



**For Immediate Release**

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**Girl Scouts helps close gender gap**

Every July, we pay homage to our freedom and liberty. The dictionary defines freedom as the "quality or state of being free; the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action." And liberty, it explains, is "the power to do as one pleases; the power of choice; and the condition in which an individual has the ability to act according to her own will."

By these definitions, I don't believe every American enjoys full freedom or liberty. Is it by choice that women earn a third less than a male coworker? Is it by their own will that today's girls are more likely headed for poverty than their brothers? Is it truly an absence of constraint that keeps girls from pursuing the classes and careers that offer more promising salaries and security?

It appears not, according to a recent study in which Janet Hyde and Janet Mertz of the University of Wisconsin-Madison analyzed math scores from the World Economic Forum's 2007 Gender Gap Index. The report ranks countries according to employment, economic, education and political opportunities.

They concluded that gender inequality in a society, rather than a lack of ability or aptitude, is the primary reason fewer females than males excel in math in most countries, including our own. "Countries with greater gender equity are the ones where the ratio of girls to boys doing well in math is close to equal," Mertz explains. If girls don't have equal educational opportunities, or if they believe they won't have equal access to certain jobs even if they do take the right classes, then they figure "why bother" and pursue more traditional paths. Unfortunately, those other paths tend to be lower paying jobs with less upward mobility -- ultimately limiting girls' power of choice.

Girl Scouting empowers girls by helping them see that "life is the sum result of all the choices you make... If you can control the process of choosing, you can find the freedom that comes from being in charge of yourself." (Robert F. Bennett) We grant freedom by helping girls build the courage and skills they'll need to create their own destiny. But girls need to feel a broad culture of support, too.

Bob Marley sings: "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds." This month it seems apropos to consider the extent girls enjoy the unalienable right to choose any path - I mean path. Support girls' liberty. Be aware of comments made, toys and books provided, classes and activities suggested -- influence can be subtle.

As President Eisenhower said, "There is nothing wrong with America that the faith, love of freedom, intelligence and energy of her citizens cannot cure." I believe he's right, and I expect to see our girls leading the way.

Ann Saris is VP of Brand and Marketing for Girl Scouts of the Northwestern Great Lakes, Inc., serving nearly 20,000 girls and 6,000 volunteers in 58 counties across Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

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