

The Feminist Homeschooler

Note: The point of this session is not to debate the validity of feminism, but to allow parents who consider themselves feminists to tackle the tough issues we face as homeschoolers.

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Where I come from

- ⊗ Feminism seemed obvious to me:
gender shouldn't matter
- ⊗ My image of homeschooling moms:
the subservient and the hippie
- ⊗ The homeschooling moms I met:
self-confident, skillful, open, supportive
- ⊗ Questioning my assumptions:
Is homeschooling actually a feminist act?

What is feminism?

First Wave

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- ⊗ women's suffrage
- ⊗ right to be educated
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Second Wave

60s to 80s

- ⊗ cultural and political inequality
- ⊗ workplace discrimination
- ⊗ higher education
- ⊗ control of bodies/
reproduction

What is feminism?

Third Wave

90s to ?

- ⊗ response to backlash against second wave initiatives
- ⊗ response to socially conservative politics
- ⊗ sexual politics/gender issues
- ⊗ increased participation of marginalized women

How does feminism clash and/or mesh with homeschooling?

Clash:

- ⊗ The primary homeschooling parent is almost always a woman
- ⊗ The primary homeschooling parent makes little or no income
- ⊗ Homeschooling happens at home
- ⊗ The other parent usually works outside the home

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Clash:

This leads to some questions:

- ⊗ Why is the primary homeschooling parent usually the wife?
- ⊗ How does this affect our relationships in the home?
- ⊗ How do families have to redefine the “relative worth” of making money and homemaking and home educating?
- ⊗ How are decisions made in modern homeschooling families?

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Mesh: Homeschooling is the ultimate rejection of societal norms

- ⊗ Our children are not exposed to unquestioned gender assumptions
- ⊗ Unusual children are not pressured to conform
- ⊗ We can tailor education to include a feminist perspective
- ⊗ Homeschooled kids generally have a more solid sense of self when they leave home

**How can we homeschool to
raise feminist kids?**

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- ⊗ “Walk the walk”: Make sure that our kids see us making positive choices for ourselves as well as other family members
- ⊗ Respect for our roles as mother and educator
- ⊗ Offer girls every opportunity to be themselves – shun popular entertainment that enforces female stereotypes
- ⊗ Expect our boys to be feminists as well – help them see when “boy culture” diminishes the roles of girls
- ⊗ Teach all kids about the history of women – make sure to question them when something we read or watch doesn’t mention the role of women in the events portrayed
- ⊗ Conscious inclusion of feminist role models

**What does a feminist
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What does a feminist homeschooling mom need?

- ⊗ “A room of her own” (Woolf)—some physical space that she has control over
- ⊗ Her own interests/pursuits outside of homeschooling
- ⊗ Acknowledgement that her unpaid work is work—providing a custom-tailored education to her children
- ⊗ Respect from her children and spouse

Conclusion:

The feminist homeschooler is
not a contradiction.

Homeschooling can be a
feminist act.

Questions to ponder

- ⊗ Do you consider yourself a feminist?
- ⊗ Would you like your kids to think of themselves as feminists?
- ⊗ What do you do to raise your girls with a healthy self-image?
- ⊗ What do you do to raise your boys to respect women?
- ⊗ Do you ever feel embarrassed to admit that you homeschool?
- ⊗ Do you fear that your kids will think that staying home is the “natural” role for women?

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