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5/5/05  
Service Learning  
Final Paper

### Final Service-Learning Reflection

To achieve the requirements for this class, I preformed a service learning project with a local Girl Scout troop. I volunteered to be a part time leader to the Langston Hughs third grade Brownie Girl Scout troop. The main focus of my service project was planning a play day at the local Hidden Valley Girl Scout camp, and engaging the young girls in educational activities not usually available to them. Though my experiences in working with the Girl Scout organization I realized that the issues women faced in the past are still present in today's society. In working with the troop I found that the issues of education, equal opportunity and a strong community are still concerns of women today.

The Girl Scout organization is a long-standing organization that Juliette "Daisy" Gordon Low started. She assembled eighteen girls from Savannah, Georgia, on March 12, 1912, for a local Girl Scout meeting. She believed that we should give all girls the opportunity to develop equally in the community<sup>1</sup>. The importance of working with and educating young girls becomes evident when participating in the Girl Scout organization. The Girl Scout organization is very important in empowering the female gender. The organization starts with programs for girls as young as five, teaching and educating girls on issues that give them skills they need for a successful future. You can learn through service with a local troop, the power and importance of being a Girl Scout in a young girl's life. Girl Scouts still hold Low's original goal of educating and creating a comfortable community for girls to grow and develop in the community. The

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<sup>1</sup> Girl Scouts of America. <<http://www.girlscouts.org> (23 April 2005).

organization also gives girls equal opportunity and more possibilities within the community.

The Girl Scout organization was founded on the idea of educating girls to help them develop equally with their gender counterparts in the community. Education is a huge part of the organization and is one reason it is so successful in empowering women. The activities I planed at Hidden Valley, were focused on educating girls in skills that are typically targeted toward boys, such as fire building and nature hikes.

good background

The past concerns and need for education of young women is illustrated in Molly Dewson's letters to home from Wellesley college. Dewson writes about how an all-girls college filled her ache for knowledge, and gave her opportunities for personal and professional growth.<sup>2</sup> The struggle and importance of educating young women in skills they would not other wise be engaging in was discussed as far back as Molly Dewson's era of 1897 and into the present day with the Girl Scout organization.

Another area where personal education gained in class and service work intersected is in the area of domestic work. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, domestic service was still the largest category of paid women's work.<sup>3</sup> Much like the idea of bringing women out of the domestic home and teaching them skills that are not usually accessible to them, Girl Scouts provides opportunities to learn new skills and learn about different ideas that are not in their everyday life. The power, and excitement of learning to build a fire ignited the girls' interest and set a great level of energy for the rest of the day. Another important figure in history whom we can relate to

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<sup>2</sup>Dewson, Molly. "Molly Dewson's Letters Home from Wellesley." In Modern American Women. edited by Susan Ware. 30-34. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> "The Harsh Conditions of Domestic Service." In Modern American Women. edited by Susan Ware. 52-56. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2002.

the idea of the importance of educating young women is Mary McLeod Bethune. Mary McLeod Bethune's philosophy was, "lift as we climb."<sup>4</sup> She believed in educating young girls, "God gives us young girls and the time is now for girls to be educated because they are the torch bearers for the future."<sup>5</sup> Bethune and the Girl Scout organization have a similar goal of educating young girls in skills not only of labor, but of life. Women of the past and women in the present day understand that education is a very important aspect in the up lift and empowerment of women.

Another important aspect in the step toward the empowerment of women is with the community that female organized groups develop. The communities are very important because they form the foundation that women organize around. Mary Ritter Beard uses organizing women as, "a conscious national womanhood," in her fight against the great social forces of the day.<sup>6</sup> Today, the Girl Scouts of the USA has a membership of nearly four million girls uniting under Beard's "national womanhood" ideas of furthering women's roles in the world. The Girl Scout organization is one that stands the test of time because more than fifty million women in the U.S. are Girl Scout alumnae, and the numbers keep growing. The Langston Hughes troop included twenty girls and the power of an organized female force was evident in everything that they accomplished. The goal of Girl Scouts is to engage young women in a united and organized atmosphere that empowers them with skills and knowledge for their future. The organization

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<sup>4</sup>Giddings, Paula. "A Second World War and After." In When And Where I enter. 238. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Lecture 4/13

<sup>6</sup>Beard, Mary Ritter. "Women and Progressive Politics." In Modern American Women. edited by Susan Ware. 42. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2002.

gives the girls a comfortable, learning atmosphere where they gain important knowledge and skills for their future that they are not getting anywhere else.

Often the other girls in the troop become like sisters and the leaders become like second mothers, creating a form of the fictive kin network. <sup>6</sup>In the movie "Choosing Children" a group of women raised a little girl by forming a network support group. The Girl Scout organization provides a similar support group for girls who otherwise would not have a strong family to turn to, thus creating a comfortable community for girls to rely upon. During the service project with a local troop and working with girls it is rewarding to see why leaders take pride in their girls accomplishments, and why the girls look up to and listen to their leaders. This small community or female family is why the Girl Scout organization means so much to so many people. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's idea in Herland has the overall theme of women's potential to create a much healthier, happier way of life.<sup>7</sup> She had the idea of uplifting the female gender and representing women more independently. Citizens<sup>8</sup> of Herland were not prisoners of their home but vital, functioning members in a thriving society. Perkins makes the assumption that when women play a more active role in society, society is better for it. She creates a female community where women have the opportunity to grow and develop equally. In some ways the story Herland embodies a similar community of female empowerment and security.<sup>8</sup> ✓

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<sup>7</sup>Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. Herland. New York: Dover Publications, INC. 1998.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. *iii*

*ibid.*, *iii*.

*good analogy*

Eleanor Roosevelt acted like a troop leader during the depression years when she became an outlet for many American women to address their problems. People really felt that Roosevelt cared about their problems and issues and that if she knew about them she would correct them.<sup>9</sup> The Girl Scout Organization gives girls a leading lady, or troop leader who can help girls address problems they face in their lives. The power of an organized, female group has been a successful outlet for women and is an idea carried on through the Girl Scout organization.

Another idea carried on through the Girl Scout organization is the struggle for equal opportunity. The Girl Scouts teach that a woman has the opportunity to be whatever she wants to become in life. Alice Hamilton demonstrated that women could have professional careers, with her pursuit of a career in the medical profession. She chooses a career based on her interests not her gender. They advocate this in the Girl Scout program as well by allowing young women opportunities at many different skills and allowing them to find their niche or expertise. The girls can then expand these specialized skills as they grow and advance to the next level in Girl Scouts. The Girl Scout program can change the way girls see the world and their place in it. Girls learn the importance of personal responsibility, the value of goal-setting, the spirit of teamwork, and the thrill of accomplishment. These are all skills that will help them gain many more opportunities for themselves in the future.

Parents can involve their children in many organizations, but Girl Scouts is one of the few all-girl organizations that involves an outdoor component as an integral part of their program. The outdoor program gives girls opportunities in fields not usually available to them such as

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<sup>9</sup>McElvaine, Roberts. "American Women Ask Eleanor Roosevelt for Help." In Modern American Women, edited by Susan Ware. 149. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2002.

outdoor survival. Outdoor survival techniques can be crucial in opening a completely new exciting world of opportunities for a young girl. An important image in history advocating opportunities for women came in the visual picture of Rosie the Riveter. Fanny Christina Hill was a woman trapped in domestic service, but during World War II she was given the opportunity to work at North American Aircraft. This idea of giving women other opportunities was displayed in the war time images like Rosie the Riveter. However, Hill is a rare case of an African-American woman who was successful enough to succeed in a male dominated position until her retirement in the 1980's.<sup>10</sup>

Why do  
you suppose  
so few  
girls' org.  
include  
outdoor  
components?

Much like Rosie the Riveter changed opportunities for many women the Girl Scout organization is always changing and evolving with the times. The opportunities for young girls had changed. In service it was evident that the organization is constantly evolving and developing new patches and activities to adapt to a new era and a new generation. Along with this idea was the fact that Girl Scouts do not discriminate against any race, class or ethnicity. In searching for patches for the girls it was surprising to see how diverse the organization has become in the past few years. Patches were available with girls of all different colors and ethnicity on them. One that they gave out after the camp displayed a little African-American girl sitting next to a white girl preparing smores. On its web site the organization showed signs of its diversity by displaying images of Asian, Mexican, and Indian girls engaged in activities. The Girl Scout organization is a female-based organization that produces girls with many different opportunities and does not discriminate against race, class or ethnicity.

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<sup>10</sup>Hill, Fanny Christian. "Rosie the Riveter." In Modern American Women. edited by Susan Ware. 185. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2002.

Through service involvement with the Girl Scout agency one can acquire much knowledge about how women in the past have helped better women's lives in the future. Women like Juliette "Daisy" Gordon Low, Molly Dewson, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's, just to name a few, aided women in the struggle of empowering the female gender. Clearly, the Girl Scouts' organization still holds to the ideas of past women to educate and create a comfortable community for women to grow and develop within the community. This service project with the Girl Scout organization produces a clear connection of ideas of the past, working and progressing in the present day toward a brighter future for many women.

*Excellent  
connections to readings.*