

The Boy Scouts of America: The Controversy Continues

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To be honest with you, this reporter is confused. Keep in mind, for a moment if you will, that I am new to Vermont, a recent resident of Michigan. I am also new to covering hard news, having spent the better part of the past five years writing human interest and current events issues for a multitude of mediums. So when my Editor-In-Chief, Jason Whipple, throws the lead for this story in my lap, I really didn't realize what he was doing.

So, being as I was totally ignorant on this issue, I began my research. First, I pulled up the Boy Scouts of America on the web and read over their policies and standards. They seem pretty clear cut to me. Then, I contacted Mr. Jerry Lupien, Executive Director of the Green Mountain BSA Council.

Mr. Lupien promptly forwarded to me the Green Mountain Council, Boy Scouts of America 'Non-Discrimination Policy Statement' and an article titled 'Vermont Scouting Promotes Tolerance, Leadership,' which ran in the *Rutland Herald*, September 26, 2001. Having read the national standing on this issue, which clearly states that homosexual conduct is inconsistent with their values, I found myself confused by the Green Mountain Council's material. Specifically, 'BSA does not inquire into the sexual orientation of existing or prospective members,' and 'Promoting sexual behavior or orientation within the confines of the Scouting program is inappropriate.' Also, 'The Green Mountain Council reserves the right to review the membership status of a member if his or her behavior becomes inappropriate.'

In reference to these and other questions concerning the Green Mountain Council's non-discrimination policy statement, Lupien stated that, "We don't see it as a conflict with national policy. Local councils are free to determine behavior that is acceptable, it always has been." Mr. Lupien also stated that, "We ask if you judge...Number one, base it on past actions and number two, by what we say our policy is and not what someone else says."

From here, my research led me to Mr. Mark Noel, founder of the New England Coalition for Inclusive Scouting. Mr. Noel sees things somewhat differently. These quotes are taken from an editorial he wrote for the *Burlington Free Press*: "The BSA claims it doesn't discriminate against homosexuals because it doesn't ask people about their sexual orientation when they join. They only kick out "avowed" homosexuals—that is, someone who lets it become publicly known that he is gay. Essentially, this policy boils down to one of not discriminating against people as long as they can hide the fact that they're a member of an unwanted group."

At this point I went back to the BSA website, which I might add, reminds visitors that

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last year the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed the BSA's standing as a private organization that had the right to set its own membership and leadership standards. From the BSA website: "We believe an avowed homosexual is not a role model for the traditional moral values espoused in the Scout Oath and Law and homosexual conduct is inconsistent with the values we wish to instill."

This is how this reporter sees this issue... The BSA has the legal right, given them by the U. S. Supreme Court, to set its own membership and leadership standards. This is a fact! From their website set of standards: "We respect other people's rights to hold differing opinions and ask that they respect ours." This is their 'national' policy. It is a policy that is quite clear and unambiguous to anyone who reads it. We as individuals, members of organizations, and more importantly as citizens, will indeed be held accountable for our values and beliefs. The BSA has a very clear legal right to hold and implement these types of policies and they can rest assured, that ultimately in the end, they will be judged by it.

Their policy also states that, "Adversaries of BSA feel that everyone should be allowed to participate in Scouting activities. The BSA is a values-based education organization." In direct reference to values, the kind of values our nation was founded on, Mr. Mark Noel of the New England Coalition for Inclusive Scouting asked me a very thought provoking question. It is a question that you may very well want to ask yourself. It concerned what I considered 'true' citizenship to be. His answer to this question was, "The ability to accept all people, regardless of race, color, creed or sexual orientation." It is a belief, I feel, America was founded on... and a concept that challenges all of us to re-evaluate our own views on what the difference between legally right and morally just really are.

For more information on the New England Coalition for Inclusive Scouting, log on at: www.necis.org. For the Boy Scouts of America: www.bsa.scouting.org. For the Green Mountain Council, Boy Scouts of America: <http://users.aol.com/gmbsa>. To read 'Vermont Scouting Promotes Tolerance, Leadership': <http://rutlandherald.nybor.com>.

Juanita Lerch is a freelance writer and photographer who has covered everything from hard news to haunted houses. Her real passion is romantic fiction and a novel exploring the trials of a love beyond reason is in the works. A recent resident of Michigan, she now lives in East Burke, and can be reached at nell@bluemoo.net.

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