

I was homeschooled in Texas between 2000 and 2015. I spent most of that time begging my mother to let me go to public school, but she always refused. She believed that sending a daughter to public school "tainted" the girls' sexual purity and religious devotion, and many of her friends agreed. My family was Catholic, but we were also heavily influenced by other homeschool families' evangelicalism. My begging for a basic education only grew more desperate in junior high and high school, but the older I got, the more adamant my mother was about keeping me at home. She had made homeschooling her entire identity, and refused to reevaluate whether it was actually helping me.

My academic progress ended up stagnating beyond repair, beginning in junior high. When I struggled to keep up with schoolwork (especially mathematics and science), my mother called me "lazy" and "undisciplined." It didn't matter to her that I had to teach myself everything completely alone, with no qualified teachers to help me understand and apply the material. She also didn't care that she had pushed me into grueling extracurricular activities of her choosing that ate up all my free time. All that she saw was that I was "lazy," and even then she still refused to let me switch to public school where more people could help me. Instead, she just forced me to stay home in "high school" for a whole extra year. When all my friends and same-age peers got to graduate high school and move on to college, I got left behind and trapped in a severely abusive household. To this day, I consider that one of the most humiliating and isolating experiences of my life.

The educational neglect I suffered because of homeschooling also severely limited my prospects after I was finally allowed to leave home. Trying to get my parents to take my college search and application process seriously was like pulling teeth, and they were extremely strict about where I was allowed to apply. I was only allowed to apply to two schools, period. The first school was a large in-state public university that received thousands of applications per year, and offered automatic admission to students who either ranked in the top 10% of their class or had standardized test scores above a certain threshold. I couldn't rely on the class ranking for automatic admission because I was homeschooled, so my only real chance at getting in was with test scores. But because my education was a joke, and I never had enough time for test prep, I missed the test score thresholds by the thinnest of margins. As a result, I was unable to get full admission to the public university. The second school I applied to was a tiny, extremely conservative in-state Catholic college. Since I was only allowed to apply to two schools, and the first one rejected me, my only option for leaving home and furthering my education was this tiny Catholic school.

I couldn't even study what I genuinely wanted to study and pursue as a career in college. I could only major in what my homeschool education allowed me to do. I ended up studying economics and politics not because I'd always wanted to, but because three years of forced participation in homeschool speech and debate had made me more knowledgeable about these subjects (or, more

accurately, about what economic and political beliefs the far-right religious fundamentalists wanted me to have) than anything else. I also couldn't test out of anything because I was never allowed to take AP courses, and because I couldn't pass the placement exam required to take calculus courses. I ended up stuck in math courses that did nothing to improve my career prospects in the social sciences, let alone in STEM.

In short, the college I went to provided nothing more than a continuation of the education I'd received at home. Much like I had to teach myself everything in high school, I had to do all the research for internship and graduate school applications on my own because no one seemed to know what to do with me. The more I learned about other universities' offerings, both in terms of curriculum and connections, the more I felt cheated out of a real shot at life beyond the religious conservative bubble everyone around me shoved me into. My undergraduate *alma mater* was one of the most homophobic and transphobic campuses in the country, and as I realized that I wasn't strictly cisgender or heterosexual, I only felt more defective. It's no accident that I ended up attempting suicide twice while attending that college.

I wish I didn't have to wonder how my life would have been different if I had been allowed to access an education with real instruction in math and science. But because religiously-motivated educational neglect has dictated my whole life, it's all I can do. My parents might have thought that they were protecting me from evil by shutting me away from the world, but all they really did was lock their daughter in a prison she can never escape because the prison's limits follow her everywhere she goes, for the rest of her life.

Signed,
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