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WG317: Boys to Men

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## **GrEAt Guise**

### **Introduction**

Colby alumni are well aware that the conception of two distinct colleges under one university administration never completely materialized. What did occur was the establishment of two distinct divisions, with many separate classes in the freshman and sophomore years. Complete separation of instruction was never accomplished, and since 1875 there has never been a time when a majority of the classroom sessions did not contain both men and women students together... Since 1894 every Colby catalogue has published separately the lists of men and women students (Marriner 247).

Despite being one of the first colleges to become co-ed, Colby has a history of exclusive empowerment of men. There was such backlash that 19 years after it became coed, an attempt was made to form two colleges. Despite this failure, there remains divide on this campus. The women's campus is on the South end including Foss, Woodman, Marylow, Coburn and Runnals. The men's campus is the North end, including Fraternity Row, and Bobs. Women took classes on the South side of Miller lawn in Lovejoy, which is home to the humanities departments. Men took classes on the North side of Miller lawn. The North side of Miller lawn is home to all science buildings and departments. While the active exclusion of women from parts of this campus has since ended, the skeletons of this remain, enough time and silence has just rendered

them invisible – the Men’s campus is still the sciences side and the Women’s campus is still the humanities side.

In 1984, The Colby Board of Trustees voted to abolish fraternities and sororities. They did so because these societies were inconsistent with the values outlined in the handbook. Fraternities were abolished because female students did not feel safe walking to Roberts, which at the time was the student union. The current student union is now between what was the men’s campus and the women’s campus. Despite their bold stance on fraternities, the Board never explicitly stated what criterium they defined a fraternity and how that did not align with Colby’s values. Instead all that was stated was, “to participate in rushing, pledging, perpetuating, and initiating activities by fraternities and social organizations is strictly prohibited” (Goodman 1). It was not the rushing that was problematic, it was the continued exclusion and entitlement of certain members of the campus that was problematic. It was a failure for the Board of Trustees to have not defined a fraternity: their silence means that fraternities are still active at Colby.

One of my friends, dated a boy in a frat. One of the things she said she loved the most about their relationship was that she was the keyholder. She was the one who had the power of inviting all the other girls to the party. She held the key to power because her boyfriend granted her the knowledge of the frat parties – when, where, and who. Frats at Colby exist but the knowledge controlling the “rushing, pledging, perpetuating, and initiating activities by fraternities and social organizations” is knowledge safely guarded by those in the in-group. The knowledge that isn’t guarded is the social events (See Fig 2, 3 Colby Education Seminar 16, 18) - in the social media posts from trips to Dad’s house on the Cape or pictures of the basement of a

frat house: when. AKON day was only noticed because some members of the in-group, decided to share the knowledge of what was an 8-year tradition.

One of my dormmates freshman year, is what I would call a *frat boy*. We were close enough (not that close) that freshman year we shared out locations on find my friends. Every weekend night he would go to the ‘lake house’, a house supposedly owned by a Phi, that many of their active members live in each year. That was up until around February (I think), then he suddenly stopped sharing his location with everyone. The ‘lakehouse’ had removed access to knowledge: where. One of my friends once said that what was crazy to her, was how she knew one of her best friends was in the frat, he had never and would never share that knowledge in those terms. Instead of saying he was going to *frat formal*, he would say he was going to a formal at the ‘lakehouse’. The lakehouse isn’t the frat but everyone who is in the frat is the ‘lakehouse’: who. So long as what Goodman describes as “gossip” (Goodman: Inaccurate Perceptions With Respect To Fraternity Activity 13) is ignored, the extraordinarily limited knowledge of the out-group is ignored by those in power. The Gossip has the answers just that the out-group will never have the knowledge of the in-group, of the frat.

### **What is EA?**

During those critical years in Colby history, from 1824 to 1878, the Literary Fraternity and the Erosophian Adelphi were academic assets rather than social liabilities. More than any other influence, they mitigated the dreary routine of memorite classroom recitation. Their discussions were on serious subjects of national significance, and their libraries and reading rooms provided the students with books and periodicals not found on the sermon-filled shelves of the college library. During that half-century Colby was more truly an

institution of higher education because of the existence of its two student societies (Marriner 461).

Ernest Marriner ends his chapter on the early social societies at Colby College this way because these social societies empowered all students at the college. In 1835, the year the Erosophian Adelphi society was formed, it had intense competition with the Literary Fraternity. Each group hoped to have more members of the freshman class in their society. This was met with a decision by the faculty that neither society was allowed to initiate more than half of the freshman class. It is unsure what happened for the rest of that academic year, but in the fall of 1836 something had changed; each of the societies first meeting records include a note: “Invitation to become a member of the society was issued to each member of the freshman class” (Marriner 454). Inclusion was on the right side of history.

The Literary Fraternity was dissolved in the 1878-1879 academic year due to poor attendance. The Erosophian Adelphi society, despite having no formal dissolution, had its last recorded meeting on November 16, 1875 (Marriner 460). That was true until February 22, 2019 when a student posted to the Civil Discourse regarding a meeting that he attended on November 1, 2017 (Singh). The Erosophian Adelphi meeting that the student attended was different than before the society had gone underground, something entirely different:

By the fireplace was a man sitting on a chair with his back turned to us. This man (who was a well-known campus ‘leader’ in the class of 2018) continued to give a dramatic and ominous speech about how we were “the light” that was carrying this campus forward, a

group of gentlemen dedicated to bettering their community (something along those lines) ... Once we lit the light that we supposedly were, a group of men (probably around 15 of them) who were standing behind the couch we were seated on the entire time, revealed themselves by beginning to clap and cheer. They introduced themselves as the men of “Erosophian Adelphi” (Singh).

The re-exposure of this group prompted the administration to pursue a full investigation regarding underground societies at Colby. The investigation concluded that Erosophian Adelphi (EA) was a fraternity that existed at Colby College until the fall of 2017, one that was distinct from the Erosophian Adelphi literary society from Colby’s history (Goodman 2-3). EA was a group of boys who wanted to benefit the community. By all means, they appeared to perform individual actions that benefitted the community while, as a group, remaining invisible: they built the Sexual Violence Prevention program at Colby, they created a group to talk about toxic masculinity, they made a space and time for seniors to share their stories. When confronted about his involvement in EA, a student in the class of 2019 said:

I’m sorry that it came off in the sense that we don’t recognize these other spaces and other groups...supporting these other spaces as well...trying to...the secrecy thing of it is just... I don’t fully understand... the secrecy thing of it is like just trying to have it be a space where... being the response in some way to some of the more fratty stuff and not trying to have more social climbing things like you’re not there because you’re trying to gain social capital you’re trying to help other people.

This idea suggests that they were not trying to achieve more power. Resistance to some forms of masculinity do give the resistor more power and social capital. They were correct in identifying that to truly resist masculinity, one must also resist gaining power; masculinity is synonymous with power. While there may be no more active meetings – or the meetings have ceased to be recorded, EA is problematic. Although EA does not embody the more widely identified problematic and violent forms of masculinity, their existence is a failure to adopt the framework through which institutional hegemony is maintained, active silence.

### **Active Silence and Masculinity**

Let me offer a general and tactical reason that seems self-evident: power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms... Not only because power imposes secrecy on those whom it dominates, but because it is perhaps just as indispensable to the latter.

...

Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions (Foucault 86, 101)

Foucault's theory of power and knowledge is that they create and extend one another. Power creates knowledge and knowledge is power. Masculinity is power, masculinity is knowledge. Active silence is the knowledge barrier created by an in-group between the in-group and the out-group. The in-group is privy to the knowledge that exists in both the in-group and the

out-group, while the out-group is only aware of the knowledge in the out-group. Active silence renders the knowledge and power of the in-group indiscernible and in quantum superposition; until a system interacts with or is observed by the outside world, it cannot exist in a defined state and therefore it exists in all states (Faye). Active silence allows the in-group to simultaneously have no knowledge yet all the power or no knowledge and no power. Either way, the precise amount of power that one group holds over another is explicitly related to the amount of mutual and binary knowledge of both groups. Active silence says that so long as those in the in-group stay silent, they have no knowledge and an unknown amount of power, and thus are innocent in the eyes of the out-group.

A person is not inherently evil for seeking power and control through patriarchal structures, but they must also acknowledge their culpability in the harm they cause to other individuals in doing so. Active silence prevents the recognition of privilege. It asks that those benefiting from the institutional privilege not reflect on their power, and if they do, it gives them the opportunity to dissociate their privilege. If they are unable to dissociate their privilege, it then encourages for them to stay silent because of their good, but selfish, intentions. Finally, if the recognition does not stay private, active silence publicly forgives harm, establishing innocence through ignorance. Active silence prevents there from ever being a discourse; individual ignorance is the only way to legitimize institutional hegemony.

John Goodman defines a fraternity to be a group with exclusivity, recruitment, and secrecy (3). Michael Kimmel meanwhile describes Guyland, the landscape that adolescent American men exist in, to be one with cultures of entitlement, silence, and protection (59). Both of these descriptions are of institutions that are fundamental in understanding how we normalize

toxic masculinity. Active silence can be seen in how Goodman defines a fraternity and Kimmel defines the cultures of Guyland. A culture of entitlement and exclusivity creates hegemony by establishing the validity of an in-group over out-group. A culture of silence and secrecy prevents the flow of ideas within the in-group as well as from the in-group and out-group. A culture of protection and recruitment prevents ideas that attack the hegemonic power by controlling, both who and what, can enter the in-group. EA, Fraternities, Guyland, and masculinity all employ active silence to legitimize hegemony, thus active silence is everywhere.

The term active is important here: those in the in-group are, on some level, aware of how their institutional silence preserves their power. It is important to note the active role in silence because silence is generally considered an inactive and passive role, to be inactive is to be silent. Masculinity actively demands silence upon its members. Members of the patriarchal hegemony must be more aware of how to maintain power than they are given credit for, otherwise their power could not have been consolidated for as long as it has been. By doing nothing, those already in power are able to absolve themselves of the harm they are doing to others while continuing to harm them. The specific mechanisms (i.e. Violence, Social Structures) in which power is achieved and maintained will change, but the guise of active silence is what gives ever-changing hegemony its temporary validity. This is especially important to consider when thinking about how power will be achieved and maintained in the future.

### **Active Silence and Achieving Power**

What about the leaders who started World War I? Does it understand their motivations too say that they were led by an aggressive drive? ... Their motivations probably had



much more to do with maintaining prestige and power and saving face, than an urge to kill and maim... *In summary, the instinct or drive theory of aggression cannot be derived from data on human violence. It is lacking in explanatory value.* (Miedizian 58-59)

Violence has been used as a means of achieving power over another group. Violence is not innate: it is a means of achieving power. The echoes of how prevalent normalizing violence in pursuit of power can also be seen in the #MeToo movement. White men have used violence as a way of enforcing laws in the United States: enacting violence to uphold standards that their ancestors created (McIntosh 2). The violence that used to be a normalized establishment of power is no longer accepted; the silence has been broken (Wyndham). Active silence does not achieve power: instead it substantiates the power which has already been taken by normalizing the power structure. We are only just now beginning to recognize that the violence has been built into our society to preserve the patriarchy. Violence is used to gain power, but silence is used to maintain power.

While violence is an important and problematic part of toxic masculinity, by breaking the silence, institutional power can no longer be achieved through violence. This is not to suggest that it was unknown that violence was a means of achieving power. What was unknown however, was how prevalent the normalization and justification of violence was in society. This was unknown because the knowledge only existed within men, within 'Locker Room Talk'. Violence has been normalized by law; violence is normalized by silence. We are capable of identifying how power was achieved, it is visible because it is a change. We cannot, however, as readily identify how power is maintained because the maintenance of power is not a change, and

thus can become invisible. Active silence does not create something new, in fact at its core, it asks that nothing new be made at all.

EA did not need violence to achieve power: they all, as men, already had it. Instead they attempted to achieve power through creating and attempting to legitimize an in-group. The power they were seeking was not in the eyes of the out-group, they already had power there. They instead sought power within the in-group, over the in-group and the out-group. They sought to achieve this power through the creation of a social structure – their defined group within the in-group. Both social groups and violence do the same thing, they create an *us* and a *them*. The justification of seeking power over *them* is done by emphasizing the difference between the groups. In EA's case, the difference was the individual power that privilege afforded those in the group – they were primarily white, cis, heterosexual, males. In this way they were able to temporarily create power, they empowered their own members into leadership positions on campus and positions of power in the real world.

EA failed because they did not have the chance to normalize the system of power they created. They were not able to become an institution. Part of this normalization has to happen visible to in the eyes of other patriarchal structures. EA's finite beginning is why they could not use active silence to legitimize themselves and their attempt to achieve power. They only reformed in the mid 2000s; they did not have the chance to become normalized because their beginning could be remembered by those in the out-group. Maybe their attempt to use the Erosophian Adelphi literary society was to create an older and normalized group. They were invisible until their silence was broken. This brings up an important point, for power to become normal, it must first be visible for long enough that it becomes invisible.

### Active Silence and Maintaining Power

Oppression is different from prejudice and discrimination in that prejudice and discrimination describe dynamics that occur on an individual level and in which all individuals participate. *In contrast, oppression occurs when one group's prejudice is backed by legal authority and historical, social and institutional power...* No individual member of the dominant group has to do anything to oppress a member of the minoritized group; the prejudice and discrimination is built into society as a whole and becomes automatic, normalized and taken for granted (Sensoy 62).

Hegemony is something that must be both achieved and maintained. Oppressive power does not happen instantaneously. It is slowly accrued as knowledge is gained. Power must visibly exist for long enough that it can become built and normalized into society. For active silence to work, the knowledge in the out-group must be controlled. History can make it seem like the patriarchal structures, and their associated power and privilege, have existed since the beginning of time. However, masculinity is not eternal; there was a time when it did not exist, and a point when it was not defined by power. Active silence relies on the temporality of human memory; at some point anything can become normal. It knows that normalization only happens after silence for a long enough time. To be a patriarchal structure is to have the ultimate tool, his-story, the record of knowledge since the beginning of knowledge. Temporally finite individual knowledge forgives the patriarchy from taking power by normalizing the structures that gave it power in the first place.

The ways in which hegemony is maintained are continuously changing. Active silence attempts to instill patriarchal hegemony by eternalizing the history of masculinity and power. Silence is a way of maintaining hegemony. Sexuality and sexual identity did not exist prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Halperin 199). Yet Kimmel feels comfortable describing masculinity as homophobia – the fear that other men might unmask men and see their true selves (Kimmel 72). Without the conception of homosexuality then, masculinity is just the fear that other men might break the silence surrounding their entitlement to power. Kimmel does point out an important thing, that only others in the in-group can break the silence because only those in the in-group are privy to the knowledge of the in-group.

Peggy McIntosh states that the omnipotence of patriarchal social structures renders the power these structures provide invisible. She acknowledges a complexity of privilege: those who are privileged tend to be unaware of their privilege (1-2). What she is identifying is active silence in action. Privilege is not invisible; those in the out-group can see and feel the harm of privilege. Active silence legitimizes unawareness by silencing narratives that critique the legitimacy of that privilege. The silencing of these narratives is manifested through innocence. Active silence allows invisibility in the in-group by controlling what is known: in this situation, preventing knowledge of the privilege from entering the in-group. The exclusion of an alternative reality that experiences harm, whether consciously or unconsciously preserves the morality of the in-group.

EA is not all that dissimilar from other all male groups that exist today. The social groups that exist in the cultures of Guyland and the aspects of fraternities are omnipotent, it is just that unlike EA, they have been normalized. For instance, the football team at Colby recruits members

to join their group, not everyone can join their group, and they have secret plays and an entire communication pattern that only they understand. There is nothing truly necessary about their existence - many people are able to happily exist without joining their team. They certainly are not contributing anything positive to society on a structural level, yet the group is accepted as normal. What is fascinating to me about this is that I would feel more comfortable walking up to a frat boy and asking for an invitation to their party than I would feel comfortable walking up to any sports team and asking the same. EA's existence was different than these other established all-male groups which have the privilege of historical legitimization for their recruitment, exclusivity, and secrecy.

Unawareness implies unknowing and inactivity. By doing nothing, by remaining silent, the in-group can continue to oppress the out-group without doing anything. This is why noting the silence as active is critical, silence actively maintains power and maintains innocence. EA was aware of their institutional privilege; they maintain that the point of their group was to use that power to support others who weren't as privileged. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they stayed silent about their work. They did not want to gain power and social capital – but they did. They did not reject their power; they instead used their power in silence. In doing so, they maintained their power. Their silence maintained their power. They constructed a world where they were the holders of knowledge that no one else had. In doing so, they held more power not less power.

**What can we learn from EA?**

I stress that hegemonic masculinity embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy. When conditions for the defense of the patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony.... Hegemony, then, is a historically mobile relation. Its ebb and flow is a key element of the picture of masculinity (Connell 77-78).

EA is the patriarchy evolving to attempt to stay in power in an ever-evolving society. Resistance to masculinity does not need to cause harm to an individual, but it cannot accrue more power; institutional masculinity is synonymous with power. EA was not displaying resistance to masculinity: through actions that challenged individualized masculine norms, they perpetuated institutional masculinity with their consolidation of power into a defined group. The patriarchy has maintained power through a façade of unawareness allowed for by active silence. EA could not use active silence and thus they failed to create a new system of hegemony.

EA did not combat institutional masculinity; which is men’s entitlement to power, because they did not understand that combating individual masculinity is different than institutional masculinity. EA established many individually positive initiatives at the cost of creating a social structure that perpetuates the hegemony of the patriarchy. If they truly wanted to display healthy masculinity, they would have broken the silence – the silence surrounding their very existence.

EA’s failure demonstrates why silence is problematic. Using silence, they sought to find a space where they could, as individuals, resist societal standards of masculinity while simultaneously maintaining systemic power of the patriarchy. Systemic power is rooted in silence. It will remain unknown to all in the out-group if the meeting in 1875 was the last

Erosophian Adelphi meeting, or if they even ceased to exist in 2017: we cannot rewind time and experience the knowledge and power gained while in the in-group. **It is for certain that the social relations bred from EA are eternal: the line of recruitment into companies like Goldman Sachs still exist, just at Goldman now.** Only those with the knowledge of the in-group can answer these questions. The historical restriction knowledge and social relations is what gives them power. Their failure drew attention to the only static part of hegemony: the importance of maintaining innocence of the oppressor.

If EA truly wanted to resist hegemonic masculinity, they would have been better suited following the ideals of the Erosophian Adelphi literary society. They should have continued with their same mission instead creating a group that empowered anyone who wanted to make a change, a group that was open to all members of the campus, not just those they deemed capable. What is surprising to me, is that those groups already exist. What are the CA, SGA, and COOT programs if not groups to create change? The difference between EA and the other groups was that they sought invisibility. Their invisibility prevents a discourse – it prevents any actual change from happening. It prevents disruption of the current way hegemony is maintained because it creates no real change.

The scariest part of their existence might be how comfortably and frequently they lied to those in the out-group about the knowledge of their in-group. Before they were exposed, a member looked me in the eyes and said, “I have no clue what people mean when they say there is a boys club.” I knew he was in EA; I knew he was in the Boys Club – they recruited me. I couldn’t do anything because he held all of the knowledge, all of the power. Those who were aware of EA before the Civil Discourse post knew about EA for a long time. We just were

paralyzed with fear because of how much power these men held, we had limited knowledge and no power. They worked as staff for the college, multiple student body presidents were in EA, and as ARDs in the CA program. They worked to invisibly to prevent CAs from being fired for drinking while on duty, to prevent CAs from being fired for committing sexual assault. Their secrecy and silence continued to hold men who did not deserve to be in power, in power.

Maybe their existence and failure are a step in the right direction. They showed that men are aware of their power, privilege, and hegemony. They showed that men who are aware of this privilege still create systems that maintain their power by remaining silent. They showed that it is possible to combat Toxic Masculinity while maintaining patriarchal hegemony. To be a patriarchal structure is to have the ultimate tool, his-story, and near-eternal active silence. We see this in EA's failure to achieve permanent power. They failed, not because they were creating a false hegemony; they failed because their silence was broken. What mattered in the end, is that someone in the out-group was listened to.

*Frats exist at Colby. They have just become automatic, normalized, and taken for granted. To begin to make change I would suggest the college start by 1) as a classmate put "expelling" students. 2) Updating the student handbook to allow for knowledge frat behaviors to reach those in the out-group.*

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