



# On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth

*Jay Mechling*

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In a timely contribution to current debates over the psychology of boys and the construction of their social lives, *On My Honor* explores the folk customs of adolescent males in the Boy Scouts of America during a summer encampment in California's Sierra Nevada. Drawing on more than twenty years of research and extensive visits and interviews with members of the troop, Mechling uncovers the key rituals and play events through which the Boy Scouts shapes boys into men. He describes the campfire songs, initiation rites, games, and activities that are used to mold the Scouts into responsible adults.

The themes of honor and character alternate in this new study as we witness troop leaders offering examples in structure, discipline, and guidance, and teaching scouts the difficult balance between freedom and self-control. What results is a probing look into the inner lives of boys in our culture and their rocky transition into manhood. *On My Honor* provides a provocative, sometimes shocking glimpse into the sexual awakening and moral development of young men coming to grips with their nascent desires, their innate aggressions, their inclination toward peer pressure and violence, and their social acculturation.

*On My Honor* ultimately shows how the Boy Scouts of America continues to edify and mentor young men against the backdrop of controversies over freedom of religious expression, homosexuality, and the proposed inclusion of female members. While the organization's bureaucracy has taken an unyielding stance against gay men and atheists, real live Scouts are often more open to plurality than we might assume. In their embrace of tolerance, acceptance, and understanding, troop leaders at the local level have the power to shape boys into emotionally mature men.

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