
Why Homeschooled Girls are Feminism's Worst Nightmare

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My dual role as a professor of English and of honors at a Christian university has afforded me the great and greatly-cherished opportunity to teach and mentor scores of homeschooled girls. The thirty years I have spent in the halls of academia have forced me, often against my will, to be exposed to the theories, writings, and agendas of feminism. After many years of reflection, I have come to believe that the former poses the greatest single threat to and antidote for the latter.

Before I explain why, let me define what I mean by feminism. Though many today think that feminism means nothing more than “equal pay for equal work,” the feminism that is taught in our schools and universities has little to do with the rules of fair play in the workplace. Academic feminism rests on the fiercely-held belief that there are no essential differences between the sexes.

Whether or not such feminists accept the Bible as the Word of God, they deny that God made us male and female. He may have made us male and female biologically, but whatever the nature of our bodies, our souls are androgynous. It is society, not the Creator, that “invented” masculinity and femininity.

So strong is this belief, that feminists have replaced the word “sex” with “gender.” Whereas the first connotes an essential link between body and soul, the second points to something that is not inherent in our makeup but constructed by external forces. Masculinity and femininity do not define God-created (or even nature-created)

natures that we are born with but man-made, social-political-economic constructs.

Although it can be argued that this distinction between sex and gender has advanced (somewhat) the cause of equal pay for equal work, it has had a deleterious effect on the integrity, nobility, and beauty of God-given femininity. Sexism insists that men and women are different, but then treats femininity as a lesser and less important thing than masculinity. Feminism says that men and women are the same, but then systematically privileges masculine initiative, reason, logic, analysis, compartmentalization, and competition over feminine response, emotion, intuition, synthesis, holism, and nurture.

A century ago, G. K. Chesterton prophetically defined the feminist as someone “who dislikes the chief feminine characteristics.” Today, many feminists not only dislike femininity; they dismiss it as a bourgeois illusion. Increasingly since the 1960's, true femininity has been on the run. Traditional college girls who value their own femininity have either had to hide their God-given nature or apologize for their feminine values, perspectives, and choices.

Not so the Christian homeschooled girl.

I have become famous (or infamous) at my university for my ability to spot immediately a homeschooled girl, at least the kind of homeschooled girl who majors in the Humanities (English, Writing, History, Philosophy, Christianity, Art, Music) or who joins an Honors college devoted to a classical Christian curriculum. What is my method for

spotting such literary homeschooled girls? If when I speak to a freshman girl I feel that I am speaking (literally) to a character out of a Jane Austen novel, then I know that she was homeschooled. (To date, my success rate is about 85%).

On the surface, the link between the homeschooled girl and Elizabeth Bennet is part educational and part linguistic. Most homeschooled girls—henceforth, I will be focusing on the literary type—spend a great deal of their time reading great books, especially eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. They therefore possess a much higher level of diction and understand the finer rules of etiquette. They value good conversation and are able to participate in it without succumbing to arrogance or false modesty.

But the link goes far deeper than that. The Jane Austen connection only rests partly on the homeschooler's ability to speak with eloquence and wit and to conduct herself with grace and charm. She resembles Elizabeth Bennet because she shares with all of Austen's heroines a firm and rooted sense of herself as a female member of the human race.

What I have found in my homeschooled students is what one used to find frequently in Catholic girls who attended parochial school. Such girls do not consider their femininity a limitation to be overcome or a weakness to be hidden, but something special and unique that must be nurtured and developed. The properly Catholic-educated girl of the past, like the homeschooled girl of today, is less likely than her peers to engage in pre-marital sex: not because she thinks sex is dirty or men are pigs, but because she views her own sexuality as a gift to be treasured by her and by her future husband.

Here are some of the other admirable qualities I have encountered in three-quarters of the five dozen Christian homeschooled girls I have had the privilege to teach over the last fifteen years and the five score whom I have met, briefly but memorably, through the speeches I have given for churches, universities, classical Christian academies, and worldview camps. Before listing them, however, let me make clear that I have encountered many of these qualities in girls who attended public or

private schools but whose parents worked hard to instill the below virtues in their daughters. Nevertheless, the consistency that I have observed among Christian homeschooled girls has been remarkable.

- They possess a razor-sharp wit with which they can cut pretentious people (especially males) down to size, but they rarely use this skill, and only when they are sorely provoked.

- They know what they believe and have a firm knowledge of the Bible, but they (unlike my biblically-literate male students) don't engage in forensic debates over minor theological points of controversy; they will, however, step in if the boys get too contentious or triumphalist.

- They have wonderfully synthetic and creative minds that make connections across disciplines and that open up new perspectives on old books; they don't do this in an abstract, pedantic, "scholarly" way, but in a warm and personal way.

- They respect their professors, but they speak to them on a level of equality; indeed, they will often gently set their male professors straight, not the way that a dean sets a faculty member straight, but the way a savvy wife sets her husband straight if he is starting to sound bombastic.

- Like the aristocratic ladies of the Old South, they are gifted in the arts; almost all of them can sing, and most play instruments and draw.

- They have not bought into the lies of our modern consumerist state; that is to say, they do not judge their value and worth on the basis of power, wealth, or job status.

- They proudly identify themselves as daughters, sisters, and granddaughters, and aspire to be identified as wives, mothers, and grandmothers—a self-identification that enhances, rather than diminishes, their sense of themselves.

- They desire to be helpmeets in the full biblical sense and to have their husbands trust in them and call them blessed; they desire as well to be mothers who will raise up godly children.

- Though not all of them plan to be stay-at-home moms, they all make it clear that if they have children, they will put them first.

The glorious and unashamed femininity that radiates from my homeschooled students is

a beautiful thing that at times brings me close to tears. These young women will give all they have to nurture the children God puts in their care and to make their home a humane and creative place where faith, hope, and love can thrive and bear fruit. And they desire to do this, not because they do not think they can contribute to the business world, but because they consider motherhood a high and noble calling.

To achieve such a calling, the modern woman must not only resist the voice of feminism but the voice of an excessively-male, ultra-materialistic society that only values things which can be calculated in monetary terms. I am convinced the housing crisis that kicked off the recession would not have happened if Americans had treated their houses as true homes rather than business investments. Much of the brokenness in our cities and schools could have been avoided had we valued the traditional family as the central building block of society and the ultimate source of personal and civic identity. But such things cannot happen as long as the true feminine voice is squelched.

I've been challenged by feminist students and colleagues, but never in a deep and lasting way. Their challenge is political or ideological, and, as such, is ultimately superficial. But those wise and witty homeschooling girls! They challenge me where it counts, by taking to task my masculine view of the world.

Feminists, whose view of the world is far more masculine than my own, do not like homeschooled girls, for such girls explode all the vicious and untrue stereotypes that feminists have been propagating for the last several decades. Feminism would have us believe that the stay-at-home mom is a timid doormat lacking in will and self-esteem, and that the conservative female student who champions femininity does so because she has been cowed into submission by male chauvinists. Homeschooled girls give the lie to these stereotypes.

They embrace their femininity as a positive and dynamic force that has the power to shape the world around them in a life-giving, soul-enhancing way. And they bravely defend their feminine

vision against all misogynists (whether sexists or feminists) who would demean it. Indeed, they have the wit and discernment to perceive that the feminist is finally a greater threat than the male chauvinist: for whereas the chauvinist demeans femininity, the feminist dismisses it altogether as a social construct that has no essential grounding in our God-created soul.

The homeschooled girls I have taught know who they are, both as female creatures made in the image of God and potential creators and nurturers of new human lives. And, because they know who they are, their self-esteem is both high and firmly rooted. If truth be told, it is more often the successful feminist than the homeschooled girl who struggles to hold on to a sense of herself that is daily eaten away by a faceless, androgynous, consumerist society.

As I indicated above, homeschooled girls usually refrain from engaging in direct debates meant to crush their opponent's views (they are too well-mannered for that), but they will speak up when they spy pretension and pomposity—even as Elizabeth Bennet gleefully punches holes in the pride of Mr. Darcy. They do not suffer fools gladly, especially when they are feminists who snidely degrade the very things they hold sacred. They will also, to my great delight, defend the value of a liberal-arts education over against a vocational school that privileges job training over the development of character.

Homeschooled girls are feminism's worst nightmare because they know that men and women are different, and they celebrate that difference. They don't hide their femininity under a bushel, but put it out in public for all to see. They respect and honor their male counterparts, but they will not allow their feminine voice and perspective to be marginalized.

I said earlier that they are like Jane Austen characters, but they are also like Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*. They have the brains and the skill to don the robes of the lawyer, but their motivation for doing so is not to win a debate or to air their bitterness in public or to settle old scores. It is, rather, to defend those they love. In an age that is in great need of the *true* feminine voice—not one

marred and twisted by the politics of identity and victimization—homeschooled girls are, to borrow a line from Portia, like “the gentle rain from heaven.”

The modern democracies of Europe and America have championed a view of the individual that is radically autonomous, that refuses to define itself by social, religious, or familial categories. Feminists have perpetuated and enflamed this intensely masculine view of the individual. Homeschooled girls, in their enthusiastic willingness to define themselves in terms of family and community, offer a way back to a more biblically-based and civilization-sustaining view of the individual.