

Anonymous

Professor McCarthy

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Homeschoolers: We Aren't What You Think

We're socially awkward. We're smarter. Our parents are too involved. We can't possibly be well-educated. Many stereotypes about homeschoolers are passed around by people who aren't familiar with how homeschooling families operate. These stereotypes apply to a few homeschoolers, but every homeschooling family functions in a unique way. Traditionally educated individuals generally don't know very many homeschoolers, which makes it difficult to understand the more obscure parts of how homeschooling works. These stereotypes might also be spread by very vocal homeschoolers who don't necessarily represent the majority of homeschooling families. A great deal of people assume that we're sheltered, ultra-religious, unadjusted, and isolated; and while it's easy to see how these stereotypes could have started, they aren't usually entirely true. Each homeschooler has a unique circumstance and it's unfair to apply these characteristics to every person who is homeschooled.

Many assume that homeschoolers stay home all day and don't see anybody other than their families. Naturally, this leads to the notion that most homeschoolers are socially inept and insufferably awkward. It's easy to see how this misconception could have started. After all, if you socialize every day by going to school, how do kids and teens who don't go to school socialize? Much of the time the answer is still school. Many of my strongest friendships have been from study groups I've taken part in. When I was thirteen, a group of parents, which

included my mother and a few other homeschooling parents, created a group where the goal was to study a subject together and then take the CLEP (College Level Examination Program) test for that subject to earn college credits during high school. Even though we don't meet to study together anymore, the people that I met and studied with in this group are still some of my closest friends.

Another school-related way that homeschoolers can socialize is co-ops. Co-ops are a popular resource for homeschoolers because they keep many of the advantages of homeschooling while regaining some benefits of going to a public or private school. These benefits include access to classes that parents might feel unqualified to teach and the chance for students to socialize. I've never personally taken part in a co-op, but I have numerous friends who talk about the people they've met at their co-op often. Although it's deeply stereotypical, many homeschoolers also socialize through Church. Most of my core friend group is comprised of other homeschoolers who I met at Church or through Church events, such as a monthly Christian youth gathering that I regularly attend and my youth group. I've also met many people through mutual friends. Quite a few of my friends are involved in theater groups so they are connected to a large community of other theater kids. I've been acquainted with many people from these theater groups at parties and through other events. This is how I met my friend Matthew. One of my Church friends met Matthew when they were part of a theater production together and invited him to go on a mission trip that a group from my Church was going on. I also went on this mission trip and ended up spending two weeks in Costa Rica with Matthew. Getting to know him has impacted my life in many ways and I'm truly glad that he's part of my friend group now. It's hard to say that all homeschoolers are starved for socialization. Of course, some homeschoolers might be isolated, but most are very social and have many places where

they meet their peers—whether it's at Church, a co-op, a theater group, a sports group, or anywhere else.

A considerable amount of people also seem to think we have an indecent amount of free time on our hands. Sometimes it seems like these people assume that homeschoolers spend most of their days wandering through the forest on their twenty-acre property or reading in their living rooms. Despite hypothesizing that homeschoolers don't have a social life to keep them busy, we still get asked, "Do homeschoolers even do any homework?" This is a recurring question that I've been asked many times, usually by kids and teenagers who don't know many (or any) homeschoolers. The idea that homeschoolers ubiquitously don't do any homework may be true for certain homeschooling families, but certainly not for all. Admittedly, before I started PSEO (Post Secondary Enrollment Options), a program that allows students to take college classes while they're still in high school, I would wake up around noon on plenty of school days; however, this doesn't mean that I didn't do any homework. The hours of work that I put in were usually just later than most other students—even other homeschoolers. A great advantage of homeschooling is the ability to choose the system that works best for your situation. While some homeschoolers do the minimum amount of work necessary to graduate from high school, others far surpass what's required of them by earning college credits while they're still in high school.

In the aforementioned study group, I managed to earn over forty college credits through CLEP and DSST (DANTES Subject Standardized Tests); programs that allow you to take proctored exams at a college and gain college credits for the classes. Taking tests like these has been a great asset to me because I've been rewarded with college credits for the work that I put into studying each subject. Another example of how homeschoolers often exceed the minimum requirements for education is PSEO, which I'm currently enrolled in. Many of my friends and

peers have also chosen to use PSEO to start earning their college degrees while they finish high school. Even though we don't all necessarily go to a school to learn, homeschoolers are still required to learn all the major subjects; and while some *may* choose a relaxed, gentle pace to learn these subjects, work must still be completed to finish these classes. Long story short: yes, homeschoolers do more schoolwork than just Sunday School.

Undoubtedly, some homeschoolers do absolutely spend hours a week on Sunday school and Bible study, but the stereotype of the ultra-religious homeschooler isn't completely factual. In reality, not all homeschoolers live like they just hopped off the Mayflower in the 1600s. Not all homeschoolers are necessarily Christians, either. A few years ago, my mom saw a post on a Facebook homeschooling page that was requesting recommendations for non-religious math textbooks. There are many reasons to homeschool other than being a Christian who's dissatisfied with the teachings of the public school. Parents may choose to homeschool their kids because their child doesn't do well with the other kids, or maybe they're forced to move a lot for work. A famous example of homeschooling for reasons outside of religion is Thomas Edison. Edison was supposedly removed from his school because he wasn't smart enough to be taught there. His mother decided that she would teach him at home instead. My mom decided to homeschool my brother and me solely because she wasn't ready to send us to a public school for over six hours a day. However, the majority of homeschoolers happen to be Christians. Many, if not all, of my homeschooled friends are Christians. Nevertheless, nobody in my friend group fits the mold of the old-fashioned, ultra-religious, Christian homeschooler.

A stereotype that comes as a package deal with the religious homeschooler is that we grow up to be unadjusted to modern society. Many homeschooling parents are accused of sheltering their children and being "helicopter parents;" Parents who are overprotective of their

children and constantly “hover” over them to keep them sheltered. People who give such criticisms usually claim that keeping your children home from school will lead to them being unadjusted to contemporary culture which, in turn, gives them a major disadvantage after graduating. A factor that plays into this is that homeschoolers are notorious for being given smartphones and other devices much later than their traditionally educated peers. This is yet another aspect of homeschooling that varies broadly. I got my first phone when I was around eleven years old. Currently, I spend far too much time on Instagram, which has possibly aided my knowledge of modern culture. Due to this, I’ve never felt culture shock when interacting with public schoolers. However, some of my friends didn’t get phones or social media until much later in their lives. In my experience, these teens rarely have issues understanding what’s happening in our society or culture. While some homeschoolers might not have a deep knowledge of niche topics, memes, and trends, these things aren’t imperative to a young adult's survival or success in the world. Homeschoolers typically learn essential life skills and important news and trends from their parents or the people that they hang out with.

In many ways, homeschoolers and public schoolers are different from each other. The way we do our schoolwork and interact with people is often different. Many stereotypes about homeschoolers have some aspects of truth to them, but most of the time, they’re very exaggerated and they might be completely wrong for some homeschoolers. For example, it is a common assumption that every homeschooler spends most of their time at home and rarely talks to anyone aside from their family. It’s easy to presume things like this if you don’t know about common ways that homeschoolers socialize such as co-ops, sports groups, and other gatherings. While some homeschoolers can be isolated, many homeschooled kids and teens have a lot of ways to meet people their age. Although this is only one example, other blanket statements that

are frequently made about homeschoolers can be dispelled for similar reasons. I think that the benefits of homeschooling (a flexible schedule, guiding the focus of your education, tight-knit friend groups) are all worth it, which is why, if I have kids, I plan to homeschool them. Being homeschooled has given me many opportunities, whether socially or in regard to my education. We might be missing many experiences that we would have gotten at a public school, but we get many other experiences that are equally valuable. So, whatever comes to mind when you think of a homeschooler is probably wrong. Some of us might be socially awkward, abnormally intelligent, sheltered, or none of these things at all. Every homeschooler's situation is unique and can't be fit inside of a box.