The Lost Manhood of the American Girl: A Dilemma in Early Twentieth-Century Girl Scouting

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Abstract

These Boy Scout workers' perception that the separately run Boy Scout and Girl Scout institutions were doing essentially the same work mirrored a popular perception that persists today. The Scoutmasters' willingness to give girls the apparently universal "basics" of Scouting highlights a central question about the founding of the Girl Scouts: How much was founder Juliette Low seeking to offer girls the same program, broadening the scope of activities available to girls and women, and how much were she and early Girl Scout officials softening or "feminizing" the core Scouting material? The men who wrote to Girl Scout headquarters either missed the gendered adaptations that Low had made and that British Boy Scout founder Robert Baden-Powell had earlier built into the Girl Guide program, or they understood the shared (masculine) heritage of the girls' and boys' programs. To some degree, the adults who sponsored Girl Scout troops, allowed their daughters to join them, and provided the infrastructure needed for camping and service projects saw the common Scouting tenets and activities as transcending gender differences, or as relevant to girls...
Scholars examining homosexual communities in the early twentieth century similarly argue the public spectacle of homosexually weighed heavily in the construction of the homosexual identity. As these scholars show, the state, and medical officials created the category of homosexual personhood to define normal and abnormal sexual categories. During the rise of the middle-class and the preoccupation with defining normative sexual categories in the 1920s and 1930s, homosexuals became the antithesis to the American norm. Despite visible homosexual communities in the early part of the twentieth century, the lack of a cohesive minority dictated a less visible community until after World War II.