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The Case of the Lesbian Den Mother: Moral Reasoning Exposed



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By now, most Americans have probably heard of the lesbian mother forced out as a den mother for the Tiger Scouts, a program for first-graders offered by the Boy Scouts of America. For a few days, the story filtered through the Internet until it broke as an Associated Press article last week.

That article by reporter John Seewer reveals that Jennifer Tyrrell had been serving as a leader in Ohio Pack 109 of the Tiger Scouts. Tyrrell was forced to leave that post when officials of the Boy Scouts learned that she was a lesbian. The Boy Scouts of America have had a clearly stated policy against homosexuals serving as adult leaders, though that policy has usually been applied to men.



As a private organization, the Boy Scouts has the legal right to exclude both gays and lesbians from membership and leadership. That right was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2000, but that has not ended the controversy. Since that decision, the Boy Scouts have paid dearly for the policy, as some cities and other governments and institutions have severed support and relationships with the BSA and its local programs.

Now, the controversy is focused on Tyrrell, whose reinstatement is now demanded by gay rights organizations and some of the parents of the boys involved in the Bridgeport, Ohio troop. At least some of those parents knew that Tyrrell was a lesbian, while others did not. In any event, she has become the center of a national debate.

The Boy Scouts of America has the right to establish policies consistent with its convictions. Indeed, the group's policy of excluding homosexuals from leadership would seem to be necessary and prudent. A consideration of recent national scandals should make that point sufficiently clear.

No one is charging Jennifer Tyrrell with any improper action or motivation in this case, but the Scouts applied their policy and the controversy is now incredibly revealing.

One parent said this: "I teach my children to judge people on their actions . . . whether you agree with their lifestyle or not."

The only way to make sense of this is to see that this parent is trying to separate "actions" from "lifestyle" as if the lifestyle should be free from moral scrutiny. Lifestyles involve actions, but those are now to be considered beyond moral judgment.

Oddly enough, this rather bizarre form of thinking is indicative of a larger cultural pattern. Sexual relationships are off-limits for moral judgment. What is left is a far smaller sector of moral investigation. Once sexual behavior is removed from moral scrutiny, what will be declared off-limits next?

As one observer recently noted, our society is exchanging moral concern about sex for moral concern about diet. We are not sure that moral judgments should be made when it comes to sexual behaviors, but when it comes to free range chickens and excess carbohydrates, the moral categories kick in.

The Boy Scouts of America is a venerable and noble organization, and one that deserves our support. Given the kind of opposition it now faces, that support will be needed.

John Seewer, "[Lesbian Scout Leader Ousted in Ohio: Parents Upset](#)," *The Seattle Times* (Associated Press), Thursday, April 26, 2012.

