

Navigating Gender, Feminism and Masculinity in Faith and Culture

Featuring Dr. Christina Hoff Sommers

March 18, 2026

TRANSCRIPT

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Welcome everyone to Cornerstone University's Wisdom and Influence podcast. Thank you for joining us and listening. It is my pleasure to have one of our university's distinguished panelists from a recent Wisdom Conversations. She's a senior fellow emeritus at the American Enterprise Institute, a nationally recognized scholar on feminism, gender, and free expression.

A former professor of philosophy, author of some wonderful books, which I highly recommend: *The War Against Boys*, *Who Stole Feminism*, *Freedom Feminism*. She also hosts the *Factual Feminist* blog, and just an incredible scholar. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Christina Hoff Sommers. Christina, it's great to have you on the podcast.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Oh, lovely to be here.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And thank you for being at our Wisdom Conversations, and your contributions. I've heard — we were there together obviously, and just some wonderful feedback. So just thank you for being a part of the work we're doing here at Cornerstone University.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Oh, I greatly enjoyed that panel, and was very inspired by your students and just everything you're doing there. With so much that's amiss in universities, Cornerstone has just set the right tone and the right note.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Hmm. Well, thank you. I've all the admiration.

Christina Hoff Sommers: So much admiration.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, thank you. Thank you for being a part of it. Thank you for coming back, and we'll have you back in other ways, I think. But this Wisdom and Influence podcast, it's just great to have you.

And there's so much to talk about in our world today. I have to tell you that I thoroughly enjoyed this weekend watching the US men's hockey team win gold, the US women's hockey team win gold. And then today things began to fall apart in the media with pundits criticizing the men's hockey team as being a bunch of misogynists because they accepted the invitation to the State of the Union address tonight for the President, and the women's team declined the invitation.

And it just brought to the fore this constant battle, war in our culture, about men, women, male, female, right, gender, all these things. And this is an area of expertise that you have. Help us to understand what's been happening in our culture, throughout our culture, whether it's Christian or non, secular, church or not.

There is a significant tension boiling point about gender and male and female. Help us to understand what's been happening.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Well, for one thing, increasingly men and women are going different places politically.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Hmm.

Christina Hoff Sommers: And you hear a lot about young men being radicalized on social media, but young women are radicalized politically. The media seems to give them — I don't know if it's on TikTok and Instagram and so forth — a steady diet of radical politics, and they seem to be a little more vulnerable. Now, boys are vulnerable in other ways to other kinds of unsavory elements on the internet, but with girls there's a radicalization.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And it's not all of them, but — you know, why would that... not going to the White House and taking part, that's a rare opportunity, whatever you think of the president.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And the country is honoring you. It's a chance to be part of something with... And it's bipartisan — they're, both parties are there.

Christina Hoff Sommers: They can be part of that, but they become very rigid and wanna separate themselves. And I don't know if that represents the whole team, but I'm sorry that they're not gonna be there.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yes. Well, maybe you can help our listeners understand. These are, in some ways, muddy or muddled waters for quite some time. And you, in your work, have done an outstanding job of defending classic liberal feminism and critiquing modern gender ideology. Two very different things, and yet certainly in popular conversation in the media it can all get lost, right? So can you please help our listeners understand what we'll call classic liberal feminism and modern gender ideology? What's the difference between these two things when it comes to feminism and male roles as well?

Christina Hoff Sommers: I'm a strong believer in classical liberal feminism. Liberal feminism comes out of the European Enlightenment, and it's inscribed in the American Constitution. It's basically that women will have the same opportunities as men in education, in politics, in all walks of life. But — it's basically equal opportunity feminism. What happened in our schools is an entirely different style of feminism that grew not out of the Enlightenment and not out of the American democratic principles, but came out of Marxism, and it views women as an oppressed class, and it is constant struggle.

Men oppressor, women the oppressed. And they invested so much mental power in supporting this doctrine, including a whole raft of phony statistics to show that life in America for women — contemporary America — that life in America was just an unbearable burden of unfairness and practices that excluded women and women susceptible to every kind of horror and misery.

Great exaggeration, but they built this kind of frantic theory about women being a subjugated class in the United States of America. It was never the case. It's certainly not the case today because of the success of classical liberal feminism. Many laws were changed and doors were opened, but we have this faction that's still knocking down doors that are already open, and they created a false picture of how

bad things were for women, and they denigrated men and masculinity at the same time, which was not helpful to boys and young men, not helpful to anyone.

But this is where we are. So I've always been a moderate liberal feminist to try to pull women and encourage students to think more rigorously about reality. But unfortunately, a lot of young women have a false picture of their —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Where they live.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I'm just wondering if you can help us and help our listeners think through how... I think I have a sense of how it's happened in the academy, right, in popular culture. But I'm wondering about, if I can put it sort of the — I don't know if it — the psychological roots of this or the character roots of this or the sociological roots of this. What is it that this Marxist approach appeals to, right, in the thoughts or nature or psyche of women and men?

What's the appeal you think that's going on here? Because it's certainly more than just an argument that's being proposed, but there's something deep that people are responding to or running from, right? And they see their outlet, their redemption in this radical ideology, right? They see it and that's what they go to.

Christina Hoff Sommers: You use the word redemption. I do think it's a kind of imitation of a religion in these extreme forms, because there's this idea that you're going to just... It's going to save society and save your soul, and these very dire terms of good and evil, and the depictions of good and evil.

And as I said, it grows out of Marxism, and I think it's... It has an appeal. Marxism appealed to me when I was very young because it's sort of a simplistic way of understanding the world, and it... There's a solution, and you can be a part of it. It's all very exciting and very dramatic. As you grow older and a little more aware of history —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, maybe, maybe a little more wise.

Christina Hoff Sommers: But it is attractive, it is dramatic, and the problem with conventional classical liberalism is that it's not as exciting, and it's not as aggressively confident, 'cause you're always open to debate and doubt, and so liberalism is just a more modest and moderate doctrine.

It wasn't always. At one time, it was something to fight for, and it had its radical element. But today, it's kind of the status quo. And it's not hard to tempt someone with an exciting revolutionary idea, but if it has no foundation in reality, it's not — you wanna change the world, but you have to make sure you're changing it for the better.

And so people have this urge to save the world, and they've latched onto a doctrine that's based, as I said before, on some false statistics. It's a twisted theory of reality, and takes a rather hostile view of men. It's been very hard for boys. I think it's part of their retreat to just other places that... And they're not showing up in our universities in the same number, in our colleges. There are fewer and fewer young men, and people wonder, where are they? Where are they going? And they're on the internet. Well, they were sort of drummed out, and even groups that are just all male — if it's fraternities or if it's the Cub Scouts or YMCA, all those.

The fraternities are just — there's a war against them on many campuses. They're trying to eliminate them. And all boy groups — most, it's not happening anymore. The Boy Scouts are now — girls can join the Boy Scouts, but girls still have the Girl Scouts, so that's how it goes.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, I'm sure. I mean, I remember many years ago reading the famous paper of Michael Sandel. You, I'm sure you know that name, and I'll never forget, The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self, right? That was the paper. And his argument that liberalism or classic liberalism really could not address the communitarian needs of the individual, right?

And so you needed a thick sense of community that liberalism didn't provide. It didn't meet these deep moral needs. And I'm wondering if that's part of what's happening with liberalism, and has happened, that to some degree there is this deeper need for community, community identity, right?

And maybe it's the argument that feminists or I wanna say gender — the gender team or the Marxism group — would argue that it leaves us sort of morally bankrupt, and we need a thicker sense of who we are, and thus here's what it is, right? It's a very thin view of reality, but it is calling out a need of community and togetherness maybe, and maybe that's what's been happening.

I don't know. I've been thinking through this myself because as you see males retreat, they're retreating to their own communities, right? Whether they're digital internet communities or extreme ones or whatever, but they're retreating into their own communities. So I'm just wondering if part of the challenge has been this idea that human beings are sort of unencumbered, right? On their own. And that that's what's perhaps contributing to this. I don't know. What do you think?

Christina Hoff Sommers: I think that's part of it, but I think Michael Sandel would agree with this. I think that liberalism can be communitarian. I mean, if you go back to someone like John Stuart Mill and his concept, he had a very rich concept of utility and goodness and happiness.

It wasn't just an isolated individual with pleasure. It wasn't just the pleasure principle. He had a... Well, he said you would test it. You would see under what conditions do human beings thrive. And he had this richer understanding of happiness, the highest, higher forms. What are the higher forms?

What — someone, the wisest person who's experienced all kinds of life, what is the form of life they pursue? And there you do find that it's family, it's community, it's connection. So I think that, yeah, there are forms of liberalism that can lead to just an attenuated individual just disconnected.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: But there's connected — you can have a communitarian liberalism, if you will, and I've always found that attractive. To me, Cornerstone University is a Christian university, evangelical Christian university, and we've had these debates within Christianity and evangelicalism for a while.

We — these are the debates of the egalitarians versus the complementarians, right? I'm sure you're aware of that, right? And these debates in churches and denominations about the role of women in ministry, out of ministry and all of this. And so this is a very relevant conversation for the church, for Christians, for evangelicals, for Protestants as well because it does strike at this nature of the human person, right?

And the argument oftentimes that has been used, I think, and by the Marxist gender sort of group, is that Christianity subjugates women, right? And that consequently you have to sort of throw off your restraints. But what's interesting to me, and you mentioned this, both the Enlightenment piece, the American founding, but I would also argue even in the Christian tradition that human beings, male and female, are made in the image of God.

There's this divine natural dignity and equality of both that is also being rejected, I think, by the contemporary gender Marxist. So maybe you can speak to us, to the church folk, if I can put it that way, about this, because it's such an important conversation for us as well. And I remember in my younger

years in college, going to a Christian college and having these conversations and debates, and some of my female fellow peers really tore about this.

How are they to understand this, and what's their real role? And maybe you can help our listeners work through these things as well.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Absolutely. I mean, I come as someone who's Jewish, but one thing I greatly admire always about Christianity — here's a religion that put a woman, a mother and a child at the center.

There is a respect of the feminine, which is fundamental in Christianity, from the beginning. And of course, there are different forms and it evolves according to the culture and so forth, but it was the Judeo-Christian tradition that liberated women. That was the tradition where it was actually a lot of these...

The great humanitarian movements began with, initially, the Clapham Sect. It was a group of sort of aristocratic Christian fundamentalists in England that started the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Abolition, they started abolition. William Wilberforce came in, and Hannah More, and people, these — an early sort of proto-feminist, Hannah More.

So I just don't understand an attack on Christianity as a source of women's oppression because one could easily argue it's a source of liberation. So it simply depends. It's too complex to reduce it to something and saying, "Well, it's sexist." Compared to what?

Compared to what? It's probably the religion most amenable to women's liberation, and I think that has to do with the humanism at the center of it, the principles of kindness, and the feminine force that's respected and central.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah. I mean, we call it here the Imago Dei principle. We're all made in God's image and there's an inherent dignity and equality that we all have. It certainly has been, I think in a contemporary period, rejected, as seen, as you rightly mentioned, as this source of oppression, but it really is not. And it's been reduced to that. But there's a lot of voices speaking out against it, you being one of those.

Share with us — the book, the wonderful book, *The War Against Boys* — and what you're seeing now. You mentioned a little bit in the culture. We're seeing a number of demographic trends of great concern when it regards men and young men and boys when it comes to education and jobs and mental health and so many things, and it really is, I think you can rightly argue, a comprehensive sort of cultural war against boys, against men, right?

At the same time, there are these terrible examples of what I'll call destructive masculinity out there, right? And that's one of the dangers now that we're seeing, that as young men are running from this, they're running to, some of them are running to that, right? That destructive masculinity, and that obviously not just exacerbates the criticism, but it raises lots of concerns, too.

So talk with us about how this came about and what do we need to do, as a country, in our neighborhoods, in our families, in our churches, our institutions to address this. Because it's such a problem, and it's a pervasive problem that it requires — I think a comprehensive, well-coordinated, thought-out solution.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Well, the first thing to know is there is such a thing as destructive masculinity, or people call it toxic masculinity. But it's the exception, not the rule. There's also normative or healthy masculinity, which most of the men and boys I have known, been acquainted with, or know about

embody. In destructive masculinity, a young man or a man shows his machismo by preying on weaker people, by destroying, by just being a force for chaos.

In healthy masculinity, it's just the opposite. A healthy man protects weaker people. He builds, he doesn't destroy. And there... If you look around our society, even now, despite all we've been through, you still find so many examples of honorable, constructive masculinity. And that's one problem, is that people seem to be blind to that.

They take the worst case example and set that up as the norm, and as we're supposed to take the worst behaving man and say, "Well, that's today's masculinity." Well, and I sometimes I'm debating some very angry women who are denigrating men, and I'll ask them, "Weren't there any men that were good to you? For every man you ran into who was a sexist and sort of a troglodyte, weren't there others who helped you?" And most of them will admit, yes, there are. And I think we have to remind ourselves of that.

But the second thing is that young boys, and young girls too, but need to be civilized, and educated, and brought into the culture of ethics and morality. And traditionally, it's done through religious education, but there would be teachers, there would be coaches, there — different organizations and things. And most men, young men used to have all sorts of forces in their lives that were helping them find their way to an ethical masculinity.

Today, a lot of boys are just on their own. As I said, groups, they might get together and they'd have good role models. There are just fewer and fewer of those with the breakdown of the family that we have to start there. Fatherlessness is associated with all sorts of unfortunate developments in a young man.

One of the things they've seen is that in a... If you have a single mother and children, the girls — she's often working so hard, and she's kind of heroic, and her children see that. Now, the daughters identify with her and wanna be like her. But a boy, he doesn't identify with the mother.

He loves her, but he's going to find his sense of his maleness usually from the father. But if he's not there, well, then it might be... I mean, look, many families, broken families, the mothers manage because they can find a grandfather, an uncle, some friends who can be positive role models for their son.

But this is so important that you provide it because otherwise it'll just be happenstance who he happens to be with, and it might be bad influences and boys his young age who will lead him astray, that sort of thing. So you do have to, if you have a broken family, then you have to be on the lookout for that and try to provide that.

But then you think of our schools — there are fewer and fewer male teachers. They're just disappearing in the elementary schools, and increasingly, they're fewer and fewer in high schools, and even our colleges are now majority female professors. So where are the male role models?

They're disappearing. So we have to be conscious of that, and I wish — I mean, we made an effort. When we saw there weren't many women in computer science and engineering, there were massive efforts to bring — try to bring more women in. Where were those efforts for education? Or another field — this is a whole other area — psychology.

Psychology's becoming completely feminized. The only field I've seen it in effort is nursing. I've seen certain nursing associations really say, "We've gotta bring more males into the..." But that's one of the few areas of industry where I've seen that shift. I imagine that there's — maybe this is taboo to talk about, but I imagine there is such a thing as toxic femininity, don't you think?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Experts on bullying will tell you that both boys and girls bully. Boys tend to do it physically, and girls do it psychologically.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Mm. And it can be just as devastating, if not more. It plays — just a kind of a meanness, a viciousness.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah. I'm thinking of the movie Mean Girls.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Exactly. I mean, horrible, horrible things that girls did too.

I've looked at this a long time ago. People think that women are more virtuous and saintly. No. The capacity for cruelty, for evil — men can be, tend to be physically more violent, but women can bring their own kind of misery and cruelty, and we have to be honest about that. And both sexes, men and women, need moral guidance.

They need to develop their characters. They need concepts of vice and virtue, and constantly working for self-improvement. Hopefully, with... religion has been, for most of us, the best way to do it because it's been set out and they've worked out the kinks. They've had centuries to evolve and to accommodate us.

But so many kids don't have that. They don't have intact families, and they have schools where it's boys — it's mostly female teachers, and in some cases, if they've gone to school of education, they were taught that that little boy in your classroom, that young man, is a privileged bearer of the patriarchy and you should pay attention to the girls and don't give any, don't allow him to act out.

So they kind of take a dim vision, view. I don't think most teachers buy that or got that message, but if they are really listening to what's happening in their schools of ed, the schools of ed have been radicalized more than any other section of the university.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Do you think — I think about schooling and education. Do you think as we think about solutions in the future — it is a very serious problem, obviously in education and throughout the culture, quite frankly. But let's talk about education, whether it's K12 or university, but let's look at K12 education for now. I'm wondering if one of the applied practical solutions is in essence movements like charter schools or school choice or homeschooling, right?

Or private schools where there's much more ability to control curricula and that kind of education rather than public schools. I'd hate to say that, but I'm wondering if that's what we'll have to do. At the same time, there's a danger from pulling yourself out of the culture, right? And there's a danger to that.

But what do you think we do with K12 education, for example, to address this issue?

Christina Hoff Sommers: Well, we have a crisis right now in boys' education. They're just far less likely to go to college. They — it's boys who get the majority of failing grades, who drop out or who are behavior problems. And specifically are way behind in literacy.

And literacy's — it's fundamental to all other learning. If you can't read, you can't do anything, and boys are significantly less literate than girls. They have a harder time. So one of the things we have to be doing in our schools is realizing that — schools of education, if they were paying attention, would have — it would be a specialty of male pedagogy.

So you ask about different kinds of schools. I think we have to have a lot of experimentation, and one of the things we've seen is, which is very frustrating, that we know that to teach a child to learn, for most kids, they do need phonics. They need to learn how to sound out words.

The fashion in the schools of education for decades has been whole language. They just said, "Just immerse the child in a rich, creative literacy environment, and they will learn to read. Just let them guess and kind of look at the..." It doesn't work. It works for a lot of girls because they could probably read before they got even got to school.

For kids who can't read, they need phonics. Now, the sad thing is this has been known now for a long time, and I've seen two major breakthroughs. Phonics — we have to restore phonics. The schools of education don't listen, and it doesn't change. So I'm not that hopeful that they're going to change.

They seem just... They can't be rehabilitated. And I'm like you, I'm sad to say that, but if I... My kids are grown up now, but if I had young children, I would be very, very skeptical of what was going on in my school. If my son was having any problems with reading, you just have to take charge, and you may wanna seek out an alternative.

And if things are really not working, you may have to homeschool. And homeschooling has gotten very professional now. There's so many resources available to parents, and ways of getting kids to socialize and be with other children. It's all been... A lot of people just imagine the kids at home all the time with the parent and —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Oh, no, those were...

Christina Hoff Sommers: That's ancient homeschooling.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That's ancient, yeah. It's changed. That's not today.

You mentioned a very important observation about you have to take charge, right? So I wanna talk a little bit about that because there's been a significant movement now for the last 10 years or so about parental rights, parental involvement in schools, in your child's education. Parents know best. There are lots of ways that we can talk about this, but I want to ask you to comment on that versus what I'll call the government of the expert, right? The government or the techno expert, right? And that is what I'm seeing a lot of in education and in other areas of government where it's a culture splitting the expert, right, however we define that, versus the layperson, versus the parent, versus the family, and the expert always seems to win, right?

The white lab coat, the research, whatever, and we know best, we know better, you don't, and therefore you should listen to us, or we'll make you listen to us. That's been playing out for quite some times as the pandemic, but now it's into education, many other areas, experts know best. But there's a lot of literature in history and political law that argues that government of rule of the expert is very dangerous, very, very dangerous to liberty, to freedom, to virtue, right?

To a well-educated citizenry. So perhaps you can comment on that trend and how do we deal with that productively to ensure we have the liberty that's so important, the inalienable rights, right, of liberty that we need.

Christina Hoff Sommers: I constantly hear about how there's this anti-science attitude in Americans and conservatives. They're turning against experts. Well, I don't wanna say all experts, but let's just say, like back during COVID, we had the experts from the CDC and public health who were carried away with an agenda, and who would tell you, "You can't go to the beach because that's dangerous. Nobody can... But, oh, you can go out and join a protest, a Black Lives Matter protest with thousands of people.

That's fine because that's an important public health issue." That's what we were told, and that's very infuriating because it's so inconsistent. That was an example. And also with the trans movement, today there's an excellent op-ed in The New York Times that several official organizations, including the AMA,

the American Medical Association, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons — they have turned against this idea of gender transition for kids.

But yet we had these same organizations five years ago, particularly the AMA, were saying, "It's fine. In fact, if your child evinces a need to be the opposite sex, then you could be threatening their mental health not to let them do it." And they were encouraging puberty blockers. These were experts all over the place encouraging even surgeries.

And now is this piece in The Times today, it summarizes the whole thing. They're all... Because of a lawsuit. A young girl who —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Critical. Yeah, that lawsuit was absolutely incredible and foundational and critical. Because in a court of law, I think it shifted the entire conversation in a significant way.

Christina Hoff Sommers: This wonderful tradition, where you have due process and where you can present evidence, and the evidence has to be unimpeachable because if it's — someone can be there to challenge it. So we finally got a fair hearing. But this is the sort of thing that you assume would go on whenever you have a peer-reviewed paper or wherever a professional organization is debating what sort of policies they should endorse, but it didn't.

It all broke down. And so the public has seen some of these shocking breakdowns in some education policies, in gender policies, in the COVID policies, and a lot of our institutions lost credibility. I mean, the media and the medical organizations as well as our schools. And so I think now they have to be more humble, and they have been humbled.

And they have to earn the credibility that they once had because there was a time where they were serious organizations, and they didn't dispense just fanciful, and in this case, politically driven policies and guidelines.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, I'm wondering if in your book, *The War Against Boys*, there's also a war against girls if you look at the opposite side of this issue, right? Because what's really happening is a destructive argument about the nature of women, right? Likewise with the nature of men that's really hurting the entire society. It's hurting the entire culture, right? On both —

Christina Hoff Sommers: Well, I absolutely agree. For a while, I think it's gone out of — and I think it's no longer published, but there was something called *Teen Vogue*. So it was *Vogue* for teenage girls. It was so extreme in promoting gender experimentation. That was the least of it. Radical politics. But you would be surprised, if you have a daughter, what's being... What she is encountering on social media, in women's magazines, young girls magazines.

It... And it's always sort of hostile to boys and young men, hostile to marriage, hostile to motherhood, hostile to all of the things we talked about earlier, the sorts of conditions under which human beings flourish. For most of us, it is a life in a family. If you're a woman with a husband, with children, in a home, that is what most people want, where they flourish.

And yet we are — we have a society where many young women particularly are reading things that are leading her off in other directions. And we're not honest with young women about fertility and why it becomes more and more difficult to have a healthy child, have a child at all, as you get further on in your 30s and 40s.

It — you can do it, but let's be honest about the risks, and then it gets much harder. We don't do that. There are very few places where a young woman would read the truth about what is gonna make her

happy most likely, and the conditions to acquire that. So I think with our daughters, I worry about just that.

The most extreme was the sort of Teen Vogue model, but I'm sure there's a lot of it on TikTok. And once... If she gets into it or gets the algorithm and starts feeding it to her, it becomes this new reality that leads to depression. And I'm interested to see this data on levels of depression and happiness in the society, and a far-left politics makes you depressed.

Now maybe you're depressed and you're led to this miserable worldview —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, I've read that Republicans and conservatives are happier than anybody else.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Yeah, and churchgoers —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right, right... religious people and —

Christina Hoff Sommers: But I have found that to be just anecdotally true. And yet, now the data backs it up.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right. There's certainly an attack on both. I wanna ask you to comment on this because I'm mindful in the New Testament when Paul writes, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it," and this incredible responsibility in marriage that men have in Christianity, and I believe it's for all, to love your spouse and love her sacrificially and give yourself to her and only do good.

And I've also seen — I was born in South America, in Colombia, and immigrated to the United States when I was nine. I've seen when cultures, when men in cultures are abusive, and it becomes almost expected or accepted or it's just the way that things are, and women live under that. Is it in a culture and the home.

And at times I've seen some of the advertisements of the '30s, '40s, and '50s here in America of male and female, and sometimes it made me a little nervous. It made me a little uncomfortable just to see how men would speak to women in those advertisements or talk about them. And so I wanna just have a thoughtful exchange with you about that because it seems to me that there is plenty of examples where males have abused, if I can put it that way, their responsibility, their role, their opportunity, right? In how they treat their spouses, how they treat women, how they see them.

We — I just watched recently on Netflix a wonderful documentary of the Hungarian chess master, the young woman, female, who became a chess master before Bobby Fischer at 15 and four months. And all the men — Kasparov or Bobby Fischer — they always denigrated women when they talked about chess, right? Women can't do it. They can't do it. Only men can. And when this young Hungarian woman, girl, teenager would beat them, they wouldn't even shake her hand, right? And I look at that and it just incensed me. I thought, how could you? And so talk with us about what's happened also. There seems to be the gender side, the Marxist side is hanging on that, and there's some truth to that. There are those things that happened, and they look at that and they say, "Look, there it is," right? It's here, it's here, it's here, it's here, and therefore we reject the whole thing. It doesn't work. How do we combat that?

Christina Hoff Sommers: Well, I don't think that's the tradition today in American society. In fact, you're more likely to see a commercial —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Oh, agreed.

Christina Hoff Sommers: With men being denigrated. That was a while back.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That was a while back, but I think sometimes these things —

Christina Hoff Sommers: Yeah... they look at that. But I'm not gonna deny there isn't misogyny out there. I just always remind that misandry is a problem, too. That's the equivalent of denigrating men.

But it's a problem, and there are bullies. I think it's part — someone that does that — but there are also cultures that promote bullying, and promote... And usually what I find is that if there's this culture that's, there's a lot of violence against women, there's probably a lot of violence against everybody, because it's a dysfunctional, toxic society.

And we have them across the world, and I've been to international conferences where women come from societies where they haven't... We've had two major waves of feminism, and feminism is the great American success story, Western European success story. But in parts of Africa, in Asia, there are countries where they haven't had so much as a ripple, and they're fighting.

I would, and I think that would be one important thing for the American organized women's movement to make common cause with the women in Iran, the women in parts of Africa where they still have polygamy or they're still practicing genital mutilation and that sort of thing. But they don't do that, so that's another story. But I completely agree with you that there are these practices, and there's still bullying in our society. There's less of it. It's looked down upon, and I do think we are a Judeo-Christian society where the golden rule, most people are aware of that, and at some level the notion that you should be kind, considerate, try to understand, empathize with other people and how they feel, see the world the way they do — there's a lot of effort and awareness that you should do that here.

But as we said earlier on, not all young people get that message. Not all young men get that message, and they do develop this cruel streak. And all I can say is, raise your daughters to be alert to that and stay away from it. But you can meet women that are that way too, but with men, it's the person you would marry. It would be very dangerous to marry somebody that had that capacity for cruelty and insensitivity and bullying.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah. Yeah. You have to address both. That is why I think the work you've done, it's so important because both have to be addressed. It's not either/or. It has to be both, right? And so, whether it's schools or churches or homes and all those, it's just a holistic approach to this.

Let... Talk with us, Christina, about the role, if any, of policy in this area, right? And I say this simply because so many individuals look toward policy as a solution, right? To address these kinds of issues. Where are we when it comes to policy to address either the war against boys, right, or the kind of extreme feminism that exists, or the toxic masculinity stuff that exists. Is there a role for policy to address this? Is there policy to address it now? What do you think?

Christina Hoff Sommers: Well, I said earlier that we should have better education policies. And for boys, that means massive efforts to improve literacy and also something very important is school engagement. So a boy — it just takes more to interest a boy, to get him to sit down and focus and... So you, we.

And for that, we probably should not be getting rid of recess, and we should not be getting rid of sports and things. They need those outlets.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: No, that's very, very important outlet, yes. Important for girls. As a girl, I appreciated recess, but —

Christina Hoff Sommers: Sure.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: It is known that for boys, it's, you're going to get more diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder if you —

Because that's what we're doing. We're over-medicating boys rather than... I mean, not that there aren't boys that genuinely have that, but it's very few. Even people who treat these cases will agree that it's over-diagnosed, and we are medicalizing, medicating too many young men and boys. So that's one thing, is just to make our schools, make an effort to meet their educational needs and psychological needs.

Christina Hoff Sommers: But with kids in general, I've followed the work of Jonathan Haidt and — the cell phones in school, doing whatever we can. I think it wouldn't be unreasonable just to not allow them in schools. People may disagree with this, but I think TikTok — it was interesting that it was owned in China, owned by China, but they didn't let Chinese kids watch it.

And I think that you do have to be so careful.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Hmm. I know it's — I'm just grateful I wasn't raising children when we had this, but now I have grandchildren, so I still have to worry that it is just a steady diet of things that civilizations have always tried to protect children from.

Now it's just right there, whether it's the pornography or the radical politics or just idiocy, inhumanity. It's all there. And we're at early stages maybe, and we'll have to figure that out, but that's gonna take some kind of policy.

Yeah, you've done a lot of work, and one of your great works is on virtue and vice and moral education, character education, and you just mentioned medicine, right? In psychology, it's — we're an over-medicated society. Even among college students, well over 50% are heavily medicated for all kinds of issues — psychological disorders or anxiety or depression and all those things. And there are some legitimate uses to those things, so we're not denying that.

But there seems to be a sort of default position in the medical community and the pharmaceutical community that you medicate people, right? And that issues of character that have significant psychological ramifications —

Christina Hoff Sommers: Yes.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Significant spiritual ramifications, right? Significant emotional, physical ramifications, that you can ignore that and medicate people, right? And it's somehow that will address it, but it's not addressing it. Virtue is a medicine.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Mm-hmm.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: It's a medicine for the soul. It's a medicine for the spirit, right? Vice is a poison for the soul and the spirit. So talk with us about what we can do, either at a high policy level or institutional level or educational or family or home to reintroduce and continue to reintroduce vice and virtue, even in our educational system. I just went to one of your colleagues at AEI, Ian Rowe, last year. I went to Vertex Partnership Academies, and they just sent 10 students to Cornerstone here last week, for a week, on, in our science, technology and health school.

Wonderful, wonderful school. So impressed with what they're doing there in the Bronx, focusing on the virtues with these students. So talk with us about the importance of virtue and vice as a kind of medicine, but a different kind of medicine that we seem so desperate to be in need of.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Oh, I couldn't agree more. And one of the books I wrote several years ago, I wrote with a psychiatrist called One Nation Under Therapy. And what we found is increasingly, like take

the — our classrooms have become increasingly therapeutic. And there was this whole self-esteem movement, and it was almost as if the purpose of the curriculum was to make you feel good about yourself and to find yourself and so forth.

But as an ethicist, I knew that often the best way to achieve sort of self-esteem wasn't just through praise, empty praise, but it was kind of a consequence of doing something you were proud of. But that meant discipline, and that meant self-control and also cultivating virtues. If you wanna be happy, be grateful to begin with.

Cultivate gratitude for what others have done and develop a sensitivity to what others need. And but we've replaced it with the language of psychology. And one example I like to give is, years ago I read a study by a psychologist who asked a group of young men, a large number of young men and large number of young women if they felt good talking about their problems.

Do you... Does it make you feel better to discuss your problems with another, with a parent or a friend? And almost all the girls said yes, and the boys said no. They thought it was weird. No, it's what? They just didn't even process it. But she also found that the girls were more depressed. Now, her — and she postulate...

Her hypothesis was that depression is kind of not being able to escape yourself. You're ruminating. And it may be that girls are more prone to depression because of this rumination, and they can't get out of the self. And I... It's true that boys are more — if you hear men talking, you hear women talking, women are often, it's relationships or, "He did this," or, "I said," or she.

And men, it's about car parts or what the game, something exterior. Now, this, what people often say is, "Oh, we've gotta men to focus on their feelings. They've gotta talk about their feelings." What this psychologist, her name's Amanda Rose, what she said is, "Well, maybe not. Maybe girls have to — we shouldn't encourage this rumination.

We should try to get them to be more outward, more out in the world and interested in other things, other people, not me, me, me." And one of the terrible things about women's studies on many campuses is it's sort of me studies. I'm oppressed. Me, me, what they did. You're not out in the world, engaged.

You're focused all about your own drama. And what if that, what if what the men do more typically are these boys who didn't wanna talk all the time about their problems, what if that is, you know, adaptive and maybe a kind of stoicism, that kind of stoical self-control, that may actually be conducive to happiness.

Now, I'm not saying any of this is absolute, and there are boys who are disturbed and do need to talk about their feelings. But you need someone who's skillful in knowing how to draw them out, and it turns out that it's a different skill set. To get women, it's very easy to get us to sit down and tell you everything that's wrong.

With boys, it's much harder. And they're now... I know in Australia, the psychology — group of psychologists are developing special procedures to draw young men out, and they say you have to take psychological ailments and turn them, and talk about them as if they're just problems they gotta solve, and you engage their, their, their — this sort of practical side of a young man that wants to get the job done.

I don't know. I'm simplifying it, but my whole point here is that we have to be careful about this move towards the therapeutic and thinking that everything is a matter of, that it's some kind of pathology that needs a medication or it needs a therapy. The human condition isn't a pathology, but it's very challenging.

One way to attend, ameliorate, to improve, might be some medication, but that... We don't know. We know that may... for many physical ailments, but for psychological ailments, I would argue that religion, virtue, ethics, all of that, stoicism, that has a longer history and better — there's better evidence of success than the therapeutic.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: It's — yeah, it's — it speaks to the spiritual dimension, the spiritual soul nature of human beings. You see it in the classical tradition with Aristotle and Plato. You see it in Christianity, of course. There's the soul and the spirit, and these are things that you can't medicate to fix.

Right? You can't — you can't fill the emptiness... you really have to... you can't, and —

Christina Hoff Sommers: The, the, the alienation, the isolation, the human condition.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Correct. And the spirituality is so —

Christina Hoff Sommers: And it's —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Critical...

Christina Hoff Sommers: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: The reality of God, the reality of the Imago Dei, for us as Christians, and we will say this to the whole world, the reality of the gospel and the redemptive power of the cross, and these are things that are, that address these very deep questions of the soul, question of the spirit.

Medicine can't do that. And so we are heavily — medicinized. I just made up a word, right? But in our society, but these things are festering, and they're not being addressed. We're almost out of time, Christina. I wanna ask you the one last question. Do you think we have a free speech problem on our campuses?

There's a lot of conversations all the time about this, that free speech problem, that now with the Trump administration, people can't talk. They're afraid, and what do you think is happening on college campuses today when it comes to freedom of speech with our students?

Christina Hoff Sommers: Well, I do think that we have to make more and more effort to make people feel free to say what they think.

We know that there's a lot of people just pretending they agree because they don't want to engage in debate because that — you might get called out or you'd be canceled or something. And stipulate there are some, a lot of horrible things you shouldn't say. Sure. You shouldn't be cruel, and you shouldn't denigrate others, but you can have fun, and you can make mistakes and then apologize, all of that.

But we seem to move to an area where no mistakes are tolerated and certain opinions, even opinions that many Americans agree with — let's say you were against, let's say you were pro-life, at a pro-university where it was pro-choice. You'd have to keep quiet, or you would just face so much disapproval.

And I think that one of the most precious traditions we have is academic freedom, freedom of speech, and again, I've mentioned Mill before, but it just turns out that for human beings to thrive, for a culture to thrive, you need to have that environment of openness and trial and error and correction and evolution. And it broke down.

It broke down on our campuses where instead of — you have entire departments that are based on dogmas, where they've already answered all the questions. They're not just giving you an apparatus, a means of acquiring knowledge and discovering the truth. They are providing you with their conclusions.

And in the — they're all on the same side of sort of radical left-wing politics in gender and race and class and so forth. But that is a — I think, just violates the principle of — with the very meaning of education. And so I'm, yeah, I'm a big proponent of free expression and academic freedom.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Christina, thank you. You know, we're celebrating two hundred and fifty years of America this year. Our university, of course, we're celebrating eighty-five years. And all that we've talked about and all that you've shared is so important as we think about America now, and America in the future, right?

We — these conversations are a part of, we have a sense of where we've come from, the challenges. Many people don't. Let's alert them to that, but let's also talk about what's at stake and the importance of addressing these issues thoughtfully, correctly, with wisdom for the future of this wonderful country in which we live.

Christina, thank you for all you've done in your career, and you continue to do. It's been great to have you, and we look forward to seeing you again on our campus or on our podcast.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Well, thank you, and I'm grateful to what you're doing. It was wonderful visiting your school and meeting those students, meeting you.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Thank you, Christina. Well, all good to you, and we'll talk soon. Thank you so much.

Christina Hoff Sommers: Thank you.

TRANSCRIPT NOTICE

This transcript was generated using automated speech-to-text technology and may contain small transcription errors, including inaccuracies in wording, punctuation, or speaker identification. While reasonable efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, the transcript should not be considered a verbatim record of the podcast. For the most accurate representation of the conversation, please refer to the original audio recording.