremely packaged and seemed fake. According to one Membership Specialist, this was also consistent with training modules that often came from the National organization. She told me:

It’s like when you watch National’s training videos. All the girls are in uniform. The room is neat. They have all the supplies. The girls only have itty-bitty squabbles and the leader rightly takes care of it. And it shows everything pristine and perfect. It all flows smoothly.

R: What’s the imperfect side?
Girl Scouts can get messy. We are so dependent on our volunteers to do this program, that...I’ve heard horrible reports of things that my leaders have done. Stand up and scream at the girls in the middle of meetings and make them cry. Things get messy. It’s not perfect. For example, the things that you can do in New York are not necessarily that you can do [in this city]. And the reverse is true. Again, I use the training videos. There are all different ethnicities. The leaders are different colors. Here [in this state] it’s 70% white. So you walk into a room, and yeah, they kinda all do look alike. But it’s not because we choose them to look that way. It’s just kinda how they come together. And so I think in many ways...it shows everything is perfect. Not all our girls wear uniforms to meetings. Not all of our girls have everything that everyone else has. I think the pictures show the pristine. They show the ultimate. They show the top end. They’re not always what the girls get, but what the girls could get if they dream that big and they have the support of adequate adults.

This fakeness also has a flip side. According to the same Membership Specialist it doesn’t adequately reflect the appeal to older Girl Scouts who are taking advantage of the “girl power” message and learning how to be themselves. The images on the cookie boxes may reinforce traditionalism and sisterhood between mothers and daughters in stereotypical ways, but these rhetorical boundaries leave out the many girls who are defining the movement on their own terms. One of the Membership Specialists noted:

The other thing that I heard from troop leaders that was really surprising to me—and it made sense after I thought about it—but Cadettes and Seniors don’t sell nearly as many cookies as Brownies do because they come to the door and people say to them, ‘aren’t you a little big to be selling Girl Scout cookies?’ And this is around Halloween time. ‘Aren’t you a little big to be trick-or-treating?’ kind of thing. I mean, everybody loves to buy from a Brownie. Those first, second and third graders! Aren’t they cute in their little vests and sash? So cute. And then you have a Cadette who is wearing makeup and has...you know one of my Cadettes came in yesterday and had a brand new tattoo she’s extremely excited about. And that’s a little...her tongue is pierced and I’m sure if she showed up on my door and said she was selling Girl Scout cookies, if she didn’t have a uniform on I may very well question that! Because of a general appearance and the perception that Girl Scouting is for little girls.”
Still, most of the Membership Directors and Specialists told me that promoting a happy, active, image of Girl Scout experience is consistent with the Brand Voice and is a taken-for-granted aspect of their daily marketing, in addition to what they expect for the cookie boxes. In fact, most of them could not name the kind of images that were displayed on the boxes until our interview. The images had become so normal that they were sometimes seen as reflecting the reality of Girl Scouting. One Membership Director told me:

I don’t think they reflect the whole organization and everything we do, but I think as far as being...Like the images of girls doing things is reflective, actually, of the things Girl Scouts do and also...it is the product that’s being marketed. So, I think it tends to be...more of a peppy, outgoing, enthusiastic side of Girl Scouting.

Yet another reinforces the idea that the images are reflective in some areas in the country, most in urban areas:

I think the images are probably...typical in some areas of the country. Here in [this state] they probably don’t reflect as accurately the day-to-day life of girls. The metropolitan areas tend to be more reflective of actual activities. I suppose you could also say that there’s an economic level in the images that may not be accurate in some areas too.

Earlier, I mentioned that staff provided me with ambivalent comments about their role in the decision making regarding the images and their cloudy idea of GSUSA’s role in the process of creating cookie boxes. Generally they responded with a fair amount of uncertainty and ambivalence about their role in how the images are selected for the cookie boxes and sales material. The most popular answer to the question “do you have any direct input or decision-making capability to help create the images on the boxes?” was “no,” followed by only a fuzzy interpretation of what that process entailed. Even some current and retired
CEOs told me they didn’t know much about how the images were selected. One of the retired CEO who has been gone from the organization for three years told me that her influence on images for the cookie boxes was:

Very little. I think if I worked very hard I probably could have. I think both Girl Scouts…well, I think a reflection of Girl Scouts, two cookie companies are very interested in what their public thinks. And I think if there was an idea that they had heard from several other people and I was very persistent about it I could get it through, but otherwise very little.

Nearly all the Membership Specialists and Directors of Membership told me they weren’t concerned with image selection given their busy schedules and many connections to be made each day. Most of them also were not sure about how that process occurred and hadn’t given it any thought until I had asked them directly. After one Director paused to think she told me:

You know, I’m sure that there’s probably a way to do that, but at this point I look at it is ‘I have plenty to do.’ I don’t care what Nationals does with their cookie boxes. As long as we get them in a timely manner—great. They changed the cookie boxes two years ago and that was crazy because all the colors changed. And so what people were used to seeing—what the leaders were really—anybody who’d done it before was struggling with it. They don’t care so much about the pictures, but the color of the boxes. Yeah, that’s a big deal to them. Quick counts. You can just look at them and all the orange boxes are Peanut Butter Sandwiches. And you don’t actually have to read whether it’s a sandwich or a patty based on the color of the box.

The color of the boxes was a subject that received a lot of attention from the Membership Specialists and their directors, because sorting shipments for delivery to different “cookie moms” and “cookie dads” is a big part of the job. Images were not at the forefront of their jobs and tended to be a taken-for-granted aspect of the product sale and program activity. The only remote interaction they remembered vividly had to do with the yearly visit by their cookie sales
representative, who sometimes solicited comments on the sale, but more often
than not gave a sales pitch on sale demographics and instead provided information
on the theme for the year and other necessary materials. One Membership
Specialist told me:

I don’t recall any direct input. The cookie companies presented their
version with a theme and that has to be approved by the national
organization. I do recall one time when a PR company did a presentation
along with a survey opportunity at one of the executive director meetings.
Actually, I don’t think there was any real direct opportunity to do that. I’m
sure it could have been done had I had some sort of burning desire to do it.
I could have gone through the hoops to make my opinion known, but it
just didn’t come up.

The only staff members to work semi-regularly with these sales representatives
were the Product Sales Coordinators at each council. I was fortunate enough to
speak with two of these individuals and their comments were invaluable to this
study. One Product Manager told me that the bakers have a hand in research and
impact how the images on the boxes are created:

I think they...they do this teen study. I think GSUSA helps with it along
with ABC Bakers. They do this...teen survey...nationwide of Girl Scouts,
non-Girl Scouts, just girls, and then they have like, boys in there for other
things, but obviously not for this stuff, but they just go with what
teenagers like, what teenagers want, and things that go with the color
schemes and go with logos for a certain year. Or a theme—like this year’s
cookie sale—‘Celebrate.’ They gave...a whole bunch of different options
and you always have to have some catch phrases.

Only one CEO told me there was an active system of input for the images
on the boxes and promotional material. I noted that her perception of participation
was markedly different than some of the others’ experiences with GSUSA
(recalling the former Membership Director who told me attempting to participate
in decision making was “bologna”). She told me:
We do have input. We elect our bakers, you know, what we want to see projected, how much of the input goes to the national organization I am not quite sure. But I know that we do get feedback and we're being constantly surveyed by the bakers and assessed by the bakers. After each sale there is a big evaluation. After the bakers gather the information and development trends of what we want to project, then it goes...up to GSUSA and based on what direction of the movement is going...we at the movement want to project strong girls. You see all kinds of diversity. You have racial diversity, age...happy girls, girls having fun. The key message is that we have in Girl Scouting. The power of girls, you know, the power and friendship of girls together.

One of the CEOs and many of the Membership Specialists also confirmed my speculation that all of the images came from photo shoots contracted by GSUSA, but beyond that most people could not tell me about the specialized process involved in choosing the photographs, or designing the boxes and sales material. Most of them theorized that GSUSA has the final approval of all designs, but it was still unclear to me by the end of my data set whether the bakers put together the total image project and then solicit the feedback of GSUSA, or if that work is done in-house.

The implications of all this are that paid staff at the council level convey a shared understanding between the strengths of images on cookie boxes and sales material and the need for fundraising, whatever their level of criticism. They do their best to deliver a good program for girls and at the same time manage the budget of local councils. I gather that images on the boxes are a distant thought for most practitioners and even CEOs of the organization, and because they are far removed from the decision making process situated at the National office they give little-to-no input that could implement change. At the same time, their words demonstrate how centralized and specific decision-making can be for the New
York office for the images that are produced nationally and the limited amount of knowledge circulating between the site and the network of Girl Scout councils nationwide.

Clearly, the organization has a lot at stake with its image management and need for good marketing. I also wanted to know what girl members thought about the images on the boxes. My experience with three Girl Scout focus groups add another dimension to the analysis by providing me with the words and actions of young people involved in the scout movement.
CHAPTER 4:
ANALYSIS OF GIRL SCOUT FOCUS GROUPS

It was a thrill to spend time with the three Girl Scout focus groups. Their insights demonstrate the intelligence and critical ability of the girl members. I was astounded by their eloquence, the decisiveness of their opinions, and their knowledge about organizational issues. Often they were able to speak to what they thought of as rhetorical struggles of the organization on a nationwide level and offer their opinions about the state of the Girl Scout movement. In other cases, I found the girls in the focus groups to be individually driven. Other girls seemed to be actively defining the movement in radically different terms than in the "badges and signs" template provided by their sisters before them. All of these characteristics made for interesting discussion and rich analysis for this project.

The rest of the chapter devotes itself to three sections, each divided by the type of focus group held in the Midwest. The first section describes my experience with a "Studio 2B" group; the second, with a Senior Girl Scout troop; the third with a young Cadette troop. Their comments add valuable insight about the impact of the Brand Voice on Girl Scouts participating in the organization.

Studio 2B

The first of my focus groups was a Studio 2B troop—a new and controversial program within the Girl Scout organization. I recorded their comments during their first meeting, which was held in the kitchen of their suburban leader and mom of one of the members. Over pizza, strawberries, juice, and Girl Scout cookies, we progressed through a list of questions about their
opinions of images on the boxes and sales material. I felt like I was in a zoo of teenagers. After every comment any girl made, the group would burst into peals of laughter. They grabbed for food, hit each other just to tease, and giggled about their past adventures. Three quarters into the discussion they burst into a song about a “chicken dance.” Random clucking made parts of my transcription difficult. One girl even dropped a piece of pizza on my tape recorder.

All the commotion led to great results. Based on what I'd read about Studio 2B, this troop seemed to live the definition. Their mission was to follow no set Girl Scout guidelines whatsoever. Most of the comments they gave me regarding images on the cookie boxes were consistent with my own interpretation. The activities we engaged in resonated with the group since most of them had prior troop experience, but they had a problem identifying with the imagery. The following excerpt from the focus group emphasizes their opinion that the cookie boxes show girls who are younger than they and use wording that does not reflect their experience:

Girl 1: All these pictures look like they’re five years old.
Troop: Yeah.
Girl 3: They’re all smiley. And usually every single time there’s at least two people who aren’t having fun [at a real troop event].
Girl 2: It says we have strong bodies and I don’t think we’re really strong.
Girl 2: Look at you!
Girl 3: I’m strong!
Girl 2: Flab [The girl holds up her arm and feels the skin beneath the forearm].
Researcher: What doesn’t look cool on the boxes and posters?
Girl 1: There’s always little kids.
Girl 4: Their clothes, their clothes.
Girl 2: ‘Cause they’re all wearing the same shirt that says, that says...[interrupted]
Girl 3: Girl Scouts
Girl 4: Junior Girl Scouts is in bright blue.
Girl 1: Look they’re all wearing the same shirt!
Girl 3: They should all just be theirself [sic] and wear their own clothes!
Girl 5: Their clothing and their hair.
Researcher: Let me ask you something. Would you like the boxes better if the girls had...were older and wore regular clothes like you do?
Troop: Yeah!
Girl 1: ‘Cause then we know that regular people are in there.
Girl 1: Like placing them all in the group. Like I doubt that people would wear all in the same day all the Girl Scouts would wear their Girl Scout shirt to school. Like ‘oh yeah, it’s Girl Scout day today! Yeah!’
[Laughter].
Girl 2: Like those green ones.
Girl 3: Oh that was hideous. I don’t like wearing that.
Girl 4: I hated the uniforms.
Girl 5: I don’t think I bought a uniform.
Girl 4: I think I bought a vest, that’s it.
Girl 2: I didn’t buy a vest. I just have my, you know, little badges.

In this case I heard the girls comment twice on the young look of Girl Scouts on the cookie boxes. I also noted their preference for girls in “real” clothing. Based on this part of the transcript, in addition to other comments throughout the text, I gathered they took issue with the Girl Scout uniform as much as they voiced displeasure for uniformity of dress on the cookie boxes as well as the brand ware.

I was surprised that I caught our conversation on tape, because every time they spoke the room rattled. Given their level of interaction, I quickly learned this was not a group that cared about badges and uniforms. They cared about spending time with each other and that was about it, each telling me a story about how dull and more complicated their lives would be without this group of friends. Therefore, traditional Girl Scout program (civics, sports, and educational opportunities) was not at the forefront of their minds. This came through when I asked them if the wording on the cookie boxes resonated with the group:
Girl 2: ‘Strong Values.’ I don’t know if…
Troop: ‘Strong Bodies.’
Girl 3: I don’t think ‘Strong Leadership.’ I mean, we don’t have a leader type person.
Girl 4: ‘Strong Community.’ Like your city?
Girl 2: Do we really do a lot of stuff?
Girl 3: Yeah, we don’t do a lot of stuff really in the community besides selling Girl Scout cookies, but you have to pay for them.
Troop: [Laughter].
Girl 1: But half the cookies that we sell actually comes from our families.
Girl 2: And then ‘Strong Minds.’ I don’t think strong minds, because Girl Scouts doesn’t like make you smart. It just… [Laughter].

Based on these excerpts from our conversation I could see that spending time together was their number one priority. Their troop leader, who was making pizza nearby, graciously produced a photo album with pages full of adventures the group shared over the years. We flipped through the book and I asked the girls to point out their favorite Girl Scout memory in the photographs. I wasn’t prepared when they broke into song:

Girl 2: When we were in South Dakota and we went on the hayride and then like we were in that circle doing the little thing.
Girl 3: What thing?
Troop: [In unison]. Oh, the chicken dance! [Singing] “Oh wait a minute, oh wait a minute…” [inaudible because of bad singing].
Troop: Cluck, cluck…Bok, bok, bok… [Making chicken noises].
Girl 2: She was eating the grass! [Laughter].
Girl 3: She made me go in the circle. I was like walking around the circle and everyone was like, ‘I hate chicken.’

This dialogue described a ghost town hayride during their last trip to South Dakota, where the girls toured Mount Rushmore, the Corn Palace, and participated in lots of silly games and activities. The actual picture that triggered the response showed two of the girls crouched down by a campfire wearing cut-off shorts, t-shirts, and red bandanas. They have memories that will last them for the rest of their lives.
Senior Girl Scouts

The second focus group was held at a truck-stop restaurant just off of a major highway. The rural hometown of all four girls in the focus group was just three miles down the road, over the busy highway. Each of the girls drove themselves to the focus group—three of them were in their Junior year of high school and one of them was ready to graduate in May. Three of the four girls wore their Girl Scout sashes, and one of the girls wore her full formal uniform, complete with striped shirt, sash, and blue skirt. I was surprised at their level of formality given that some of them vaguely knew who I was from other council events. Still their attire showed me they regarded our interview as an occasion. I recognized the display of formal ware as a rare occurrence and normally brought out only for Court of Award ceremonies or other events of significance. It was a sign of respect that they would dress this way for my presence.

However, I was mistaken if I thought this overt display of Girl Scout allegiance meant the girls had nothing political to say. In fact the opposite was true. They voiced their opinions with forcefulness and backed up their arguments with plenty of experience and organizational insight. They even managed to stir my own memories of Girl Scouting, including some of my earliest thoughts on social consciousness developed from work at Girl Scout camp right after high school. As I sat with them I saw younger versions of myself; young politicos cultivated by a social movement that enabled them to have self-awareness, conviction, and "voice."
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The girl in full uniform clearly had the most extensive contact with the national organization, having attended Wider Opportunities (exclusive “field trips” for girls hand-selected from across the United States) and also having served as a delegate for her region at the last Girl Scout national convention held in California. She initiated the conversation about Studio 2B as a program, since she was present at the convention when the program was officially unveiled to delegates, staff, and CEOs from around the country. I was told that a debate ensued between her and other delegates in favor of the program. In discussing the issue of branding, the Girl Scout uniform, and the identification of the potentially “branded” Girl Scout member, she said:

One girl said to me: ‘sometimes I just don’t want to wear a uniform. I feel stupid’. I’m like, I would never, ever be ashamed of my uniform. Ever. And they’re like, ‘instead of having a sash they’re going to have...a charm bracelet and they’re going to earn charms’. Will that be different than a badge? And they said, ‘well, it’s a charm bracelet. You can wear that more than a sash’. With a charm bracelet it’s just on your wrist and it can look like just any other bracelet, but a sash can stick out. You’re proud of it. The way they presented it...they just wanted to be girls. They want to get rid of the stereotype of all the crafts and cookies and I think they should go about it in a different way than creating a whole new program for Girl Scouts. And I asked them if the Girl Scouts logo was going to be on all of the Studio 2B stuff and they’re like, yes. That’s all I want to know. They’re like it’s just a trial thing anyway and I’m like yeah, but I know there’s a lot of girls out there right now that are disgusted with your presentation. The research they had done was very narrow. I wasn’t impressed at all. Every time I look at [Studio 2B] I go...that’s not what a Girl Scout is. There are certain people that just aren’t Girl Scout type, but who’d of thought that they would want to change it? I don’t like the idea of it at all. Girl Scouting has been something that has been around...since way early nineteen hundreds and I don’t see any reason to change it. I mean, yes, times are changing, but why is that a reason to change Girl Scouts? In the back of my mind I’m thinking ‘it’s good that we’re trying to get more people involved, but if they want to be a Girl Scout and be ashamed of it, why do they want to be there? I think tradition just...I think it reinforces the best. It keeps it all together, kind of, the values and stuff. When you...see how Girl Scouting used to be, how...it progressed and we
have so far to go yet. I mean someday there might be a Girl Scout in space travel. Who knows, but you never know where it’s going to go and looking back you can say ‘look what women have done with this. I mean, my God, this is amazing. The fears I have is that...somebody walks up to you and asks, ‘are you a Girl Scout?’ And you say, ‘no I’m in Studio 2B.’ Well, is Studio 2B...is it just another youth group out there? It wouldn’t bother me, but the fact that they’re trying to change the image of Girl Scouting bothers me.

The other three Girl Scouts commented in suit with her testimonial. Obviously, it had been a topic of discussion among them, as well as with their troop leader who I gathered the other girls looked to for their information in addition to their friend.

The group also brought favorite pictures with them. Some were line-up photos of girls at formal events wearing their full uniforms, but there were also pictures of their troop leader and other girls smiling and huddling together on a ratty futon couch. The girls quickly dismissed the line-ups, but enthusiastically told me about the time their troop went to Washington DC for vacation. They recalled spending the night in an awful motel, but loving every minute, as well as running around the city at all-hours of the night with their troop leader. Troop leaders also represent moms for the girls. I was touched by one girl’s comment, which reminded me of the “generational nature” of scouting mentioned earlier by a CEO. Pointing to the picture of her leader (a.k.a. “Mom”) she told me:

When we have a troop meeting, I don’t think of my mom as my mom. I think of her as my leader and then that brings us closer together. I think...the one major thing that if I wasn’t in Girl Scouts I wouldn’t be close to my mom as I am now.

Those are powerful words coming from a seventeen year old, especially when many kids her age are likely to be concerned with devising ways to avoid their parents and assert their individuality. However, I was not only moved. I was
intrigued by the level of inclusion and friendship these girls had for adults like their leader. The value she placed on the picture, and what I saw mirrored in the faces and comments of her friends, told me the adults of Girl Scouting should also have a presence on cookie boxes. Few are featured (two), and those who are do not appear to be in the parent or troop leader role (owl professional or firefighter).

Overall, I took our discussion as a clear indication from all four participants that wearing the Girl Scout uniform was strongly associated with demonstrating pride and solidarity within the organization, particularly in the wake of some serious controversy over the new Girl Scout program “Studio 2B,” which conceives of breaking rank from the traditional levels of scouting. All four agreed that the Girl Scout uniform was acceptable attire for cookie boxes. They said nothing about brand ware, but made impacting statements about their commitment to the organization and the role of adults in their Girl Scout adventures.

Cadette Girl Scouts

The last focus group I attended was in the basement of a local church. I arrived to find a large group of Cadettes who looked quite young. I learned they were all twelve-years-old and recently “bridged,” or moved up in the hierarchy, from the Junior rank. They were quietly focused on a project. I shook hands with three leaders and they casually handed the group over to me so that I could make my introductions to the girls. Unlike the Senior troop, the girls were fairly underwhelmed with what I had to say. Over the course of an hour I searched for things that might trigger fireworks in our discussion. I asked them about the
images on the boxes, the wording, their favorite experience selling cookies.

Ambivalence seemed to be the most common response to my questions, though I cannot say for sure this is how the entire group felt. Nothing in my questioning seemed to do the trick, until I asked to see their troop pictures. The topic of “travel” made their eyes light up. Girls produced pictures from their back pockets, jackets, and their mothers’ purses that were lying on the tables. Finally I hit on the part of the cookie sale that meant the most to them—fundraising. A traveling troop needs money and these girls knew how to get it.

Researcher: You did a what?
Girl 1: A dog wash.
Girl 2: Not a car wash...we’ve had a car wash too.
Researcher: How did you advertise it?
Girl 2: We put posters up around the city.
Girl 3: Pancake breakfast is our best.
Girl 1: When we did a car wash we had to wash a semi.

The girls mentioned three different sales events sponsored by their troop in a short time, leading me to believe that fundraising occupied most of their activities for the year in order to save for the big trip: London. Therefore most of the troop didn’t have a lot to say about the images on the boxes, logo ware or traditional uniforms. They would’ve rather talked about raising funds, but two girls in the troop commented on the issue of uniformity (all girls on the boxes wearing the same t-shirt) when I asked. They told me:

Girl 1: They’re all wearing Girl Scout shirts.
Girl 2: Yeah, and like, not very many kids do that.
Girl 1: Yeah, when we get together at Girl Scouts, I don’t think we all wear Girl Scout shirts.
Girl 2: And they’re like wearing all the Girl Scout apparel and like, I don’t know, like...usually a lot of people like that. Like everyone in this picture is wearing...
Researcher: The Girl Scout logo shirt?
Girl 1: Um, hmmm. Like it...like it’d be better I think if they were all supposed to have some kind of Girl Scout logo, but of different types. And also what they actually wear...because not very many people wear this.
Researcher: What do people typically wear?
Girl 1: Jeans instead, of like, skirts.

The comments of these two girls made me think about the need for many kinds of “looks” on the Girl Scout cookie boxes. I also started to think of this troop as a group of marketing savvy twelve-year-olds, because they were quick to tell me that the images were not the issue for the product they sold. They had other ideas about what appealed to a wider audience. Most of the time, their comments pertained to maximizing sales and improving the quality of the cookies in order to appeal to a wider audience.

Girl 1: They could be cheaper.
Researcher: Yeah, they raised the price, didn’t they?
Girl 1: Yeah, a lot. For a while we were the cheapest group.
Girl 4: Yeah, it was funner, [sic] because people bought a lot more.
Girl 3: They should get different ones [cookies].
Girl 1: Yes, they should keep most of them, except for the really nasty Peanut Butter Sandwiches. I think they’re evil.
Girl 5: I think they should keep the Lemon Pastries because they’re low fat and that’s what my aunt buys because they’re low fat.
Girl 6: And I think they should have the same ones through, like, the whole US because the macadamia nuts or something...

They often did not directly identify with the images on the boxes either, since I gathered that their main goal as a troop was to travel and not engage in the traditional civic, sport, or educational opportunity (besides what is gained from a cultural experience abroad).

Girl 2: I don’t see how it could build a strong community, because you’re just selling cookies.
Girl 3: But you go around in your community [to sell] and like, you get to know your community better.
Girl 2: How to talk to people when you’re selling cookies.

Even their favorite Girl Scout photos came from fundraising events. They were particularly excited about one photo of their troop leader—another mom—who was sitting under a small canvas tent in a lawn chair. In front of her was a table with a tag board sign containing a message written in marker: “Shop and Drop.” The girls told me this event was one of their best fundraisers next to the cookie sale, explaining that the booth was one of several hundred vendors clustered together at a local craft fair called “Festival in the Pines.” The girls strategically set up their tent near the entrance of the craft fair. Running their little business like a coat-check, the girls charged patrons a small fee to hold on to their purchases so they were able to walk around the local fair grounds unencumbered looking for other crafts. “We’ve done it for two years,” one of the girls told me. “It’s fun. We put a jar out,” and one day made, “two hundred and fifty dollars or something.” I learned about the potential of Girl Scouts from this focus group. They didn’t care to engage in a political conversation about meta-issues. They preferred to mine Girl Scout experience for themselves.

As a troop, they may see the Girl Scout organization as a vehicle to accomplish personal and shared interests, in this case travel (and maybe even the love of business). I am delighted to see their interests developing so specifically, which demonstrates the Girl Scout organization is flexible enough with its program to accommodate girls with depth and breadth. The questions about the images on the boxes and poster, however, solicited few comments with the
exception of two girls who desired a range of images instead of the uniformity, although noting that brand ware did not bother them.

Overall, the three groups above cannot be taken to represent distinct categories in their attitudes. There are, however, conclusions to be drawn from the forcefulness of some of their comments as well as from what they did not say. The Studio 2B troop seems to represent girls who are creating their own space in Girl Scouting. They are also the group least likely to identify with brand ware and uniforms on the cookie boxes and voice their displeasure. The Senior Girl Scout troop seems highly identified with traditional core values of the organization, evidenced by their display of the Girl Scout uniform and stated angst for modernizing programs like Studio 2B. Though they had nothing to say about brand ware on the cookie boxes or sales material, it was clear they thought that the organization is simply spreading itself too thin and attempting to please too many people. The final Cadette troop seemed the most ambivalent about what they saw on the boxes. In my opinion they operate out of a middle ground between the Seniors I spoke with and the Studio 2B troop. On one hand they happily situated themselves in the organization using traditional Girl Scout methods: calling themselves “Cadettes” (as opposed to Studio 2B “others”), taking part in traditional “bridging” ceremonies, and enthusiastically selling cookies and other products. On the other hand, they were using the organization as a vehicle to travel—deviating from the traditional sports, education, and civic activities encoded on the cookie boxes. All three groups represent the spectrum of girl participation in the organization. I am grateful to the girls who added richness
to the project. They reaffirmed my love for the Girl Scout movement as well as my political approach. In the end, I have a clearer picture of who I am and what I do as a writer and advocate for girls.

I'm also overwhelmed by the amount of information to sort through in this analysis. The last two chapters helped to show two sides of the same coin. For instance, chapter three provided insight about paid staff members’ conceptualization of Girl Scout cookie boxes (and sales material) and how the images get there in the first place. This group of narrators found pride in their jobs and believed in the program it offered girls, yet confronted the problems associated with the cookie sale as a fundraiser for the organization. They also admitted a certain quality of perfection associated with images on the boxes. In this chapter I attempt to understand the different voices of Girl Scouts participating in the organization and social movement. Some commented on the need to maintain traditional values. Some were quite ambivalent, but made good use of Girl Scout program. Others were radically defining the movement for themselves.

The next chapter provides a discussion about the theoretical implications of my analysis and also gives concrete suggestions about what should come next for organizational practitioners. I argue that brand ware on the cookie boxes and sales material is detrimental to the overall organizational goals of GSUSA by pointing out the trouble with holding photo shoots and the consequences of homogenization through corporate branding.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Girl Scouts of the United States of America is a nonprofit steeped in history and tradition, simultaneously striving for cosmopolitan appeal in order to provide state-of-the-art program activities for girls. The organization’s concern for challenges facing girls, membership diversity, and mentorship dates back nearly ninety years. Yet the creation of the Girl Scout Brand Voice, a communication model of consistency for all councils and the national office, is evidence of more modern times, which propel the production of images of girls. In this chapter, I attempt to make sense of the three-part analysis of artifacts from the cookie sale, paid staff interviews, and Girl Scout focus groups in order to draw concrete conclusions about image production at GSUSA. Overall I would like to comment on why I think the crafted images of the cookie boxes are not an appropriate view of the organization, even though the activities portray active, interested Girl Scouts to a larger audience. I would then like to rehearse what is problematic about conducting photo shoots for the sales material, in order to point out how it contributes to rhetoric of alienation and fits with the definition of Third Wave feminist values. Finally, I would like to speak to the consequences of corporate branding for GSUSA and its ties to the “McWorld” phenomenon worldwide. While my interview set is small and contained by comparison to the geographic expansiveness of the organization, some implications about the cookie boxes, images and their interpretations can certainly be drawn. Of course, my project certainly cannot reflect the same kind of generalizability that functionalist scholars aspire to, but as other feminist scholars have claimed the expansiveness
of application is not necessarily the number one feature of worthwhile research (Dallimore, 2000, p. 171).

That said, I argue the primary conclusion concern raised by this study is that it is not what girls on the cookie boxes (and sales material) are doing, it’s what they’re wearing. Practitioners, parents, Girl Scouts, and volunteers should have the most concern for this conclusion, since they have the most to lose in terms of organizational mission and direction of the Girl Scout movement.

It’s Not What They’re Doing, It’s What They’re Wearing

During the rhetorical analysis I stated that the pride I feel for the organization and the belief I hold for its remarkable program is at odds with the knowledge that Girl Scouts has to sell itself using images of girls to promote the cookie sale. What I realized from the analysis is the organization employs a mixture of strategies to brand and draw attention to its cause (to enrich the lives of girls, in addition to raise funds for the program). The cookie boxes display a clear pattern of branding, which includes standardized formatting using the Brand Voice (Girl Scouting is “fun,” and for every girl). The series of boxes also features close-up and group pictures of girls engaged in sport, education, and civic-minded activities. Most noticeably, I observed that each box featured groups of girls dressed from head-to-toe in Girl Scout brand clothing, from the formal uniform to logo ware like leggings and t-shirts. The most prevalent feature was the logo ware. Only a few boxes featured girls in traditional uniform.

In chapter two I also described some of the observable similarities and differences between the Girl Scout uniform and brand ware. Overall, the purpose
of both the formal uniform and the brand ware is to create uniformity. Not only do these wearable artifacts make the organization identifiable to an external public, but these objects also create uniformity amongst members, and to allow members to demonstrate their identification with the organization and social movement within a range of acceptability deemed by the organization. However, being able to display individuality and achievement is another matter, which marks the biggest difference between brand ware and the formal uniform. While brand ware consists of colors that are not typically found on the formal uniforms, usually take the shape of leisure clothing like sweatshirts, t-shirts, accessories, and leggings, they do not reflect many of the traditional symbols of the organization and drastically reduce the amount of individual participation girls (and adults) have in shaping their own appearance to identify with the organization. This is because brand ware is much simpler in appearance than what is often found on the traditional uniform and is geared for high-recognizability using the Brand Voice. Formal uniforms—and even charm bracelets provided for Studio 2B troops and “Juliettes” (individual girls of Studio 2B without troops)—emphasize achievement with an array of badges and pins, membership longevity, and even their own creations which are encouraged to be tailored to each individual girl. (I remember starting Girl Scouts in first grade. My troop leader suggested we take a nature hike and pin leaves to our sashes). There are many ways a Girl Scout can personalize her appearance using the many detailed accessories linked directly to participation, not merely aesthetics, to adorn a formal uniform. Moreover, the traditional uniform may be less problematic than brand ware if only because it
helps to preserve a certain balance between organizational heritage and innovation. As one Senior Girl Scout told me during the focus groups there is simply more recognizability and sentimentality attached to the traditional uniform. She also told me about how incredibly proud she is about the progressiveness of Girl Scouting. In her words—"A sash can stick out. You’re proud of it. I think tradition…reinforces the best. It keeps it all together…the values and stuff. We have so far to go yet. The fact that they’re trying to change the image of Girl Scouting bothers me”—is an example of a girl-member who recognizes the need for such a balance. She and the rest of her senior troop were highly identified with traditional aspects of Girl Scouting, namely pride for the Girl Scout uniform, but also looked forward to more adventures offered in Girl Scouting (like space travel). Based on her commentary and the thoughts of this Senior troop, I argue that featuring brand ware on cookie boxes and other sales material is more problematic than allowing Girl Scouts to wear the formal uniform or other preferred styles of dress.

Let me be the first to commend the organization on their commitment to model the potential of girls on their materials and show examples of what their girls already can do. The activities displayed on the cookie boxes are a sign of strength because of they resonate with Girl Scouts like myself and I am encouraged by the progressiveness contained in the girls’ activities.

Less progressive than the activities the girls are engaged on the cookie boxes and sales material is the attire of the girls itself. For instance, I was disheartened to see the uniformity of these artifacts, and the doll-like branding of
Brownie Girl Scouts. The uniformity of artifacts generally references the use of photo shoots in order to get difficult close-up, stop-action photography, in addition to Girl Scouts clad in brand ware instead of their regular clothing. This indicates two things: one, the professionalization of photo shoots and the use of difficult close-up, stop-action photography and two, the emphasis upon brand ware over regular clothing. In my opinion, uniformity went one step further when I argued the little girls dressed in ethnic and Victorian Era attire had been branded twice by Girl Scouts and the American Girl doll collection. This strategy may make a stronger appeal to a group of girls who have historically sold the most for the organization.

Paid staff members from two councils shared this sentiment and told me that the activities displayed on the boxes portrayed the best things about the organization, but like my suggestion that selling Girl Scouts’ appearances was problematic they told me about the tension the sale holds as a fundraiser and narrated stories about the national organization. They seemed to possess a kind of shared understanding about the cookie sale. On one hand, they celebrated the program, images, and ideology of the sale, but on the other hand practitioners told me about fundraising as a necessary evil. In this way paid staff acted as “bridge” informants in order to provide information between corporate decision makers and fieldworkers.

Their discussion of the cookie sale as a fundraiser is representative of most practitioners and leaders in nonprofit organizations—few people ever speak of fundraising as the favorite part of their jobs. GSUSA is no exception. While
councils generally receive a handful of grants, and about ten-percent of their income from the local United Way, in addition to personal and in-kind donations, they are largely reliant on cookie money to function year-round. Many nonprofits would probably envy the kind of national recognition the cookie sale receives, but considering how dependent each council is on their cookie income it is not surprising that a lot of staff time and marketing effort is spent on the endeavor.

Focusing on the cookie sale, Girl Scouts of various ages, ranks, and years of seniority reflected pride, ambivalence, and rage about the tension between Girl Scout tradition and modernity. Some perceived that the branding and wearing of Girl Scout uniform was strongly associated with demonstrating pride and solidarity within the organization, particularly in the wake of some serious controversy over the new Girl Scout program “Studio 2B,” which conceives of breaking rank from the traditional levels of scouting. While no group was completely distinct in their categorization, other girls that I spoke to were wholly ambivalent about the branding of girls on the boxes and their own position in the organization. These girls primarily spoke of their scouting experience in the most active terms. To them, the organization was merely a means to an end—to travel and achieve the funding to do it. The last group of Girl Scouts, a new Studio 2B troop, told me that the branding of Girl Scouts was a complete turn-off. According to what I’ve read about the new program their statements are consistent with the very reason why the new, more radical, version of Girl Scouting has emerged; to compete for girls; attention and meet their needs, especially if those things are completely divergent from traditional Girl Scout...
ideology. This is the rub between girls who strongly associate with the Brand Voice and traditional uniform and girls who are attempting to change the movement altogether. I'm thrilled such tensions exist between young members of the organization who are receiving services. They possess a level of consciousness (and critical ability) I wish I had as a young person.

The theoretical implications of these observations have to do with Cheney's (1999) definition of marketization, which attributes the increase in consumer orientation by practitioners within an organization to external constraints. The increase in consumer orientation is noticeable as we traced the evolution of Girl Scout marketing with regards to the cookie sale. At first, it appears that Girl Scout councils recognized the need for efficiency and capitalized on methods of mass production by contracting bakers early in the sale. Slowly but surely cookie packaging evolved to include color and design, but around the late 1970's, something began to change. I argue the gradual shift from traditional arrangements in the organization to modern ones exemplify: assumed rationality, diminished participation, and the social construction of everyday symbols (Cheney, 1999).

First, GSUSA provides evidence of assumed rationality about the Market through a 'parental' approach to decision-making and the Brand Voice. Recall the numerous stories from CEOs, Membership Specialists, and Product Sales personnel who said they had no decision-making capabilities with regard to images whatsoever. Furthermore, they could not articulate the process of selection at the National level of the organization. There was one notable exception where a
CEO assured me of the image selection process stating that troop photographs could be sent to GSUSA to be juried, but most others either didn’t know or didn’t care. Their most frequent statement was, “I don’t have time.” The professionals at the National office (GSUSA) are then expected to make policy. One example of this the creation and implementation is the Girl Scout Brand Voice, a prescriptive workbook for practitioners to follow throughout the country to ensure image management (GSUSA, 1999). Other examples of centralized decision making at GSUSA are the similarities between the Girl Scout cookie poster (2003) and the American Girl doll collection, as well as the testimonial from a retired member of the organization who discussed branding at one of the Girl Scout National Conventions. I considered these observations part of a common pattern associated with increased identification consumer orientation for the nonprofit, as well as a move to try and compete for girls’ attention based on externally imposed constraints. These constraints, of course, are financial sustainability for GSUSA as well as the collage of media sources grabbing girls’ attention. In a sense, the organization’s main goal is to help “girls grow strong,” is undermined by the manufactured appearance of “happiness” and the construction of picture-perfect girlhood on the cookie boxes and sales posters.

Second, the development of the Brand Voice and crafted images on cookie boxes diminishes participation for decision-makers (practitioners, troop leaders, etc.) as well as the Girl Scouts. Like Cheney (1999) predicts, tremendous growth and innovation are not always well received in nonprofit contexts, because “voice” is ultimately lost by the average practitioner and even girl members.
Again based on the interviews few practitioners really cared about influencing GSUSA’s selection of images on cookie boxes and sales material, but it was clear that girls from the focus groups cared a great deal. On the conservative or more traditional end, Senior Girl Scouts were vehemently opposed to growth and innovation that deviated too much from original core values of Girl Scouting, particularly Studio 2B. They identified with participation that wasn’t “watered down”; a program for Girl Scouts that gave them definition and a unique “voice.” On the other hand, many of the Studio 2B participants and even some in the Cadette troop simply wanted a space in Girl Scouting to do what they do.

Unfortunately, one can see some of the alienating aspects of the cookie boxes and sales material based on their comments about the young appearance of girls reflected on the boxes and the homogenizing qualities of girls in brand ware. Voice and participation is lost when Girl Scouts perceive themselves to be on the “outside” of their own movement.

Lastly, Cheney (1999) described the importance of understanding organizational symbols as the vehicle of rhetoric. In this case, GSUSA’s most visible artifacts happen to be cookie boxes and posters, which reinforce a type of rhetoric about the organization that are not necessarily representative of its constituents or organizational mission. The cookie boxes become one set of very few symbols from GSUSA the average person encounters in the United States. They are socially constructed, but often taken as transparent. This raises an ethical issue of representation. If organizational practitioners and researchers at GSUSA
are aware that the images on the cookie boxes do not resonate with Girl Scouts today, then more research and revision of the Brand Voice is in order.

My exploration of the way GSUSA aligns itself with Market values sets up the next two sections. First I will explain the trouble with using photo shoots for Girl Scout cookie boxes and sales material. Then I will follow up with a discussion about the implications homogenization through branding practices have for GSUSA.

The Trouble with Photo Shoots

The "perfect" photo shoot is problematic because it may contribute to a rhetoric of alienation through the normalization of perfect "unreal" images of Girl Scouts. I contend this process fits with the prescribed values of 3rd Wave feminism. The data put forth from my observations of artifacts, staff interviews, and Girl Scout focus groups reinforce why this may be the case.

Recall the conclusions from analysis of the Girl Scout cookie boxes and promotional poster. With the exception of one cookie box (see Figure 11) depicting a group of Girl Scouts somberly saluting the American flag, every girl is wearing a smile and some kind of traditional uniform or Girl Scout brand ware. I also pointed out the doll-like qualities found in the sales poster. Both are evidence that the organization is attempting to align images of Girl Scouts with stereotypical representations of "normal" girlhood in the United States. The historical context of origin for such normalization draws from the perceived "niceness" and "happiness" associated with Girl Scouting (Perry, 1993), the gendered expectation that girls will either mother or mimic dolls as choice play
toys, and the current popularity of the American Girl Collection (Acosta-Alzuru, & Kreshel, 2002).

Staff interviews demonstrated that professionals within the organization also recognize the flawless images on the cookie boxes represented the “top-end” of Girl Scouting—a kind of ideal, not the common appearance of most Girl Scout troops. One Membership Specialist seemed to sum it up when she said, “The pictures show the pristine...the ultimate...they’re not always what the girls get, but what the girls could get if they dream that big and they have the support of adequate adults.” At the same time, they also acknowledged how showing the top-end could be problematic. As other Membership Specialists noted, pictures don’t often represent the kind of diversity or activity that is available in each council. Most importantly, they said that the young image of girls on the boxes and the picture-perfect settings reinforce the stereotype that Girl Scouts are cute, little, and sweet-looking (although active)—not pierced, tattooed, teen-aged, and above all, non-uniformed.

Girl Scouts from the focus groups had many different ways of addressing Brand Voice concepts, though not always with reference to the cookie boxes or sales material. The Studio 2B troop was the most critical and direct about the traditional uniform and brand ware shown on the cookie boxes. Their comments are the closes to suspected alienation: “They should all just be their self [sic] and wear their own clothes! ‘Cause then we know that regular people are in there.” More importantly thought, they cited that their ultimate goal in Girl Scouting was simply to be together and hang out. The Senior troop did not address the problem
with photo shoots directly, but spoke to the importance of maintaining the traditional uniform and feeling pride about wearing it. Related to the concept of branding, they unanimously disparaged any program (especially Studio 2B) that took away any kind of uniqueness from the organization. Besides two girls who commented negatively about the uniformity of girls wearing the same t-shirts, the rest of the Cadette troop mainly focused on other aspects of the cookie sale that could produce greater profits.

Here we have three different voices: my rhetorical analysis of the artifacts, paid staff’s interpretations of the sale and the artifacts, as well as Girl Scouts ranging in age from twelve to seventeen years old. I would like to be modest in my claims about the alienation of girls at this point, for a couple of reasons. It would be unfair to make outstanding theoretical claims about the process of alienation simply based on the rhetorical analysis. Collecting a range of interviews is the reason why I sought out interviews from two other groups within the organization in order to temper my own political views on the subject.

Based on the data set above, I still believe there is something problematic about assembling children for the purpose of being photographed at play. The rhetorical analysis suggests how girls’ identities may be exchanged as commodities, as evidenced by the uniformity of brand ware, traditional uniforms, the lack of street clothes, their smiling faces (only where “somber” is not socially scripted) and picture-perfect photography. Griffin (2000) might suggest that when girls are not allowed to choose their own activities, or clothing for that matter, they may become passive objects rather than acting subjects.
Based on the interviews with paid staff and Girl Scout focus groups, the completeness of rhetorical alienation is not clear. While staff members said the images on the boxes did not reflect the messiness of Girl Scouting, their comments also helped to show a pattern of market-driven expectations that create a conducive environment for commodification, and ultimately alienation, to take place. The main Girl Scout focus group to indicate any sort of perceived alienation was the Studio 2B troop, reinforced by only two other girls from the Cadette troop. All of the other Girl Scout commentaries either represented ambivalence or strong conviction about other matters regarding Girl Scout identity, but did not lend itself to the definition of alienation based on perfectly crafted cookie boxes.

Does the creation of such images sound like it fits with a feminist agenda? If the marketing activities of GSUSA are applied to contemporary definitions of Third Wave feminism, (recalling that those are high values of individuality, embededness in popular culture, and a re-claiming of female virtues) then yes the images could be considered “Third Wave.” For example, in the rhetorical analysis I mentioned the explicit message is that girls do active things, as opposed to sit passively and watch. As paid staff indicates, the images also represent individuality by displaying an array of activities, therefore indicating that Girl Scouts is for “every girl, everywhere.” The Girl Scout sales poster depicting girls of different races and ethnicities, dressed in traditional costume is another example of Third Wave values re-claiming female virtues. Under this value
system it is still okay to be pretty and "feminine" and also progressive, interesting, and active—one of the hallmarks of Third Wave feminism.

However, the answer to whether branding at GSUSA ‘fits’ with Third Wave feminist practice can also be a “no.” In my opinion the “slick media conventions” Shugart (2001) and other scholars write about are evident in the stereotypical representation of normal girlhood discussed a few paragraphs ago. She writes “many critics note that the relatively recent advent of apparently feminist sensibilities in the contemporary media in fact camouflages subtle strategies that undermine those ideas, predicating them instead on patriarchal terms” (Shugart, 2003, p. 2).

As a critical feminist scholar I feel it is my responsibility to accompany this critique with concrete suggestions. Knowing that it is unrealistic to suggest girl images should be eliminated from the boxes and promotional material entirely, the most legitimate possibility is for GSUSA to recognize their part in the alienation process and take a stance against the commodification of their members by soliciting action shots taken only by staff members, troop leaders, or even girls at the council level. Provided none of the pictures are “arranged” at the level where girls are uniformly made to wear branded clothing, it would ensure the new images are more reflective of Girl Scout constituency and portray the individual eccentricities of the movement.

“Real” photos should be guaranteed. Period. If this was the policy by GSUSA, it might be embraced by paid staff and organizational members for a number of reasons (beyond the philosophical one admonishing the perfection of
girl images). First of all, photos coming from the troop, camp, or council event may help to defy the idea that council staff has no impact on the decisions made at the National level. This was one of the primary grievances evident in the interviews. Secondly, more authentic imagery may help to temper the harshness over the rising debate over the traditional versus modern attitudes towards changing Girl Scout program (like formal rank and Studio 2B). It may be able to do this by showing pictures of girls in mixed attire—some wearing Girl Scout uniforms and some in plain street clothes. Finally, putting regular girls on the front of cookie boxes and sales material is an explicit attempt to shatter the class divide. While the organization has been active about cultural and economic diversity since its inception, it may still carry the perception that Girl Scouting is only for suburban girls with soccer moms. This perception may still be enforced by the branding of girls—particularly when children today observe clothing as a status symbol and view ever-changing Girl Scout “looks” as difficult to achieve as the latest brands at school. These images may turn parents and girls away simply because “perfect girls” on the boxes don’t represent the lifestyles of lower income families.

Homogenization Through Branding

Some might interpret this data as evidence that marketization and commodification can be used to build a social movement for girls. After all, it seems that GSUSA is providing local councils with financial sustainability and also offering an amazing program to its constituents. However, I contend that my
rendition of marketization and alienation are a better read for a couple of reasons. First,

My comments would be just another research project stuck in the Ivory Tower if I suggested that the only answer was to take girls’ faces off the cookie boxes and sales material and condemn the Girl Scouts of the United States of America for participating in a late capitalist economy by marketing their product as they have done. Of course, corporate branding and image management is often perceived as a necessity and reality for nonprofit organizations in today’s marketplace.

An important issue for my project is making a distinction between what it means to wear the Girl Scout uniform, (or more personal related regalia like leadership pins, specialty badge work, or even gold and silver awards) and what it means to wear the new logo and brand clothing. Formal uniform regalia stands for tradition in the Girl Scout organization and social movement. It is an ornate expression of personal achievement within the prescribed ranks of Girl Scouting, which also serves as an expression of the uniqueness of each girl member. Moreover, I gather that since the formal uniform is an accumulation of years of service, learning, and growth it is a visual emblem of one’s pride for their accomplishments and identity in the organization. To wear a Girl Scout uniform is to wear part of your identity and exhibit your sense of commitment to values that you may not be able to fully articulate. I am very proud of the many uniforms I’ve worn over the years, from the Brownie uniform and sash that contained my little triangle “try-its” to my dark blue Senior sash decorated with mementos signifying
the times I tested my abilities in leadership. Today my adult Girl Scout uniform is
much less festive, but soon I will be able to proudly wear a 20 Year Pin alongside
my “Thank You” award given to me several years ago at a council Annual
Meeting. These trinkets may mean nothing to some people, but they are deeply
personal to me. I gathered the same level of emotion from paid staff and Girl
Scout focus groups, with exception of Studio 2B. This was a group of girls true to
the spirit of diversity within the Girl Scout organization. Like the new program,
Studio 2B girls were quick to tell me the best things about Girl Scouting meant
having the chance to be yourself. If that meant breaking from the traditional
uniform, and even rank order, then Girl Scouting was giving them the room to be
the kind of people they wanted to be. Such a concept was a refreshing change
from a world where social codes for girls are fixed (Orstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995).
They found the ultimate safe space for identity exploration in the Girl Scouts of
the United States of America.

I believe it is important to provide this range of opinion on Girl Scout
regalia, since I myself had to grapple with the question of “so what?” regarding
the uniformity of images on the cookie boxes and sales material. So what if the
girls are all wearing logo t-shirts and the occasional full uniform? So what if they
look like billboards? Even if I think this kind of branding contributes to a rhetoric
of alienation for the girls, what about the positionality of the staff and girl
members? What if they felt extreme pride by wearing the Girl Scout logo? Given
my explanation for the high level of identification that staff and most girls from
the focus groups seemed to generate towards their formal Girl Scout uniforms,
and the Studio 2B opposition to wearing it, I feel it is appropriate to explore why the logo ware on cookie boxes and sales material is the antithesis of Girl Scout tradition and contributes to the homogenization of Girl Scouting.

Simply, the uniform and brand ware clothing are interpreted differently. The first promotes organizational participation and individual identity and the second contributes to the McWorld phenomenon. Let’s consider two reasons for such interpretation: frequency and reason for dress. Frequency of dress may be the right place to begin. Most staff members, girls from the focus groups, and I would agree that in Girl Scout experience, wearing the uniform is generally reserved for special occasions and not for everyday meetings. The logo brand clothing is an altogether different case. Simplicity and recognizability are its two biggest assets for this reason. Putting more of the logo ware on the boxes than formal uniforms helps to create uniformity amongst the girls photographed, thus contributing to a rhetoric of alienation for those involved, or not involved in that type of scenario.

Reason for dress also shows the difference between the uniform and logo ware. On one hand, I argue the traditional Girl Scout uniform has the ability to show solidarity and identification with the organization and at the same time demonstrate individuality since it is a reflection of achievements or “where you’ve been” with the organization. Therefore, wearing the Girl Scout uniform when not coerced is a symbolic statement of belonging and active participation in the organization.
On the other hand, Deetz (1992) might agree that logo ware consistent with the Brand Voice contributes to hegemonic consent of Girl Scouts and organizational practitioners, especially when girls are told by others enforcing the Brand Voice to wear the same thing to a photo shoot, or are given clothing not of their own selection. The larger message in this chapter might also be to suggest that GSUSA’s attempt “to construct the perfect image” may be at the cost of democracy for its participants (adult decision makers as well as the girls wearing the clothes). In the narrative the former Membership Specialist points out that GSUSA may have strong corporate ties to other marketing companies, and likely draws its strength from the best minds around as evidenced by their connection with the marketers of Quaker and Bell Telephone. There was even a suggestion that the current Girl Scout logo is remarkably similar to the popular tampon company Playtex, whose old logo also features the image profiles of three women. Given their size and appeal, it would not be a surprise if the American Girl connection is a factor in GSUSA marketing for Girl Scout cookies.

It also contributes to the McWorld phenomenon, which is described by Barber (1992) as something that provides prosperity and sameness, or the kind of consistency sought by GSUSA throughout every Girl Scout council in the country. Recalling that Barber (1992) said “no more social justice and equality than are necessary to promote efficient economic production and consumption,” McWorld explains everything that is wrong with the Girl Scout Brand Voice. Branding Girl Scouts with logo-ware on the cookie boxes and sales material, particularly if it draws from multiple product images, reinforces many kinds of
stability for consumers. Barber notes that this part of a “market imperative,” has everything to do with making sure organizations speak a similar language to a corresponding market (Barber, 1992, p. 3-4).

Branding girls with logo-ware indicate the development of a common language (like in the case of a possible American Girl doll match up with cookie sales), which serves to homogenize the identity of the Girl Scouts as opposed to highlighting the unique strengths of the organization, like its attention to diversity and outstanding program for girls. In this case, branding is one of the most efficient ways to market a product and have it take on mainstream recognition, thus regulating trade.

Conclusions

In the beginning of this study I sought out to answer three broad research questions: (1) what images of girlhood does the Girl Scout cookie sale construct and reinforce? (2) How do paid staff in the organization interpret the cookie sale? and (3) How do Girl Scouts interpret images on the boxes and their role in the cookie sale?

To address the first question, I found that Girl Scout cookie boxes constructed images of diversity and activity for girls, observable by images depicting girls with strong bodies, minds, and sisterhood. However, the cookie boxes also construct an artificial and picture-perfect image of girlhood, where girls are always happy and cute, well-put-together in appearance, and cater to uniformity. The cookie poster constructed girlhood in a slightly different way. I noted a visual similarity between the cookie poster and some of the dolls
manufactured by Pleasant Company. The girls in the poster were doll-like, happy, dressed in ethnic costume, and appeared posed. I also noted at least one other staff member who recognized the visual similarity and another who pointed me in the direction of other instances when GSUSA’s marketing practices reflected popular constructions of the time. These observations demonstrated how Girl Scout marketing may be part of an ongoing cultural conversation on girlhood. GSUSA may draw from this cultural conversation in order to tap into a kind of cultural resonance, which predictably reaches girls today. All of these images reinforce certain beliefs about girlhood. For instance, girls are now acceptably active, but tragically still expected to manage their emotions to appear happy for others.

Paid staff in the Girl Scout organization identify a need for the cookie sale—and corporate branding—because it promotes girl strengths and potential and belongingness among members. However, they also acknowledged criticisms about the event. Staff said that the cookie sale is too often emphasized as a fundraiser, even though the explicit mission states it is supposed to be a program for girls. Furthermore, they said the images on the cookie boxes contributed to a kind of picture-perfect Girl Scouting that could only be used as an ideal.

Regarding the Girl Scouts I interviewed, the groups could not be more different regarding their interpretations of cookie boxes and their perceived role in the cookie sale. The Studio 2B troop did not set lofty goals for their sale quotas and mainly sold cookies to family, but spent a lengthy amount of time bashing the age of the girls on the boxes and brand ware clothing. The Girl Scout Cadettes were in the extreme opposite, selling cookies and other services in imaginative
ways to make money for their adventures abroad. They took time pointing out the most conducive selling techniques that had nothing to do with the clothing worn by the girls on the boxes, though reported not being able to identify with the brand ware clothing. The Senior Girl Scouts, clearly veterans at the cookie sale, emphasized their pride in the tradition of the activity, which included wearing the formal Girl Scout uniform.

A study on the Girl Scout cookie sale offers the disciplines of organizational communication and feminist studies a context for the theories of marketization and the rhetorical alienation of women. My intention was not to contribute theoretical conclusions, but to provide a slice-of-life account of how certain pressures of the Market influence practitioners and girls from a women-centered, nonprofit organization. What I found shows that nonprofits of this nature are impacted by perceived demands of the Market, often at the cost to individual members. Most importantly, GSUSA’s tendency to buy into market pressures may cost them distinctiveness in terms of organizational identity, as well as lead them into “mission drift,” or in other words, away from the values and goals it originally holds for “helping girls grow strong.”

I offer this analysis to a number of different audiences. Besides folks in the scholarly community who will read this document, I would also like to share it with Girl Scout CEOs, organizational practitioners, and yes, even some of the Girl Scouts I spoke to during the focus groups. (Given the Senior’s level of interest and impressive knowledge of the organization, I know they’d be equally able to interpret the findings and render an opinion). I’m also aware this analysis may
ruffle some feathers in the organization for the same reason I think the Brand Voice is a successful marketing tool—because I offer a critique of marketing that suggests a different set of virtues: increasing discussion (and advocating conflict) about the usefulness of branding girls, arguing for mediated images that convey “a sense of community and solidarity” in addition to promoting a “vibrant local identity” through girl images that portray them as they want to dress or act, including girls involved in Studio 2B who may want to abdicate from wearing the logo altogether. It will be a great day when I receive my case of Girl Scout cookies and notice that some of the girls on the boxes are decked-out in their full uniform, others are wearing their favorite sweater or plain tank top, some have tattoos, and a few have fluorescent green hair. Until then I’ll proudly wear my Girl Scout uniform and keep speaking my piece.
References


Seattle, WA: Seal Press.


Northboro, MA: Madwoman Press.


GIRL SCOUT ADULT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

By Kenlyn Kjesbo

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

1. What is your title in the Girl Scout organization? (What is the name of your cookie distributor company and what is your title?)
2. How long have you held this job?
3. What is your educational or professional background?
4. How did you become a professional Girl Scout?
5. Were you a Girl Scout in your youth? If yes, can you tell me about your favorite Girl Scout memory? Did you sell Girl Scout cookies?

RQ 1: Who are the decision makers that create these images of girlhood for the Girl Scout organization?

1. Do you have any direct input or decision-making capability help create the images on the cookie boxes and sales material for the Girl Scout cookie sale?
2. If you do, what is your role?
3. If you do not have direct input, can you make suggestions on the job?
4. If you do not have a role in image/package decision-making, do you know how the boxes and sales material is created?
5. Can you tell me about how the development of these items occurs?
6. Can you tell me about how a box of Girl Scout cookies goes from creation stage to delivery stage?

RQ 2: From the conceptualization decision makers, how has the Girl Scout cookie sale developed over time to reflect their (GSUSA's) image of girlhood?

1. Where do the pictures on the boxes and sales material come from? And where are they sent to be evaluated?
2. What is the process for deciding what images are used on the boxes and sales material? How has this process changed?
3. What do you think the Girl Scout organization represents?
4. What do you think the Girl Scout cookie sale represents?
5. What do you think young Girl Scout members today get from participating in the cookie sale?
6. Do you think professional Girl Scouts engaged in this creative process have the same outlook on promoting girlhood as when the cookie sale first began? If so, how? If not, how is it different?

RQ 3: Why do they create these images of girlhood?

1. What do you think these cookie box/poster images (display during interview, faxed if over the phone) convey to young Girl Scout members?
2. What other audiences are considered when choosing the composition for the boxes and sales material? Why?
3. What are the criteria for deciding what images and wording is used?
4. Is there an explicit philosophy of Girl Scouting governing this set of criteria? If so, what is it?

RQ 4: Are these images embraced by organizational members or are they produced as a "necessary evil"?

1. Do you like the look of the Girl Scout cookie boxes and promotional material?
2. Is there a box that stands out to you? Why?
3. What do these cookie box/poster images (display during interview, faxed if over the phone) mean to you?
4. Do you think these images reflect the "reality" of Girl Scouting today, or is there any part of these images that is not so "real" to the existence of Girl Scouts as an organization? Can you explain?
5. Have you ever had unofficial conversations with your co-workers about the look of the cookie boxes or other sales material? If so, what was it?
6. Have you ever had a volunteer or a child comment about the look of the cookie boxes or other sales material? If so, what was it?
7. What is the greatest aspect of your job preparing the Girl Scout cookie sale every year?
8. What is the most challenging aspect of your job preparing the Girl Scout cookie sale every year?
GIRL SCOUT CHILD/YOUNG ADULT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

1. How old are you?
2. What grade are you in?
3. Are you in Junior, Cadette, or Senior Girl Scouts?
4. Do you belong to the same troop?

RQ 5: Do the images on the cookie boxes represent traditional or contemporary images of Girl Scouting?

1. Looking at the boxes (present at the table) of the cookies we are eating, can you point out pictures or words that look like things you would do in Girl Scouting?
2. Can you point out pictures or words that don’t look like things you would do in Girl Scouting?
3. What looks cool on these boxes and posters? Why?
4. What doesn’t look cool on these boxes and posters? Why?
5. Does any picture or word on these things look outdated to you? What looks modern to you? Is there a mix of outdated and modern?

RQ 6: How do girls assess the Girl Scout cookie sale?

1. Have you sold Girl Scout cookies before?
2. Do you like selling Girl Scout cookies?
3. How do you sell them?
4. Who buys the most boxes? How come?
5. Where do you think the money from the sale goes?
6. What do you think of the cookie sale?

RQ 7: What do they think of the images on the cookie boxes and other cookie sales material? Are the representative of their experiences?

1. Do any of the pictures on the boxes or posters look like you, or something you would do?
2. Do any of the pictures on the boxes show things that you have done in Girl Scouts?
3. What do you think about these pictures in general?
4. Do you think this is what being in Girl Scouts is like? Why or why not?

RQ 8: What do they get out of being in Girl Scouts?

1. Can you tell me a story about your favorite memory in Girl Scouting?
2. Can you show me a picture of your favorite memory, or one of your favorite memories?
3. What do you learn from selling Girl Scout cookies?
4. What do you get out of being in Girl Scouts?
5. What would you be doing right now if you were not at a troop meeting?
Date: February 13, 2003

To: Kenlyn Kjesbo and Shiv Ganesh, Communication Studies

From: Sheila Hoffland, Vice IRB Chair

RE: Approval of your proposal titled "The Girl Scout Cookie Sale: Analyzing the Marketization of Girlhood"

The modifications in your 11 point summary, the Child Assent Form, the Parental Informed Consent Form, and verification of the requested information satisfactorily address the conditions that the IRB placed on approval of the proposal. Approval for this study is granted as of the date of this memo and continues for one year from the date of the Conditional Approval; if the study runs more than one year, a continuation must be requested. Also, you are required to notify the IRB if there are any significant changes in the study or if unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study. Please use the "signed and dated ICFs as "masters" for preparing copies for your subjects.

Sheila Hoffland
Vice IRB Chair

Enclosure
SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM for individuals employed by Girl Scouts of the United States of America

TITLE: The Girl Scout Cookie Sale: Analyzing the Marketization of Girlhood

INVESTIGATOR or STUDY DIRECTOR: Kenlyn S. Kjesbo, Department of Communication Studies, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59802, (406)-243-6604 (W); (406)-327-0506 (H), kkjesbo@hotmail.com

Special instructions to the potential subject:

* This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them.

Purpose

You are being asked to take part in a research study comparing younger Girl Scouts' memories of their scouting experience and impressions of current Girl Scout cookie boxes with paid Girl Scout staff's impressions of designing cookie boxes and carrying out the event. You have been chosen because you belong to the Girl Scout organization as a paid staff member or adult volunteer and may have experiences to share about implementing the sale, working with the organization, being a member. The purpose of this research study is to learn more about how organizations can serve girls better and how images of girls are created by organizations.

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in an interview, either in person or over the phone. The date, time, and location of the interview will be arranged by you and the principle researcher (Kenlyn Kjesbo) to determine a time that is most convenient for you. During the interview you will be asked to answer questions that have to do with your experience working or volunteering for the Girl Scout organization and your role in the Girl Scout cookie sale. You will also be asked to share your thoughts of the pictures on Girl Scout cookie boxes, sale posters or brochures. The session will last for no more than an hour.

Risks/Discomforts

The risks and discomforts associated with this study are minimal and there will not be a time during this discussion where the researcher will ask you about bad, painful, or hurtful experiences associated with your job or volunteer efforts. However, if you begin having uncomfortable feelings or experience any discomfort, please feel free to discontinue your participation at any time.
Benefits

Although there is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study, your help with this study may benefit your professional efforts indirectly. Your comments tell how Girl Scout staff, volunteers, can make a program that reflects girls' realities and offers them exceptional programming. Your input also helps researchers understand how organizations serving girls work today.

Confidentiality

Your records will be kept private and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. Only the researcher and her faculty supervisor (Dr. Shiv Ganesh, (406)-243-4499, ganesh@schway.umt.edu) will have access to the files. Your identity will also be kept confidential.

After the interview has been recorded using an audiotape recorder the researcher will type out a copy of what was said without any information that could identify you. If the results of this study are written in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your name will not be used.

The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the home of the principle researcher, Kenlyn Kjesbo. The consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the principle researcher, as well, at the University of Montana in the Liberal Arts building. Here is the timeline indicated for the use and destruction of data:

March, 2003: Begin analysis of interviews for writing process. Transcriptions of dialogue will be used for analysis. Tapes and transcriptions will remain under lock-and-key.
April, 2003: Destroy audio tapes at the end of the month, near or just after thesis defense has occurred.
May, 2003: Destroy transcriptions during the second week in May.

Compensation for Injury

Although we do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms.

"In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel. (Reviewed by University Legal Counsel, July 6, 1993)"

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You can choose to not participate in the interview at any time and may withdraw without penalty. You will not lose any benefits from the researcher or the Girl Scout organization, which you are normally entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, please feel free to leave the
You may leave the study for any reason. Though these cases are rare, you may also be asked to leave the study for any of the following reasons:

1. A serious adverse reaction, which may require evaluation
2. The study director/investigator thinks it is in the best interest of your health and welfare, or
3. The study is terminated.

Questions
You may wish to discuss this with others before you agree to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the research now or during the study contact:

- Kenlyn Kjesbo (Study Director) at: Department of Communication Studies, University of Montana, (406)-243-6604; (406)-327-0506; kkjesbo@hotmail.com.
- Dr. Shiv Ganesh (Faculty Supervisor) at: Department of Communication Studies, University of Montana, (406)-243-4499; ganesh@selway.umt.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Chair of the IRB, Tony Rudbach, through the Research Office at the University of Montana at (406)-243-6670.

Subject's Statement of Consent

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed (Typed) Name of Subject

Subject's Signature ____________________ Date ________________

Date Approved by UM IRB 2/13/03
Approval Expires on 11/15/04

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SUBJECT INFORMATION AND ASSENT FORM for Girl Scouts under 18 years of age

TITLE: The Girl Scout Cookie Sale: Analyzing the Marketization of Girlhood

INVESTIGATOR or STUDY DIRECTOR: Kenlyn S. Kjesbo, Department of Communication Studies, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59802, (406)-243-6604 (W); (406)-327-0506 (H); kkjesbo@hotmail.com

Special instructions to the potential subject:

* This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them.

Purpose

You are being asked to take part in a research study comparing younger Girl Scouts' memories of their scouting experience and impressions of current Girl Scout cookie boxes with paid Girl Scout staff impressions of designing cookie boxes. You have been chosen because you belong to the Girl Scouts as a younger member and may have experiences to share about selling Girl Scout cookies, being in Girl Scouts, and living your own life. The purpose of this research study is to learn more about how organizations can serve girls better and how images of girls are created by organizations.

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in a group discussion. The meeting for the discussion will be arranged by your troop leader or someone from your local Girl Scout council. During the meeting you will asked to sit in a circle and answer questions by the researcher that have to do with your experience in Girl Scouting and how it relates to your life. You will be asked to share your memories of scouting through words and pictures. You will also be asked to share your thoughts of the pictures on Girl Scout cookie boxes, sale posters or brochures. The session will last for no more than an hour.

Any picture you provide for the talk will be used to help you explain your adventures in Girl Scouting. Your image, or images of your friends, will not be shown in the thesis or research data. Only your words provided during the focus group will be used, which will be audio taped and later typed. The picture is being requested to compare the activities and presentation of those images on the Girl Scout cookie boxes. This comparison will help to discern likeness or differences between the Girl Scout Brand Voice and actual Girl Scout experiences.
Risks/Discomforts

Although the risks and discomforts associated with this study are minimal, mild discomfort may result from remembering or retelling a story from past experiences. Answering the questions may cause you to think about feelings that make you sad or upset. There will not be a time during this discussion where the researcher will ask you about bad, painful, or hurtful experiences. However, if you begin having these feelings or experience any discomfort, please feel free to discontinue your participation at any time.

Benefits

Although there is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study, your help with this study may benefit you indirectly. Your comments tell how Girl Scout staff, volunteers, can make a program that interests you and your life. Your input also helps researchers understand how organizations serving girls work today.

Confidentiality

Your records will be kept private and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. Only the researcher and her faculty supervisor (Dr. Shiv Ganesh, (406)-243-4499; ganesh@selway.umt.edu) will have access to the files. Your identity will also be kept confidential.

After the group discussion has been recorded using an audiotape recorder the researcher will type out a copy of what was said without any information that could identify you. The tape will then be erased. The typed copy will be used as data and will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Your signed consent form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data, as well. If the results of this study are written in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your name will not be used.

Compensation for Injury

Although we do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms.

"In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel. (Reviewed by University Legal Counsel, July 6, 1993)"

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You can choose to not participate in the group discussion at any time and may withdraw without penalty. You will not lose any benefits from the researcher or the Girl Scout organization, which you are normally entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, please feel free to
leave the discussion group or not attend the event. You may leave the study for any reason. Though these cases are rare, you may also be asked to leave the study for any of the following reasons:

1. A serious adverse reaction, which may require evaluation

2. The study director/investigator thinks it is in the best interest of your health and welfare, or

3. The study is terminated.

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You may wish to discuss this with others before you agree to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the research now or during the study contact:

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I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part or to have my child take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed (Typed) Name of Subject

Signature of Subject ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Date Approved by ____________________________ 2/13/03

Approval Expires on ____________________________ 11/15/04