

GIRL SCOUTS

WHO WE ARE
WHAT WE THINK

Executive Summary



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GIRL SCOUTS: WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE THINK
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fall 1990

A Research Study

Conducted for
Girl Scouts of the United States of America

by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

On March 12, 1912, a remarkable woman named Juliette Gordon Low decided that what the girls of the United States needed was an organization of their own--an organization where they could learn new skills, develop self-esteem, and have a wonderful time. Today, with more than 3 million members, Girl Scouting is unwavering in its purpose to help girls develop to their fullest potential and become competent, resourceful women.

In the 1990s, girls will face many challenges on their path to adulthood. They must deal with their own personal and family lives and, their education, as well as societal problems. Among the institutions available to offer support is one that has been seeking to meet the special needs of girls since 1912--Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.

In 1990 the Girl Scouts commissioned Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., to survey current Girl Scout members. We wanted to take a closer look at today's Girl Scouts. Who are they? What do they think about their Girl Scout experience and how has it influenced their lives? We also wanted to learn more from girls about the problems and decisions they face.

Here are the highlights from this study of a nationally representative sample of nearly 1300 Junior, Cadette, and Senior Girl Scouts, and an additional over-sample of about 450 girls designed to give us the perspective of Girl Scouts from various racial/ethnic groups.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY

- ° Girl Scouts cannot be stereotyped. They comprise girls from many walks of life, including diverse racial, ethnic and religious groups, different family arrangements, and from urban, suburban, and rural areas across the country. Girl Scouts serves girls from all economic backgrounds, including girls living in poverty and affluence, and the majority in between.
- ° The best part of being in Girl Scouting is having fun and developing friendships with girls.
- ° Girls feel they receive benefits that coincide with the four program emphases Girl Scouting tries to instill in all girl members: developing self-potential, relating to others, developing values, and contributing to society.
- ° The ranking of activities girls most enjoy in Girl Scouting is very consistent with the benefits they report above. Trips and camping--fun activities that are shared with other girls--are the most favored activities. Crafts and making things, games, patch or badge projects (and pursuing the Gold Award for Senior Girl Scouts) are other activities girls enjoy which demonstrate their interest in achievement as well as having fun in a variety of ways.
- ° The personal importance of Girl Scouting is highest for Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan Native girls, and for girls living in urban settings.
- ° The troop setting provides older girls with many more opportunities for leadership, involvement, and decision-making than girls experience in their school classroom setting. The chance for leadership experience is a great source of satisfaction for many girls.

- ° Girls are quite satisfied with the adults who work with their troop to bring the Girl Scout experience to them. A clear majority view their leader as someone they can look up to.
- ° Girl Scouts are "joiners," with two-thirds involved in three or more activities in addition to Girl Scouting. However, even though Girl Scouts are "joiners," they still report higher academic achievement than a national sample of girls at comparable age levels.
- ° Most of the Girl Scouts surveyed have been involved in Girl Scouting for quite some time. On the average, Senior Girl Scouts have been in Girl Scouting for 8.5 years, Cadette Girl Scouts for 5.7 years, and Junior Girl Scouts for 3.6 years.
- ° For many girls, Girl Scouting is a family tradition. Over half the Junior, Cadette, and Senior Girl Scouts surveyed who have been members for five years or more have mothers who were Girl Scouts.
- ° Six out of ten Girl Scouts expect to be in Girl Scouting in the next year and only 8 percent do not expect to remain members.
- ° Girl Scouts, like other girls their age, worry more about school performance than they do about drugs, sexual pressures, and violence in their neighborhoods.
- ° Overall, Girl Scouts are more likely than non-Girl Scouts to make good moral decisions in a series of hypothetical situations. Girl Scouts who most believe in following the Girl Scout Promise and Law and who are most religious make good moral decisions more often than other Girl Scouts.
- ° In looking to their future lives as adults, girls say their number one priority is to help young people. They said this is more important to them than voting, being involved in a religious organization, giving money to charity, volunteering, or even serving in the Girl Scouts.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Girl Scouts: Who We Are, What We Think

How The Study Was Conducted

This study was commissioned by Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. and conducted by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., during the spring of 1990. Questionnaires were completed by two samples of girls. One was a nationally representative sample of 1284 Junior, Cadette, and Senior Girl Scouts. Junior Girl Scouts are typically ages 9--11, Cadette Girl Scouts are ages 12--14, and Senior Girl Scouts are ages 15--17. (Younger girls were not included in this study because of the considerable cost in doing personal interviews, which would be necessary for girls who are so young).

Although the national cross-section included girls from various racial/ethnic groups, the sample size of approximately 1300 meant that there were too few girls from some racial/ethnic groups to permit understanding and generalization. For example, assuming that 2 percent of the United States population of girls 9--17 is of Asian origin, 2 percent of nearly 1300 is only 26, certainly not enough to provide reliable information. Since it was not feasible to dramatically expand the size of the national cross-section, the research plan sought data from an additional sample designed to seek the opinions of girls who are Black, Hispanic, Asian or American Indian/Alaskan Native. The most feasible way to do this was to seek troops that have at least 50 percent of their membership made up of girls from one of the four racial/ethnic groups the Girl Scouts was interested in. This sampling strategy provided the perspectives of 463 girls from various racial/ethnic groups. These findings are not generalizable to all minority girls in Girl Scouting, but rather to girls in troops reported to be made up of at least 50 percent minority girls. However, this sampling approach does allow us to hear directly from girls in different racial/ethnic groups to be sure their views are known.

In both the national cross-section and the over-sample, surveys were administered by troop leaders in troop meetings. Girls were told there were no "right" or "wrong" answers; they should just tell us exactly how they felt. They were also told that their troop leader would not look at their answers, and their surveys would be confidential.

The Executive Summary describes what Girl Scouts told us about who they are and what they think about their Girl Scout experience. Key findings include references to and comparisons with a national cross-section of American girls. The national sample used comes from the 1989 study *The Girl Scouts Survey on the Beliefs and Moral Values of America's Children*.

A full report of *Girl Scouts: Who We Are. What We Think* is available upon request to Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.

GIRL SCOUTS: WHO WE ARE

Girl Scouting includes girls from many different walks of life. They cannot be stereotyped.

This survey of Junior, Cadette, and Senior Girl Scouts in troops reveals a diversity of backgrounds among the girls, encompassing the range of racial/ethnic groups, economic levels, geographic locations, and household compositions that girls experience in contemporary society. America is changing; who Girl Scouts are is changing. To speak of an "average" or "typical" Girl Scout is not as useful as looking at the diversity that Girl Scouting represents.

The profile presented here is of the national cross-section sample. Because of the way this sample was selected, the findings can be generalized to all Junior, Cadette, and Senior Girl Scouts in troops across the country.

Cross-Section Profile

After adjusting the survey sample to reflect the Girl Scouts' national membership by program age level, 74 percent of the respondents were Junior Girl Scouts, 19 percent were Cadette Girl Scouts, and 7 percent were Senior Girl Scouts. Not surprisingly, the average age within each program age level was 10.4 years old for Junior, 13.0 for Cadette, and 15.8 for Senior Girl Scouts.

Racial/Ethnic Diversity

Girl Scouting embraces racial/ethnic diversity.

In this nationally representative sample of Junior, Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts, 84 percent are White, 9 percent are Black, 2 percent are American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1 percent are Asian. Another 3 percent of the girls said their racial/ethnic identification was "other," while 2 percent said they were "not sure."

In addition to identifying their race, girls were asked if they were of Hispanic origin or descent. About 9 percent of the Girl Scout sample said that they were of Hispanic origin or descent.

These findings show that girls from diverse racial/ethnic groups are participating in Girl Scouting. Given projections of an increasingly pluralistic society, where the word "minority" no longer is appropriate, Girl Scouting will continue to reach out to serve all girls.

Household Income

Girl Scouts serves girls from all economic backgrounds, including girls living in poverty and affluence, and the majority in between.

Slightly over half of the Girl Scouts surveyed live in neighborhoods where the median household income is less

than \$35,000, which includes 8 percent who live in neighborhoods with median incomes below \$25,000. Nine percent live in households that use food stamps, and 12 percent live in families where the girl reports that there is an adult who is unemployed and looking for work.

At the other end of the economic range, 24 percent of the Girl Scouts surveyed live in neighborhoods where the yearly income is \$45,000 or more.

Geographic Distribution

Girl Scouts represent all geographic regions of the country, but there are proportionately more Girl Scouts in the Midwest and fewer in the South than girls in the national sample.

About 10 percent more Girl Scouts (37 percent) live in the midwestern states compared to girls of the same age in a national sample (26 percent). On the other hand, fewer Girl Scouts live in the south (26 percent) compared with the nation's girls (36 percent). In the eastern and western states, the percentage of Girl Scouts and of girls in general is about equal.

Religious Background

The religious affiliations of Girl Scouts are very similar to those of girls across the country.

Forty-five percent of Girl Scouts say they are of a Protestant faith, 31 percent Catholic, 3 percent Jewish, 5 percent claim no religion, 1 percent other, and 14 percent say not sure.

Household Composition

Close to three-fourths of Girl Scouts in this study live with both of their parents, 12 percent with their mother only, and 10 percent live with a parent and stepparent.

Understanding the composition of households in which Girl Scouts live is

very important, because of implications for ways to involve both girls and adults in Girl Scouting. It is especially important to understand Girl Scouts' belonging to different demographic groups. For instance, Girl Scouts who live in neighborhoods with the highest median incomes are most likely to say they live with both their mother and father (82 percent). On the other hand, Girl Scouts who report that their family uses food stamps are much less likely to say they live with both parents (57 percent).

Approximately 27 percent of Girl Scouts who are Black, 25 percent of Girl Scouts who are Hispanic, and 10 percent of Girl Scouts who are White say they live in single-parent households headed by their mother. Junior Girl Scouts are somewhat less likely to live in households headed by both their mother and father (72 percent) than are Cadette (77 percent) or Senior Girl Scouts (81 percent).

Latchkey Homes

At least a few times a week, two of every five Junior Girl Scouts (ages 9--11) come home from school when there is no adult present.

Girls were asked how often they come home from school when there is no adult at home, and the choices were: every day, a few times a week, once a week, once a month, or rarely or never. Although this question alone does not fully define a latchkey situation, the findings provide important information, particularly about younger girls for whom adult supervision is likely most important.

Overall, 43 percent of Girl Scouts in this survey say that at least a few times a week they come home from school when no adult is there. This compares with 49 percent in a nationwide survey of girls the same age. Junior Girl Scouts are less likely (40 percent) than Cadette (47 percent) and Senior Girl Scouts (62 per-

cent) to say that they come home with no adult present every day or a few times a week after school. Nevertheless, it is just at this younger age level, girls aged 9--11, when a latchkey situation raises the most concern.

Girl Scouts who are Black (56 percent) or Hispanic (53 percent) are more likely than Girl Scouts who are White (41 percent) to say they come home at least a few times a week to a home without an adult present. Urban Girl Scouts are more likely (49 percent) than either suburban (39 percent) or rural Girl Scouts (42 percent) to experience this kind of latchkey situation.

Academic Achievement

Compared with girls of the same age in the national study, more Girl Scouts in this sample reported achieving higher grades in their school work.

Approximately 27 percent of the Girl Scouts said they received mostly A's, compared with 20 percent of the girls nationally, while 44 percent of the Girl Scouts reported receiving mostly A's or B's (versus 37 percent in the national sample).

Involvement in Other Non-Classroom Activities

Most Girls Scouts are "joiners," and are quite busy pursuing several activities in and out of school.

Extracurricular activities at school seem to be especially popular, with 77 percent of the Girl Scouts surveyed saying they are involved in some form of the arts at school, 74 percent in sports, and 46 percent in other clubs and organizations such as the school newspaper, student government, or special-interest clubs. About two-thirds (62 percent) of the Girl Scouts are also involved in organizations outside of school and Girl Scouting. These activities include religious groups, youth organizations, arts and sports

activities, and community service projects.

In fact, 66 percent of the girls say they are involved in three or more activities besides Girl Scouting, while only 8 percent report that Girl Scouting is their only involvement in an activity or organization. Interestingly, Girl Scouts from neighborhoods with the lowest median incomes (below \$25,000) are more likely (85 percent) to be heavily involved in other activities and organizations than are Girl Scouts from the more affluent neighborhoods (\$45,000 and over; 53 percent).

Number of Years in Girl Scouting

Most of the Girl Scouts surveyed have been involved in Girl Scouting for quite some time. On the average, Senior Girl Scouts have been in Girl Scouting for 8.5 years, Cadette Girl Scouts for 5.7 years, and Junior Girl Scouts for 3.6 years.

Girls at any program age level have, for the most part, also been involved in the previous program age level in Girl Scouting: 92 percent of Seniors were Cadettes, 89 percent of Cadettes were Juniors, and 83 percent of Juniors were Brownies. Each program level has some girls who had not been involved in the previous level. This number is larger among the younger groups (8 percent of Senior, 10 percent of Cadette, and 15 percent of Junior Girl Scouts, after correcting for those who said they were not sure). Although their numbers are not very large, some older Girl Scouts have not "always" been in Girl Scouting and have been attracted to participate at a relatively late stage in the program age level sequence. Understanding why this occurs could help strengthen recruitment strategies for older girls.

Girl Scout Heritage

For many girls, Girl Scouting is a family tradition.

Girls who said their mothers were Girl Scouts are more likely to have been involved in Girl Scouting for a longer period of time than girls whose mothers were not involved. Over half of the girls at the three program age levels surveyed who have been in Girl Scouting for five or more years have mothers who were Girl Scouts. In contrast, only one fourth of the girls who have been in Girl Scouting for two years or less have mothers who were Girl Scouts. Furthermore, those girls who have been in Girl Scouting the longest are more likely to have mothers who have been leaders or volunteers in Girl Scouting at some time. It makes intuitive sense that the girls' mothers may influence the girls to stay involved longer if the mothers developed a commitment to Girl Scouting through their own past involvement.

Another interesting finding was that 47 percent of Girl Scouts who are White say that their mothers were Girl Scouts as a girl, while only 23 percent of the Girl Scouts who are Black and 37 percent of the Girl Scouts who are Hispanic make such a comment. It is certainly important that the Girl Scout Movement finds ways for parents and guardians of all current and potential Girl Scouts to become actively involved in supporting their girls' participation in Girl Scouting. Indeed, girls today who are from diverse racial/ethnic groups may be beginning a Girl Scout heritage for their daughters in the future.

The Over-Samples

Fortunately, the nationally representative cross-section yielded enough responses from Girl Scouts who are Black or Hispanic that they can be reliably reported. To understand the perspectives of girls who are Asian or American Indian/Alaskan Native, however, we will turn to the over-samples that were done to give us their responses. This over-sample contains 145 girls who are Asian, and 48 who are American Indian/Alaskan Native. These are still not large

samples from which to draw statistically reliable statements about all Girl Scouts who are members of these racial/ethnic groups, and these samples are subject to the limitations described earlier. Nonetheless, they provide an important starting point for understanding.

Some of the demographic characteristics of girls from these over-samples differ markedly from the cross-section in general. They are described here as background information useful in interpreting the responses to subsequent questions on experiences of Girl Scouting.

Girl Scouts who are Asian come from more affluent circumstances than most Girl Scouts, and are more likely to live in suburbs and in the West.

Eighty percent of Girl Scouts from this over-sample live in neighborhoods with median household incomes of \$35,000 or more. They are also much more likely than other girls to say they live in the West (75 percent) and in suburbs (56 percent).

Girl Scouts who are American Indian or Alaskan Native live in much less affluence than most Girl Scouts, and are more likely to live in rural areas and in the West.

Eighty-five percent of these Girl Scouts in the American Indian/Alaskan Native over-sample live in neighborhoods with median household incomes of less than \$35,000, which includes 39 percent below incomes of \$25,000. Higher percentages of these girls report living in families that use food stamps (16 percent) or with an unemployed adult (28 percent) than do Girl Scouts in general. Unlike most Girl Scouts, girls in this over-sample are much more likely to live in rural areas (71 percent) and in the West (48 percent.)

GIRL SCOUTS: WHAT WE THINK

This section of the report will reveal what girls think about their Girl Scouting experience, how they feel it has influenced their lives, and what problems and decisions they face that can be addressed through Girl Scouting.

Girl Scouting's Benefits

First and foremost, girls told us their Girl Scout experience has provided them with fun and a chance to work closely with other girls on activities.

From a list of 25 possible benefits, the two most highly rated are fun and working with girls on activities. Close to two-thirds of all girls at all program age levels feel their Girl Scout experience has provided them with fun a lot, and another 21 percent feel Girl Scouting has been fun at least somewhat. Girls who are Black (85 percent), and girls from urban areas (73 percent) feel even more strongly that Girl Scouting is a lot of fun.

Similarly, 60 percent of all girls say that Girl Scouting gave them a chance to work with other girls on activities a lot, and 23 percent said this benefit occurred somewhat.

Girls also feel their Girl Scout experience has helped them learn new things, relate better to people, enhance their friendships, and serve their community.

The following are the eight next most highly rated benefits:

- ° "Helped you to make new friends: (52 percent a lot, 25 percent some)
- ° "Provided you with an all-girl group to spend time with" (51 percent a lot, 29 percent some)

° "Taught you about things like good health, safety, etc." (51 percent a lot, 28 percent some)

° "Helped you stay together with friends you had from before you joined Girl Scouts" (49 percent a lot, 22 percent some)

° "Helped you gain new skills" (46 percent a lot, 33 percent some)

° "Helped you do something good for your community" (46 percent a lot, 32 percent some)

° "Taught you how to cooperate with other people" (46 percent a lot, 31 percent some)

° "Made you more sensitive to the needs of other people" (46 percent a lot, 28 percent some)

A review of these perceived benefits of Girl Scouting reveals a consistency with the four program emphases which Girl Scouting tries to instill in girls at every age level: developing self-potential relating to others, developing values, and contributing to society.

Girls Becoming Leaders

Older Girl Scouts see opportunities for decision-making, involvement, and leadership in their troop meetings; they see these opportunities as much less available in their school classroom.

Nearly three-fourths of Senior Girl Scouts (72 percent) say they lead the troop in an activity at least sometimes (34 percent do so very often) as compared with less than half of these Seniors (45 percent) having a similar opportunity in the classroom (15 percent do so very often).

Even more remarkable was the finding that 66 percent of Senior Girl Scouts say they very often make decisions about what goes on in their troop but only 25

percent make decisions about what goes on in their classrooms. The findings are similar for Cadette Girl Scouts.

Following this same pattern of responses, the clear majority of Senior Girl Scouts reported they very often are active participants in their troop meetings, i.e., they:

° Say how they feel or what they think and have their troop leader listen. (74 percent)

° Really listen to what their troopmates say. (74 percent)

° Take an active part in what's going on in their troop meeting. (74 percent)

° Say how they feel or think to troopmates and have them listen. (74 percent)

Once again, when asked the same questions about their typical classroom experiences, the responses were uniformly lower. Perhaps most striking was the finding that only 42 percent of Senior Girl Scouts feel their teachers very often listen to what they say or think, versus 74 percent of Senior Girl Scouts feeling their troop leader very often listens to what they have to say. The findings for Cadette Girl Scouts do not reveal as wide a gap but the differences do exist.

About Girl Scout Activities

Trips and camping are the two favorite Girl Scout activities.

Girls were asked to rate how much they liked to do 11 Girl Scout activities: a lot, some, a little, or not at all. Eighty percent of all girls in the national cross-section say they like trips a lot, and 71 percent say they like camping a lot.

In another question asking girls which activity they most look forward to next year, camping, and trips were again the first or second choices for most girls.

Junior Girl Scouts most look forward to camping whereas Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts most look forward to trips.

Achievement, recognition, and the opportunity to work with other girls are also identified as favorite activities.

Close to two-thirds of all Junior Girl Scouts said they like crafts, games, and patch and badge projects a lot; most Junior and Cadette Girl Scouts say they like to do these activities at least somewhat. For Senior Girl Scouts the second most anticipated Girl Scout activity is working toward the Gold Award, the highest achievement in Girl Scouting.

The chance to work with other girls is also very important. Almost all of the Senior Girl Scouts said they like working with other girls at least somewhat. A majority (65 percent) said they like working with other girls a lot. Almost half of Junior and Cadette Girl Scouts also feel they like working with other girls a lot.

Satisfaction with Girl Scouting

Girls express considerable satisfaction with the adults who work with them and with their troop leaders as persons they can look up to.

Girls were asked to rate their satisfaction on a four-point scale--from very satisfied to not at all satisfied--with their troop leaders. Troop leaders were very highly rated:

- ° the adults who work with your group (66 percent very satisfied and 22 percent somewhat satisfied)

- ° your leader as someone you look up to (57 percent very satisfied, 25 percent somewhat satisfied)

Girls from the cross-section who are Black indicated an even higher degree of satisfaction with the adults who work with their groups (84 percent very

satisfied) and their leader as someone they look up to (74 percent.) Girls from the American Indian/Alaskan Native over-sample were most satisfied with their leader as someone they look up to: 83 percent said they are very satisfied.

Leadership experience is a great source of satisfaction for Girl Scouts.

Fifty-nine percent of the Girl Scouts surveyed were very satisfied with their chance to lead. Girl Scouts in the cross-section from an Hispanic background were especially satisfied with the chance to lead, with 78 percent saying they were very satisfied.

Diverse aspects of Girl Scouting proved to be satisfying to girls.

Many girls were very satisfied with:

- ° troop activities that take place outside their meetings (66 percent)

- ° the things they do in meetings (50 percent)

- ° council-sponsored events (49 percent)

- ° their all-girl setting (48 percent)

The majority of girls (73 percent) were at least somewhat satisfied with their Girl Scout handbooks, and 30 percent were very satisfied. The degree of satisfaction with the handbook declines, however, as girls get older.

Overall, Cadette Girl Scouts are less likely than Junior and Senior Girl Scouts to say very satisfied and more apt to indicate somewhat satisfied on many of these items.

The Personal Importance of Girl Scouting

The overwhelming majority of Girl Scouts value their experience as Girl Scouts.

Another way to see how satisfied Girl Scouts are is to ask them, "How important to you personally are the Girl Scouts--very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?"

The personal importance of Girl Scouting to troop members is generally quite high. Eighty-one percent of the girls surveyed say Girl Scouting is either very or somewhat important to them. As Girl Scouts mature, they are less likely to feel Girl Scouting is "very" important to them, although the vast majority of Senior Girl Scouts (92 percent) feel it is at least "somewhat" important.

Girl Scouts in the cross-section who are Black (58 percent) or from Hispanic background (44 percent) as well as girls who are from the American Indian/Alaskan Native over-sample (43 percent) are more likely to say that Girl Scouting is personally "very" important than Girl Scouts who are White (33 percent) or from the Asian sample (25 percent.)

The personal importance of Girl Scouting is also higher for those Girl Scouts living in urban environments (44 percent saying very important) than for Girl Scouts living either in the suburbs (33 percent) or in rural areas (27 percent.)

When asked in an unstructured question why they say Girl Scouting is very or somewhat personally important, Girl Scouts who volunteered a response say most frequently:

"They enjoy being a Girl Scout or that Girl Scouting is fun.

"Girl Scouting is an educational or learning experience.

"Girl Scouting gives them the chance to meet new people and make friends.

"Girl Scouting gives them the opportunity to help people or their community.

For the small minority (9 percent) of girls who feel Girl Scouting is not very or not at all personally important, the reasons most frequently offered are:

"They are too busy, or have different priorities, or prefer other activities.

"It's "boring" or "no fun."

Expectations to be in Girl Scouts the Next Year

Six out of ten Girl Scouts expect to be in Girl Scouting the next year.

Most of the remainder (30 percent) are undecided, while only 8 percent do not expect to remain Girl Scouts. Senior Girl Scouts are the most certain about their intentions, with 74 percent of the girls saying they will continue and only 15 percent expressing uncertainty.

As would be expected, girls who rate Girl Scouting as personally very or somewhat important are much more likely to expect to be in the Girl Scouts next year, at 79 percent and 58 percent, respectively, than those who rate Girl Scouting as not very or not at all important (24 percent).

Reasons Girls Stay in Girl Scouting

Fun and friendship are the two key reasons girls stay in Girl Scouting.

Girls were asked to choose, from a list of 11 reasons, the one or two most important reasons for staying in Girl Scouting. Half of the cross-section of Girl Scouts surveyed say one of the most important reasons, for staying in the Girl Scouts is that it's fun. Girl Scouts also give as one of the most important reasons "I've made close friends there" (35 percent); and "it has given me something to do" (27 percent).

What girls look to Girl Scouting for varies among the diverse group of girls in Girl Scouting:

° While Junior and Cadette Girl Scouts give the three reasons above, Seniors instead say "it has given me a chance to do good for other people" as their third most frequent response (19 percent)

° Fifty-four percent of Girl Scouts who expect to remain in Girl Scouting state their most important reason for staying in Girl Scouts is that "it's fun." In contrast, Girl Scouts who do not expect to remain in Girl Scouting say "it's fun" at only 27 percent.

Why Don't Other Girls Stay in Girl Scouting?

Peer pressure and an "uncool" image of Girl Scouting may be reasons some older girls don't stay in Girl Scouting. Activities that are not fun may keep some younger girls from continuing in Girl Scouts.

When asked to speculate why some girls their age decide to leave Girl Scouting, girls give different reasons according to their program age level.

Junior Girl Scouts say girls leave because:

"It's "boring" or "not fun" (25 percent).

"They are busy, or it's not a first priority, or they prefer other activities" (18 percent).

"They don't like it" (14 percent).

Cadette Girl Scouts are more likely to say:

"Peer pressure," or "it's not cool to be a Girl Scout" (33 percent).

"They are too "busy" (28 percent)

"Boring" or "not fun" (18 percent.)

Senior Girl Scouts say:

"They are too "busy" (42 percent)

"Peer pressure" or "it's not cool to be in Girl Scouts" (41 percent)

"Outgrown it" or "too old for the Girl Scouts" (16 percent).

About Girls' Worries

The most pressing worries of girls may not be what adults would predict.

For the most part, the problems that the average Girl Scout worries about most for herself are not the problems that adults and the media often focus on, i.e., drugs, sex, violence. This was the same finding that resulted from the national study on beliefs and moral values of boys and girls across the country, when children were asked to select the one problem that most worried them. This does not mean Girl Scouts do not worry about these other issues. Rather, like most girls their age, their most urgent concerns have to do with their home and school lives.

The problems Junior Girl Scouts worry about most are family problems: lack of love and care from parents, problems in their family, or physical abuse of kids. In contrast, Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts most worry about the pressure to do well in school, and Senior Girl Scouts report the added worry of what to do with their life.

Because Girl Scouts are a diverse group of girls, not all Girl Scouts have the same worries.

For example, 26 percent of Hispanic Girl Scouts in the cross-section worry most about lack of love and care from parents, as compared to about 13 percent of girls from the Asian over-sample, 10 percent of girls who are White or Black, and 6 percent of girls who are from the American Indian/Alaskan Native over-

sample. On the other hand, Girl Scouts who are White or American Indian/Alaskan Native are more likely to worry most about problems in their family (13 percent) than girls who are Black (4 percent) or Hispanic (2 percent.) Girls who are Black are more likely to express their worry about violence in their neighborhood (16 percent) as compared to other girls (5 percent). Girl Scouts who are Asian worry most (16 percent) about the pressure to do well in school.

In addition to trying to identify Girl Scouts' single greatest worry from a list of 18 possible problems kids today might face, this study also asked girls to think about how much they worry about each of those problems. The pressure to do well in school seems to be the problem most consistently felt by all girls in this study, with about 40 percent of all girls worrying about this a lot and about 20 percent worrying at least somewhat. Junior Girl Scouts and Girl Scouts who are Black or Hispanic worried about physical abuse of children and violence in their neighborhood and schools much more than did other girls. Also, about half (52 percent) of urban girls said they worried about violence in their neighborhood a lot, as compared to 43 percent of suburban girls and 33 percent of rural girls.

The Pressures Girls Feel

The majority of girls in this study feel they are pushed a lot to "do the right thing."

Girls feel pressured to:

- ° Obey parents and teachers (67 percent)
- ° Not to take drugs (63 percent)
- ° Get good grades in school (62 percent)
- ° Prepare for the future (53 percent)

Girl Scouts who are Black feel even more pushed to do these things than

other girls. As girls get older, pressures to get good grades and prepare for the future are felt even more strongly.

Just over one-third of Girl Scouts (35 percent) feel pushed a lot to be popular and "fit in" with their peers. Girl Scouts of Hispanic descent feel this pressure even more acutely (47 percent) as do the Cadette Girl Scouts (41 percent).

Older girls (Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts) were asked about how pushed they feel to engage in at-risk activities, such as having sex, drinking, smoking cigarettes, and taking drugs. The vast majority of girls say they feel hardly any pressure to engage in these activities. Interestingly, very few of the Girl Scouts in this survey (4 percent) said they felt pressured to take drugs.

Overall, on the questions asked only of older girls that had to do with drug and alcohol use, sexuality, and suicide, Cadette Girl Scouts said they worried more than Senior Girl Scouts, and Hispanic girls worried most of all.

Moral Guidelines Girl Scouts Use

The Girl Scout Promise and Law

Seven in ten girls say that the Girl Scout Promise and Law has been of some use in their own lives. Close to one-third of girls say it has been very useful.

Girls who are Black (55 percent), Hispanic (40 percent), or American Indian/Alaskan Native (38 percent) were especially likely to say the Promise and Law has been very useful to them. Twenty-seven percent of girls were able to cite a time when the Girl Scout Promise and Law had recently helped them make a decision. The two most frequent kinds of decisions were to help where they were needed, and to be friendly, kind, and considerate. Other girls felt the Promise and Law helped them be more honest and fair, helped them overcome peer pressure, and

encouraged them to protect and improve the world about them.

The Role of Religion

Close to one-third of Girl Scouts say their religious teachings and beliefs are an important guide in their daily lives, including moral decision-making.

About half of Girl Scouts say that religion is very important to them, and 30 percent turn constantly to their religious teachings or beliefs to guide them in their daily lives. An additional 39 percent of girls say they turn to their religious teachings to sometimes guide them.

When asked to choose the one most important guideline from a list of five moral guidelines children might use to make moral decisions, 37 percent of Girl Scouts chose "to do what God tells you is right." However, when girls were allowed to rate the importance of each of the five guidelines, 72 percent said doing "what God tells you is right" is very important as one their guiding principles.

The importance of religion as a guiding force varied among girls in Girl Scouting. Younger girls expressed greater emphasis on the importance of religion in their lives than the older girls. Girls in the national cross-section who are Black or from Hispanic backgrounds placed significantly more emphasis on the role of religion in guiding their lives than did girls who are White, American Indian/Alaskan Native or Asian. Overall, however, more Girl Scouts place greater importance on the role of religion in their lives than girls in the national sample.

In spite of this seemingly profound influence of religion in their lives, girls still are most likely to turn to parents and friends for advice. However, 22 percent of girls do feel that their religious leader is one of the special adults in their lives who really care what happens to them.

Other Moral Guides

When girls don't know what is the right thing to do, they are most likely to turn to their parents for advice.

This is true of girls of all ages, although Junior Girl Scouts are more likely to seek parental advice (77 percent) than Cadette Girl Scouts (56 percent) and Senior Girl Scouts (51 percent). Other sources of advice girls reported are friends, who become increasingly important as girls get older, siblings and other relatives, and then teachers or coaches.

Girls have varied moral guidelines that they turn to when they have to make decisions about what is right or wrong in a particular situation.

Girls were given a list of five possible guidelines they might use in deciding what is right or wrong in a situation, and were asked to rate the importance of each. Their rating of one of those guidelines, religious beliefs, was discussed above. Many girls felt that the following four guidelines are also very important in their decision-making:

*to do what would make them happy (62 percent)

*to follow the advice of an authority, such as parent, teacher, or youth leader (61 percent)

*to do what would be best for everyone involved (56 percent)

*to do what would improve their situation or get them ahead (49 percent)

Moral Decisions Girl Make

Girl Scouts were asked how they would behave in a series of hypothetical ethical dilemmas. A similar series of questions was asked of children in a nationally representative cross-section of children in 1989, reported in the Girl Scouts

Survey on the Beliefs and Moral Values of America's Children. A comparison was made of the responses of Girl Scouts in this study with those of girls in the national study. However, there are two important caveats to keep in mind when looking at the comparative results:

"The two samples of girls--the national sample and the Girl Scout sample--are not equivalent demographically or otherwise.

"The current study does not explain why differences between the Girl Scout responses and those of girls in the national sample might occur. It is possible that the results are due to the kinds of girls who choose to be Girl Scouts in combination with the influence of the Girl Scout experience on those girls.

Although we cannot say based on this study alone what role Girl Scouting plays in encouraging sound decision-making, we can say that Girl Scouts report different moral decisions than the girls in the national sample. We can also say that more of Girl Scout choices are consistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Promise and Law than in the general population.

For each of the following situations, girls were instructed to "Imagine someone like yourself in each of them and tell us what would most likely happen."

Whether to Cheat on a Test

Here is the situation given to girls:

"You sit down to an important test. You know you don't know the answers to most of the questions because you haven't had enough time to study. There is a person sitting next to you who is very smart and well-prepared and you can see her answers. In this situation, you would probably..."

Almost three-quarters of the Girl Scouts we asked said they would not cheat (70 percent). Only half the girls in the national cross-section said they would not cheat. In both the Girl Scout sample and the national cross-section, the tendency to say they would cheat increased with age.

Peer Loyalty vs. Telling the Truth

Here is the situation given to girls:

"Some school property has been destroyed. Your best friend brags to you that she did it. The school principal asks you if you know what happened. In this situation, you would probably..."

A greater proportion of the Girl Scouts surveyed (43 percent) said they would tell the principal the truth than did girls in the national cross-section (25 percent). Girl Scouts who are Black were most inclined to tell the truth (62 percent). However, in both studies, girls in junior and senior high school were much less apt to tell the principal the truth. The pull of peer loyalty becomes quite strong for girls in their adolescent years.

Willingness to Help a Classmate

Here is the situation given to girls:

"You already have a regular after-school activity you've said you would do, but you learn that a student in your class has had a bad accident and cannot come to school for many months. The teacher asks you if you would be willing to give up your activity for two or three afternoons each week for those months to help that student with school work. In this situation, you would probably..."

The responses of girls in Girl Scouting versus those in the national cross-section were not very different, with the most common response to help no matter

what. Younger girls were more likely to give this response than older girls.

Sexual Conduct

This situation was only given to the older girls, i.e., Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts.

Here is the situation:

"You have had a steady relationship with your boyfriend for a long time and you feel very much in love. At this point, he tells you he wants to have sex with you. In this situation, you would probably..."

The pattern of responses suggests that a greater proportion of Girl Scouts feel they would refrain from having sex in this situation describing a long-term relationship than girls from the national cross section. However, it is important to note that 9 percent of the Girl Scouts and 22 percent of girls nationally say they would have sex in this situation.

Alcohol Use

This is another situation given only to older girls in both studies:

"You go to a party where some of your friends are drinking alcohol. Someone hands you a drink. In this situation, you would probably..."

The responses of girls in Girl Scouting are quite different from the national cross-section. Two-thirds of Girl Scouts say they would refuse the drink as compared to one-half of girls in the national study. Conversely, more girls in the national sample would drink without worrying about it than would Girl Scouts.

Accepting Others

This situation was developed especially for the Girl Scouts study because of the organization's commitment to pluralism.

Here is the situation:

"You are in a group of your friends. A new girl has joined your class, who is different from everyone else in your group. This girl comes up to your group and tries to be friendly. Some of the kids in the group start to make fun of this person. In this situation, you would probably ..."

The most frequent response was to be friendly and ignore the rest of the group. Others, fearing peer opinion, opted to say nothing in the group but try to make friends with her later. For this situation, the responses of Junior and Senior Girl Scouts were quite similar. However, Cadette Girl Scouts were much less likely to say they would be friendly and more apt to think they would keep their distance from the new girl. "Since the early adolescent stage of development is where the pressure to conform and be like one's peers is strong, this finding is not surprising.

Girl Scouts who are Black were much more likely to try to be friendly (62 percent) than girls who are White (49 percent), Asian (41 percent), Hispanic (36 percent) or American Indian (36 percent).

Girls who most believe in the Girl Scout Promise and Law and in their religion are most likely to make good moral decisions.

Girl Scouts who find the Girl Scout Promise and Law to be useful in their lives were much more likely to make the "right" moral decisions on each of the situations discussed above. Similarly, girls whose religious beliefs are important to them were also more likely to make moral choices consistent with religious traditions.

Moral decision-making becomes more complicated as girls get older. Pressures to perform well in school and to conform to peer groups seem especially to influence moral choices. Any organ-

ization working to foster the healthy development of girls must understand these pressures exist and help girls to deal with them.

About Future Life as Adults

"Helping young people" is Girl Scouts' number one public service priority when they become adults.

Girl Scouts were asked to think about their lives as adults, and what kinds of public service they expect would be important to them. A remarkable 65 percent of girls said that helping young people would be very important, and an additional 24 percent thought it would be at least somewhat important. Interestingly, helping young people was more important to girls than doing so specifically by serving in the Girl Scouts as adults.

Intention to be involved in serving the public good seems to diminish somewhat as girls get older. A strong majority of girls feel volunteering, voting, giving money to charity, serving in the Girl Scouts, and involvement in a religious organization are at least somewhat important to their future adult lives. However, for the most part, Junior Girl Scouts were more likely to say these actions were very important to their adult lives than the older girls.

Girls with stronger religious beliefs were more likely to express commitment to future public service. Religious convictions also were a factor in girls' views of what they would do as adults. Not surprisingly, the most dramatic finding was that girls whose religious beliefs were very important to them were much more likely to say they would be involved in a religious organization as adults (85 percent) than girls who said their religious beliefs were not very or not at all important (29 percent). Also interesting to discover, however, was that the girls who state they are not religious were also much less apt to say that, as adults, they would give money to

charity or volunteer time in their community when compared to girls who said their religious beliefs were very important.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

By asking girls about their beliefs and experiences, we learn that adults should not have stereotypical images of the "typical" Girl Scout. Girl Scouting is open to and enjoyed by girls from all walks of life. We have learned that in the all-girl troop setting, there are unique opportunities for girls to exercise leadership and decision-making skills, and that the role of the adult leader is critical. And we found that more Girl Scouts make sound moral choices than girls from a national study.

Not surprisingly, we have learned that girls' perspective is that Girl Scouting is, first and foremost, a place to have fun and share friendships. The more they enjoy their experience, the more likely they are to remain in Girl Scouting. However, achievement--through badge, patch, and award programs--is also important to many girls. But it is important to remember that learning and development can only take place in an environment that girls truly enjoy.

Like any study, some questions are answered and others are raised. Why do more Girl Scouts make good moral decisions than in a national sample? Is there something special about the kind of girl who gets involved in Girl Scouting or is the Girl Scout experience somehow changing girls' lives or is there some combination of these two factors? What new approaches can Girl Scouting take to address the worries and pressures girls today feel? Since girls' interests and concerns vary so much, what tools can Girl Scouting give to leaders to help them judge what is best for the girls they work with?

We hope the information learned thus far by asking girls to tell us who they are

and what they think will set the stage for better understanding of Girl Scouting today. The findings from this study certainly underscore Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.'s ongoing efforts to develop creative program and membership initiatives designed to reach out to all girls. Our changing society needs to help girls develop to their fullest potential and become competent, resourceful women. Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. intends to play a vital role in improving the lives of girls.

