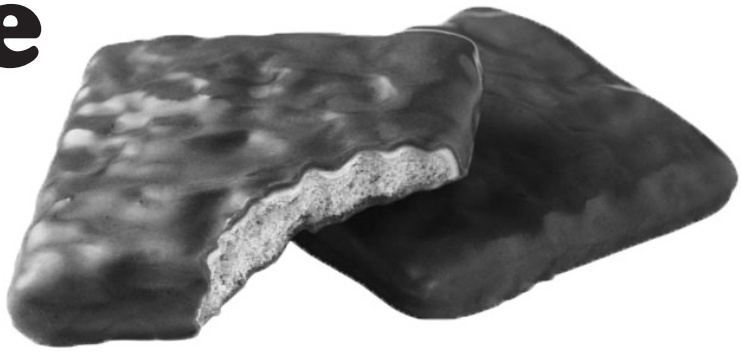
# The Real Recipe Behind the Girl Scout Cookie



BY OLIVIA FELDMAN

It's midwinter, which means we are in cookie-selling season for Girl Scouts all over the nation. The Girl Scouts have been selling cookies since 1917. The tradition started in Muskogee, Oklahoma, when a troop of Girl Scouts decided to sell cookies in a local high school cafeteria to raise money for their club. For the first twenty or so years, troop members and their mothers baked their "Girl Scout" cookies in their homes, but in 1922, the recipes became standardized among at-home bakers. In 1936, Girl Scouts USA licensed their first commercial baker to accommodate the high nationwide demand for cookies.

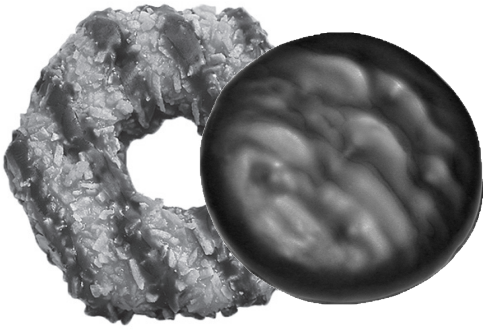
These days, cookie production is handled by just two bakers: ABC Bakers and Little Brownie Bakers. In order to maintain consistency, each baker produces eight cookie varieties. The cookies are used to fundraise for local troops and are considered an "entrepreneurial opportunity" for Girl Scouts. Today, you can buy one of the classic three flavors of Thin Mints, Trefoils, or Caramel deLites (also known as Samoas), or one of the five other flavors provided by different bakeries. No matter what, when you buy a box of Girl Scout cookies, you will find a background picture of a troop member engaged in an exciting, educational task like kayaking, planting a garden, or delivering a speech. Accompanying the photograph is a quote about how Girl Scouts empowers its members.

Girl Scouts began in 1912 in Savannah, Georgia, as "something for all the girls." Founder Juliette Gordon Low envisioned an organization that "would bring girls out of their homes to serve their communities, experience the out-of-doors, and have the opportunity to develop 'self-reliance and resourcefulness.'" The organization has found that cookie sales have been a way to promote these values. Janet Zelenak, the current Director of Product Sales at the Girl Scouts of the Jersey Shore, explains, "the key to the Girl Scout cookie success is that it is the only girl-led business that helps girls to develop five major and very important skills that they will use throughout their lives. They are goal setting, decision making, money management, people skills, and business ethics." While the idea of empowering young women through entrepreneurship is not unique to the Girl Scouts USA, cookie sales certainly are.

The cookie itself is extremely important, since it reflects the history of young women's "empowerment" in America. In the early twentieth century, baking not only reflected the role of women as homemakers but emphasized the tradition of homemade production and consumption of food in the pre-World War II era. Changing with the times, the cookies became manufactured in mass quantities. By the late 1930s, when production began to boom in the U.S., so did the corporatization of cookies. As more women were entering the workforce, the shift in the Scouts' focus went from baking to selling cookies, even granting prizes to those who sold the most.

Since the Girl Scouts incentivize cookie sales, they participate in instilling values of American capitalism early in life. The cookie-selling program is all about teaching young women and gender-nonconforming people how to sell large quanti-

Images:



ties of cookies so they can receive material prizes. With rhetoric about teaching life values to young women and gender-nonconforming people, the Girl Scouts advance the American concept that in order to be a productive civilian, you need to create and push capital. If you aren't making money, then you're failing.

Because the cookies are a seasonal item, Girl Scouts absorb another business lesson: supply and demand. The cookies are always in demand because their supply is not readily available. Marketing is also important to the competitive aspect of cookie sales. Since prizes are given to those who sell the most cookies individually, knowing your market and where you can optimize your cookie sales is an important skill to learn, even as a Daisy (the youngest group of Girl Scouts).

Cookie sales teach young girls to sell themselves to the public. When there is so much pressure to sell a massive amount of cookies, members must rely on the image of the sweet and "pure" Girl Scout. They sell an idea of themselves almost as much as the cookies. Furthermore, this practice reflects the use of feminine bodies, especially in American media, to sell products. Members of the Girl Scouts are subconsciously pushed to tie their personal worth to the material worth of the product.

The tradition of the Girl Scout cookie is a uniquely American one. Morphing with the values and social scene of the twentieth century, the sale of Girl Scout cookies became a way to teach a growing body of empowered women how to be young capitalists—how to sell both themselves and a product. The pressure put on Girl Scouts to compete with other troops forces young children to learn to be creative in their entrepreneurial ventures--even in selling themselves. Something as seemingly harmless as a cookie teaches our young Scouts that their bodies are being judged by the world.

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