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What About Socialization?

by Brian D. Ray, Ph.D.

Context

Veteran homeschool parents have heard it a dozen, if not a hundred, times: “What about socialization?” Many who are unfamiliar with home-based education often conjure up imaginary representations of the life of a homeschooled child. Maybe he is tethered in the home’s fenced back yard and will never be released from his Mommy’s apron strings until the age of 27. Or, maybe she is not allowed to watch three hours of television every day and therefore will never be able to “relate” to “the Other.”¹

Based on the author’s research and experience and others’ research, three hypotheses come to mind:

1. People ask, “What about socialization?” because they are unaware captives of their own and their (adult or otherwise) peers’ experience. That is to say, if they and the preceding five generations had not been a part of same-age peer institutional schooling for 13 to 17 years of their lives, they would never ask the question about those who do not share their institutionalized history.
2. Most people think that the same-age peer segregation of children and teenagers is necessary for development into being a successful adult, even though they probably cannot define “successful adult” and they can present no research to substantiate their belief.
3. Those asking the socialization question of homeschooling have no authentic understanding of parent-led home-based education.

¹ Ray, Brian D. (2008, May 30). Who’s afraid of “the Other”? How about mixing it up? *The Educible Review*, No. 7.

Several researchers, however, have addressed the “socialization” question regarding home-based education. For example, professor Scott White of Belhaven College in Mississippi and his colleagues Williford, Brower, Collins, Merry, and Washington endeavored to compare the adjustment difficulties of homeschooled versus conventionally schooled students attending a liberal arts Christian college.² The authors observed that advocates of institutional schooling “... might suggest that due to the greater prior exposure to peer culture and traditional education, that traditionally schooled college students would experience fewer problems adjusting to college. Advocates of home schooling might suggest that due to the warm, stable and accepting environment of most home school homes, the home schooled students might possess greater maturity and resilience and thus have fewer problems adjusting to college” (p. 3).

Findings

White and the others engaged first-time freshmen college students and used two samples (previously homeschooled and previously conventionally schooled students from both private and public high schools, matched for age, race, gender, and having been raised in a Christian home. They were also fairly similar in terms of their college-bound ACT and SAT test scores.

A demographics sheet and the College Adjustment Scales (CAS) were administered to the students. The CAS is “... designed to identify and evaluate ‘the experience and expression of adjustment problems in college students throughout the college years’” (p. 3). The CAS subscales are: anxiety (AN), depression (DP), suicidal ideation (SI), substance abuse (SA), self-esteem problems (SE), interpersonal problems (IP), family problems (FP), academic problems (AP) and career problems (CP).

The researchers presented the results of statistical tests comparing the two groups on each subscale of the CAS. There was a significant difference on the AN (anxiety) subscale; home-educated students were found to be significantly less anxious than traditionally schooled students. All other t-scores were found to be insignificant. However, the authors pointed out, the level of significance was narrowly missed before rounding the statistic on the FP (family problems) scale.

Also, the first semester GPAs for each group were examined because academic performance is one measure of adjustment to college life. The homeschooled student average GPA was 3.52 (range of 1.96 to 4.0 on a 4 point scale) and the mean of conventionally schooled students was 3.16 (range of 1.08 to 3.93).

Conclusions and Cautions

White and his colleagues concluded the following:

As the results indicate, home schooled students reported significantly fewer anxiety symptoms than a matched sample of traditionally schooled students. The items on this subscale address general statements of anxiety as opposed to specific anxieties regarding academics. Close examination of the standard deviations between the two

² White, Scott, Williford, Elizabeth, Brower, John, Collins, Terance, Merry, Roman, & Washington, Maryam. (2007). Emotional, social and academic adjustment to college: A comparison between Christian home schooled and traditionally schooled college freshmen. *Home School Researcher*, 17(4), 1-7.

groups also reveals that home schooled students appear to have greater homogeneity than traditionally schooled students related to their reported problems and symptoms measured by the anxiety (AN) and depression (DP) subscales. An overall trend was revealed in the home schooled sample reporting fewer problems or symptoms across all of the 9 CAS scales. In fact, twice as many traditionally schooled students would have been identified by a university counseling service, using the test developers' cut-off scores, to assess for problems that might require counseling or other interventions. (p. 5)

The research addressed several salient points in their discussion. Inclusion of two will suffice here. First, they proffered that their study "... does not support the hypothesis that home schooled students will have more severe emotional or social difficulties related to the unique social adjustments that they experience entering college life" (p. 5).

Furthermore, the researchers compared the means of the homeschooled sample with the standardized sample obtained by the test developers.³ They reported: "However, it is noteworthy that the home schooled group means were lower than the national means across all scales indicating fewer reported problems (Table 1). Therefore, there is some supporting evidence to suggest that home schooled students are adjusting to college life at least as well as the general population of college students" (p. 5).

Finally, White and his colleagues noted the following: "Despite the fact that home schooled students have additional adjustments (e.g., social relationships, peer pressure, classroom structure, etc.) to higher education as compared to traditionally schooled freshmen ..., they appear to be able to adjust as well or better than traditionally schooled freshmen to collegiate life at a Christian college as measured by these various scales of college adjustment" (p. 5-6).

Although a few studies (out of dozens now) on the social, emotional, and psychological development of home-educated students have found the home educated to be somewhat relatively weaker than institutional school students on a few measures or categories, the weight of research findings firmly suggests that the home educated are doing very well, socially. White and his colleagues' research buttress the research-based indication that there is no reason to worry as the person behind the "What about socialization?" so often implicitly does. In fact, research findings to date should motivate more people to ask, "Why don't more parents homeschool their children?"

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³ White et al. did, however, warn their readers as follows: "One must be cautious interpreting a comparison between such divergent samples, therefore, no statistical comparisons were conducted" (p. 5).