

ACCS Distinctive Schools Series

Dating, Sex-segregated Classes, Manners, the Ethos of Ladies and Gentlemen, and Immoral Behavior.

Think of the phrase toxic masculinity. It is an offense against manhood to talk so. You can have bad men, as you can have bad women, but manliness is a virtue, as is womanliness, nor is there anything toxic at all about either. —Anthony Esolen

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving

⁸...Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. — Ephesians 5

¹When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. ²He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them “Mankind” when they were created. —Genesis 5

Choices are the hinges of destiny.— Pythagoras

Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance.— C.S. Lewis

St. Paul in Ephesians 5:1 gives the general marching orders for Christian households and then spends chapters 5 and 6 particularizing the command to distinct groups, describing what imitating God looks like for husbands,

wives, and children. Whether the imitator of God is a man or a woman, a father or a son, appears to be of great importance in Paul’s theology of imitation. In chapter 5, he tells wives to submit to their husbands (5:23) and husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church (5:25). He tells the children to obey their parents (6:1) and the fathers to raise their children in the *paideia* of the Lord (6:4).

Men and women, boys and girls, husbands and wives — all are called to imitate God, but each in a different manner appropriate to their creation and role. Contrary to worldly assertions, these differences are not damaging but part of God’s good design in being male and female (Gen. 5:2). Thus, Paul’s call for all believers to imitate God does not remove the particularities of our respective distinctions. This understanding is essential for classical Christian schools who partner with Christian families. If our schools are to meaningfully imitate the Lord and raise children in a substantively Christian *paideia* (Eph. 6:4), then we must rejoice in God’s good design and embrace the masculine and feminine characteristics of our students.

Paideia, which is more expansive than mere schooling, refers to the all-encompassing formation, or enculturation, of the child while they dwell under the roof of their

parents and walk the halls of our schools. If one looks to the medieval schools from which we are patterned, the difference in how the sexes are addressed is the most countercultural of all classical Christian endeavors. Of course, we ought not return to school for boys, little or nothing for girls, and a marrying age of 14. But we should seek to obey the scriptures—in spirit and in truth. Today, many Christian communities ignore the plain teaching of scripture in favor of more modern sensibilities in the arena of sex and family.

Likely, this is because sex and family have been the most altered by modernity where all differences are held to be damaging, and all inequalities, iniquities. Tragically, this modern ethic has so influenced the church that many take no discernible position on many sexual issues—except don't have sex before marriage, don't get an abortion. Oh, and don't get a divorce. Otherwise, the church often struggles to align biblically and advance the truth of the complimentary relationships among the sexes. No surprise then that we fail to understand how to treat sexual misconduct. We have been so busy apologizing for “toxic masculinity” we have lost sight of true benefits and beauty of healthy “boyness” and “girlness,” manhood and womanhood. Schools have forgotten its true value in the formation of a healthy Christian *paideia*.

An Ethos of Complimentary Creation, not “Equality”

Equality has been elevated to being a “saintly” virtue by people who don't believe in saints. Ignored is the reality that few of us are equally talented, gifted, sized, or intelligent. God claims His people as a “body” with parts suited to different purposes. Far from a picture of equality, this is a picture of purpose where masculinity and femininity are honored in their proper complementary places within the Christian community. Within the school, boys hold doors open for girls and allow girls to sit first at lunch as a picture of this purpose. Boys use their power for service as a parable of Christ using His power to purchase the church through His atoning sacrifice.

Our schools are marked by traditional—some say, old fashioned—manners. Boys are trained to treat girls as ‘special’ or ‘people of honor,’ while girls are trained to treat

boys with respect and deference. Such different ways of treating each other are generally hated by the world. In school, even if we have some second-order ecclesiological differences on this issue, our communities should be places of first order theological unity on the goodness of God's design in male and female. We need not cow-tow to cultural revolutionaries nor apologize for what God has declared good and for our joy.

Sex-Segregated Classes

One opportunity to recognize the way boys and girls live and learn is to separate the sexes in the middle grades. While not common, it has much to offer. Traditionally called the ‘diamond model’ in European education, it seeks to provide the best of both single-sex education and co-education by integrating boys and girls in the upper and lower grades while separating them during their adolescent years. This is really only feasible for schools with sufficient enrollment. One veteran administrator writes,

We're in our sixth year of having gender-segregated classes for 7th and 8th grades. In 7th, everything but orchestra and choir are by gender. In 8th grade, a couple math and Latin classes end up also gender-mixed, depending on academic needs. It has generally been a ‘win’ for us in the making of school culture. We try for the boys to largely have men teaching them, and women for the girls. It's not 100%, but it allows the teachers to speak into their lives in more specifically meaningful ways. The girls probably benefit more than the boys, as they tend to treasure these times of “just the girls.” The boys' lack of self-control gets exposed more clearly when girls are not present to be used as behavioral cushions in the classroom. We can, then, address it more directly. Our teachers have developed a handful of assignments and projects that are tailored to one gender. It's not a magic pill, but we believe that we see good fruit from this structure.”

Opponents of single-sex education typically consider it a poor preparation for the “real world” when half of the human population is excluded—they say, “life is co-ed so the class should be also.” They might be surprised to hear that the very goal of the Christian *paideia* is not to replicate

the real world but to challenge it and create a “true world.” The formative adolescent years can be times of great upheaval and meaningful identity development. While the diamond model might not be the answer for every school, administrators should seek ways to work with the grain of the students’ masculine and feminine characteristics in age-appropriate ways.

Dating and Immoral Behavior

It’s been called “Recreational Dating” or “Romantic love,” and a number of other things. Without a blush of embarrassment at its own illogicality, our modern culture asserts that a teen cannot sign a contract or be held accountable for their legal actions, but they can choose a life-time mate—or their own gender, but that is a topic for another day! At very least, they can start ‘trying them out.’ This process between two teens—with parents influencing the game, if at all, only from the sidelines—is regarded by most as simply a normal part of growing up. Thus, inevitably, our schools become a swirl of expectations and relationships. How ought we handle this pressure?

First, let’s consider some foundational principles so as not to collapse under weight of the cultural tower of Babel.

- As a school, we operate under parental authority. We do not have the prerogative of controlling students outside school hours or events.
- As stewards of a Christian community, we must take measures to protect the community ethos, and inspire an attitude that grows toward the ideals of Christ-likeness.
- Classical Christian Education is concerned with the cultivation of virtue and the Christian *paideia*. We use formative tools like school culture, virtuous expectations, and shared values to fulfill our mission.

Given these principles, most classical Christian schools arrive at a policy similar to the following regarding ‘relationships’:

We encourage students to avoid forming exclusive relationships (boyfriend/girlfriend). Should these relationships arise under parental authority, the student behavior at school and school events must

not show evidence of the relationship. If our staff or community can see that something is ‘going on’, the involved students will be asked to refrain, or, if repeatedly observed, to break off the relationship.

This type of policy places schools in a difficult, but necessary situation. Parents often support dating, or at least are prepared to tolerate it. Schools see the frequent negative consequences of jealousy, exclusion of friends, and hurts in the hallways, on the playgrounds, and at events. To address this, many classical Christian schools follow a few specific practices and monitor them diligently:

- Dances or other events where dates can be brought are either not held or careful rules are set. Some schools assign escorts. Dance partner rules can involve dance cards, or limiting the number of dances with one person.
- Typically they hold ‘protocol’ instead of ‘prom’ focusing the night on a community of formal ceremony without dating. Escorts are normally assigned and may even switch 2 or 3 times during the evening.
- Schools often have simple rules about boys and girls not being isolated in the building. For example, studying 1 on 1 in a remote area of the library.
- Parent training on the problems of taking dating lightly and encouraging them toward what has been called a ‘courtship’ model. Really, it is dating under closer parental supervision only when marriage is the intended and likely result. For most families, this takes high-schoolers out of the game.
- Schools work hard to create an atmosphere and ethos that dating and sex are for the joy of family-creation, not individual fulfillment.

Successful schools create a joyful student environment that is almost ‘sibbling-like,’ where students are free from the emotional pressure, drama, and expectations of the dating culture dominant in other types of schools. Students enjoy each other and frequently socialize outside of school, and school events are fun for everyone. Should some students choose to enter into exclusive relationships, they are often seen by their peers as

violating community expectations. These ‘couples’, if they are visible, are seen like someone wearing jeans to a formal ceremony—it’s not a grave sin, but it’s definitely not cool.

Pregnancy

Schools that successfully develop a culture described above will obviously have less dating, and, reason would dictate, fewer encounters resulting in pregnancy. In our experience, pregnancies in classical Christian schools are rare, but what should a school do if such a situation arises?

Much publicity has come to Christian schools who take action against girls who fall pregnant. We recommend that schools carefully set forth biblical principles that drive a policy. This policy must be published ahead of time so it does not appear capricious or arbitrary when tough conversations must be had and difficult decisions made.

It is easier to enforce a published policy that parents have already agreed to, than make it up as you go.

Principles, rightly ordered:

- As individuals, and a community, we are to love God and his way.
- We are to be loving and forgiving to our neighbors.
- Christian communities, says Paul, are to take care not to celebrate that which we should be mourning (Corinthians 5).

What our Christian communities uphold and celebrate shapes us. Decisions have institutional as well as personal consequences. The classical and Christian idea of ‘rightly ordered’ goods comes into play. A very difficult situation can be made more clear when we consider one good against another, and, by evaluating false goods.

Consider this scenario: A girl who is ashamed and broken by a life-changing pregnancy should feel and receive the love and mercy of her Christian community. Compound the turmoil surrounding the pregnancy with our society’s ‘simple’ solution—abortion—and the girl under pressure from her parents, boyfriend, or even peers,

is sorely tempted to take what she is assured is the easy way out. Society and the media insists that ‘loving’ her equates to accepting and affirming any choice she makes. The result can be a myopic focus on the individual girl at the expense of our school ethos and culture.

On the other hand, we may desire to affirm the bravery of a young woman who chooses to keep the baby. But, if we hold her up in affirmation without consequence, we send a message to the community—one that lessens the consequence of sin. One veteran administrator shared,

“We had a girl who got pregnant years ago during her Junior year. We required her to withdraw from the school in order to be able to devote herself to being a mother and because we thought it wrong to have a pregnant/unmarried student walking around among our younger students. We told her that after she gave birth, she’d be welcomed back to school, because she really had done a great job (assisted by the local church where she attended youth group) in repenting, expressing remorse not for being pregnant, but sexually immoral. Years later, I believe she is walking with the Lord. Key to all this were her classmates’ reactions: they didn’t shun her and walked with her the whole time. We did catch some pushback for requiring her to withdraw, but we would do the same thing all over again.”

Given the real changes in our culture and the rise of aggressive litigation aimed at Christian churches and schools, the ACCS recommends that schools become ministry alliance members of Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF). More information is to be found at <https://mrc.classicalchristian.org/alliance-defending-freedom>.