

Leanne Rubinstein
Column

“Don’t worry, I was a Girl Scout,” Katie Greene, 23, reassures her friends as they lament the setting sun and a lost trail in their day hike gone wrong. Lacking cell service and a view of the base of the mountain, the group decided they should camp out and continue in the morning. They immediately turned to Greene for guidance.

“Do you know how to make temporary shelters? Or start a fire? Are there any plants that you know are safe to eat?” they ask.

“Let’s see...” she thinks. “I could teach you about business etiquette! Or, better yet, are you versed in what to put in care kit bags to donate to homeless shelters?”

Seems silly, doesn’t it?

These are skills I actually possess, thanks to nine years as a Girl Scout of America. Important, yes, but they certainly wouldn’t do me much good in this scenario. The troop that I was a part of only actually went camping a couple of times, and the times that we did were still spent in rented cabins. I couldn’t tell you how to start a fire, but I could make you a cute set of earrings!

So yeah, I probably wouldn’t survive in the wilderness. My time as a Girl Scout did, however, teach me confidence, character, and leadership skills. It taught me to appreciate art, reading, and the company of others. It instilled a compassion that I carry with me into my adulthood.

Why should these contrasting skill sets be exclusive depending on gender? Imagine the opposite scenario: a young man goes off to college and finds he doesn’t know how to cook for himself properly... but could tie a strong knot if he needed to!

The scouting movement was initially created in response to young boys needing to train for important duties that could fall to men during wartime, [focusing primarily on woodcraft, observation, discipline, health and endurance, chivalry, saving life, and patriotism.](#)

The movement has evolved substantially over time. Modern scouting values individuality, intellect and strength. It maintains its core education in self-reliance while also teaching the importance of voting, civil rights and conservation. These skills and principles are no longer specific to any one group of people over another; why are we still trying to teach them as if they are?

In 2018, the Boy Scouts of America made strides to become more progressive by allowing girls to begin participating. Though in some ways the tearing down of this wall is a big step forward for young women, this is not the long-term solution we’ve been looking for. Molly E. Reynolds said it best in [a column she wrote for the Washington Post:](#)

“Even with careful research and preparation, Boy Scouts’ efforts to serve girls... will still be built on a long legacy of focusing on boys’ needs. Everything meant to serve girls specifically will be an adjustment, not the default, central focus. Will a Boy Scouts’ program meant to introduce girls to public service, for example, take the same careful steps to make sure young women meet female elected officials?”

In “allowing” girls to join the ranks of their male peers rather than settle for the female alternative, the organization is essentially implying that the achievements of young men in scouting should serve as a reference point for young women and should therefore be valued higher. Had this change in the Boy Scout’s policy occurred years earlier, would I have been

expected to abandon all the hard work my troop had done toward our Gold Awards (the Girl Scout's highest honor) to instead go after an Eagle Scout rank just to be offered the same sense of achievement?

Now, the Scouts are facing a tremendous time of reckoning. [With a lawsuit uncovering thousands of sexual abusers](#) among the Boy Scout ranks including not only youth members but leaders as well, the organization is revealing itself to be complicit in the face of unacceptable and avoidable transgressions. The Boy Scouts of America are under massive pressure to reform after failing to revitalize the policies and cultures that allowed such behavior in order to preserve public image. Scouting is teetering on the edge of extinction.

We must take this opportunity to reform and to re-center the priorities of scouting. We live in an age where core values and intellect are expected from people of all walks of life. The Baden-Powell Service Association (BPSA) was formed in the U.S. in 2006 as a coed, nonreligious alternative to provide a positive and inclusive learning environment for the true foundations of scouting: ["promoting self-reliance, good citizenship, training in habits of observation, and loyalty."](#) This is the direction all scouting should be headed. To quote the scout's oath, isn't the whole point to "help people at all times, and to make the world a better place?" Is it crazy to believe we can do it... together?

