

The Cookie Crumbles: Girl Scouts of USA Grooms Feminist Shock Troops

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Everyone knows about the Boy Scouts, now one of the most controversial groups in America. But what about the Girl Scouts? All sugar and spice and everything nice, plus annual cookie sales, right? Not quite. The Girl Scouts of America have avoided the beleaguered status of the Boy Scouts only because the organization has surrendered to exactly the cultural forces the Boy Scouts are resisting. The Girl Scouts' leaders hope to make their youthful charges the shock troops of an ongoing feminist revolution.

It's been a long slide for the Girl Scouts. First, as James Davison Hunter points out in his new book *The Death of Character*, they dropped "loyalty" from their oath in 1972, in favor of "I will do my best to be honest and fair." In 1975, a Catholic archdiocese cut off all support of the Girl Scouts because of their sex-ed program. In 1993, the Girl Scouts made "God" optional in the Girl Scout Promise: "On my honor, I will try: To serve God and my country, to help people at all times and to live by the Girl Scout Law." (The Boy Scouts, meanwhile, have been sued over keeping God obligatory in their oath.)

Today, the Girl Scouts is arguably one of the most politically correct organizations in the country. Its executive director, Marsha Johnson Evans, has impeccable feminist credentials: She had a 29-year career in the Navy, during which she earned the title of rear admiral, only the second woman ever to do so. As head recruiter for the Navy, she was the mother of the 12-12-5 affirmative-action policy, a mandate to make the Navy look more like America: 12 percent African-American, 12 percent Hispanic, and 5 percent Asian/Pacific. According to Elaine Donnelly, president of the Center for Military Readiness, Evans "demanded quotas with full implementation when the liberal control of the Navy was at its peak. She is very much a feminist, and was promoted and thrived in the Clinton military."

Evans's Scouts march predictably leftward on almost everything. The Girl Scouts organization supports the Title IX legislation — which mandates gender equity in sports — in both the nation's capital (in 1998–99, the organization spent \$56,800 on lobbying) and in its own literature. The Girl Scout Constitution includes a ringing endorsement of affirmative action in "recruitment, hiring, training, and promoting." Girl Scouts and Girl Scout moms are anti-gun, and were, naturally enough, represented in the anti-gun Million Mom March.

A Senior Scout resource book reads like an insert from *YM* or *Seventeen*. Scattered throughout the margins are a semester's worth of themes for after-school specials, including such statistical nuggets as, "One-fifth of girls have used diet pills, more than one in six have forced themselves to vomit, and half have skipped a meal in order to lose weight." Exercises include working through how the Girl Scout Promise and Law relate to such situations as "Supporting a decision to pull a life-support system from a dying relative" and "Ending a pregnancy." Some activities "you can do as a Girl Scout to address contemporary issues" include "organiz[ing] an event to make people aware of gender bias" or "help[ing] organize an Earth Day celebration."

"The core values remain the same, but throughout its history Girl Scouting has evolved to meet the needs and interests of girls today," says Karen Solzak Rice, a spokesman for the Mt. Wilson Vista Council of Arcadia, Calif. "Today's Girl Scout activities help girls grow up strong and give them skills for success in today's world." Girl Scouts now can earn the "Ms. Fix-It" badge for learning how to fix a leak, rewire an electrical appliance, or re-caulk a window, and the "Car Care" badge for checking fluids, filling tires to the proper pressure, and performing safety checks. And badges, which vary from council to council, go way beyond selling cookies. There's a "Domestic Violence Awareness" badge, as well as badges for stress management, for "becoming a teen," and a "Girl Power!" badge sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Girls can earn a "Decisions for Your Life" badge for participating in activities relating to teen pregnancy, including carrying around a raw egg for a designated period of time.

Victimization is central to the Girl Scout worldview, as the organization continues to propagate the now discredited notion that the nation's girls are a tribe of desperate Ophelias. Citing a survey from the American Association of University Women that has since been debunked, the Girl Scouts assures girls in its literature that teachers discriminate against them in the classroom, calling on boys more often. The new Girl Scout Research Institute, a clearinghouse of "research and polling information on girls," as National President Connie Matsui describes it, has just released its inaugural study, "Girls Speak Out: Teens Before Their Time," focusing on the supposed crisis of girls. Dr. Whitney Roban, a clinical psychologist at the research institute, advises parents: "You are hurting your daughter by trying to protect her. Sit down with your daughter and watch Dawson's Creek and the MTV Music Awards. Talk about it. It will be very revealing."

So why isn't the Girl Scouts, like the Boy Scouts, being sued and protested against for not allowing lesbian Scout leaders? Because they have them. The Girl Scouts does not have "a discrimination policy," as they like to put it — Girl Scouts doors are open to all, gay Scout leaders and girls.

Girl Scout policy forbids sex on Girl Scouts time. But the book *On My Honor: Lesbians Reflect on Their Scouting Experience*, published in 1997, is filled with coming-of-age stories sparked by gay encounters in the Girl Scouts. Along with an essay entitled "All I Really Need to Know About Being a Lesbian I Learned at Girl Scout Camp," and various stories of "butch" counselors who "wore men's clothes and had slicked back short hair," is testimony to the prevalence of lesbians in Girl Scouting. One writer remembers: "By the time I was a junior counselor, Mic was assistant camp director and her gruff, deep-voiced directives no longer scared me. I didn't know that most of the counselors were lesbians." Others remember how sleepovers and camping trips were opportunities for same-sex sexual experimentation. Girl Scout staffers writing in the book claim that roughly one in three of the Girl Scouts' paid professional staff is lesbian.

The organization itself is not shy about the issue. One resource book for Scouts informs its young readers: "Some girls have sexual attractions or desires for people of the same sex." Meanwhile, the Patriots' Trail Girl Scout Council in Massachusetts held a volunteer workshop this year on sexual orientation, working in tandem with the Gay Lesbian Youth Support project "to educate us about overcoming barriers that may exist in our organization and instilling a culture that is inviting to all girls," according to Mary Jo Kane, spokesman for the council. The Girl Scout council developed a mentoring program "for lesbian women and girls dealing with sexual identity." Says Kane, "I can only imagine the energy and leadership that would be unleashed — in society — if we spent our time and resources encouraging our girls — and everyone — to be visible, authentic, and bring 100 percent of themselves to all their experiences."

The St. Paul Pioneer Press reported this summer on a vivid example of the "authenticity" of today's Scouts:

For those of us who remember the Girl Scouts as the quiet girls in class who wore their green uniforms on Wednesdays, encountering Katze Ludeke can be quite an eye-opener. She seldom wears her sash for St. Croix Valley Troop 1256, preferring to accessorize with army boots and a lavender bra strap that slides persistently down her bare shoulder. Rather than stitching doilies and tea cozies, the talented seamstress has created her own costume company specializing in "fetish-wear." Instead of going for the Gold Award — the Girl Scout's highest honor — by reading to senior citizens, Ludeke pushed to start her own support group for at-risk teens called Queer Youth Exist. For her Gold Award application . . . Ludeke is submitting her work with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender teens, with the support of her troop.

The eyes — and ire — of the world may well be on the wrong Scouts. There are currently 2.7 million Girl Scouts in the U.S. That's a lot of liberal feminists to look forward to. In a speech shortly after becoming executive director, the Girl Scouts' Marty Evans boasted, "We're not your mother's Girl Scout troop." No kidding.