

IF I'M SO NORMAL, WHY AM I SO UNHAPPY?

by Linda Bartlett

The young women who find their way to the Lighthouse, a pregnancy resource center in Iowa Falls, IA., might seem familiar to you. Actually, they could be your neighbor's daughter, your pastor's daughter or your daughter. They are not "bad" girls; rather, they are "normal" girls.

A negative pregnancy test provides opportunity to talk about their "normal" lives. One young woman, with goals of finishing high school and going on to college, opened the door to that conversation with a heartfelt confession. "I don't understand. I'm not any different from my Facebook friends. I'm not any different from the people on TV. I dress like the models in my favorite magazines and do the things everyone else says they are doing. But if I'm so normal, why am I so unhappy?"

As a campus psychiatrist at UCLA, Dr. Miriam Grossman spent a lot of time with "normal" but "unhappy" young women. These educated women with goals of med school, performing arts or corporate law had little in life to complain about. They had active social lives, enough money and caring families. "Life is good," they would tell Dr. Grossman, "so why do I feel so depressed? So emotionally stressed? So worthless?"

"If I'm so normal, why am I so unhappy?" This question—asked in small town pregnancy centers and on Ivy League campuses—should tug at the heart and soul of every pro-life parent, grandparent and pastor. "No amount of Prozac or Zoloft," writes Dr. Grossman, "is going to solve this problem. These young women must, for their physical and emotional well-being, change their lifestyle."

Change their lifestyle? But aren't young women today more liberated than ever before? Haven't the barriers that prevented complete happiness been chipped away? Isn't it true that women can compete with men in sports, the workplace and the bedroom? It's true, but all the supposed liberation in the world only puts us in conflict with ourselves.

In Genesis 1: 27, we learn that God created humans to be male and female. Later, and with more detail (Genesis 2), we learn that God created male and female at different times, in different ways and for different purposes. Try to ignore it if you will but a woman is built to bear and nurture children.

Matters of a woman's heart are influenced by her biological design. Yes, my feminist friends, I said biological *design*. "The blurring of differences between male and female," writes Dr. Grossman, "is a radical agenda unsupported by hard science." One of the failures of nearly every kind of sex education, including Christianized sex education, is that we lump boys and girls together as equally "sexual beings" who just need more information and more comfort with their sexuality. But Dr. Marianne Legato, founder and director of the Partnership for Gender Specific Medicine at Columbia University, sees women's health as more than a political or feminist issue because women differ from men in every system of their body.

It would seem that this important piece of biblical and scientific truth has been withheld from the young women who carry the burdens of depression, disease, fear, and broken hearts in the door of the Lighthouse and every other pregnancy center across this country.

Matters of a woman's heart, by design, are connected to the love of one man, home and family. At the Lighthouse, however, we see young women who've been disconnected from all that is naturally womanly—most especially anything related to motherhood and childbearing—as something to be managed, minimized or even overcome. They have been shot up with Gardacil and soon after, like a right of passage, ceremoniously prescribed the Pill. They are prodded onto the football field, wrestling mat and arena of combat—no “holds barred”—which puts them at odds with their own biological and psychological functions and renders them more vulnerable. In abstinence class, they are reminded over and over again that sex is the most wondrous of all earthly gifts but not to be opened until marriage after first getting their degree, securing a good job and paying off loans. However, next to their heart is a biological clock that “tick, tick, ticks” the years of fertility away.

Girls have been told that they are no less sexual than any boy and have every right to enjoy the pleasures of intimacy. But most girls have not been told about oxytocin, the neurochemical that floods a woman's brain during a cuddle or a kiss. By design, oxytocin promotes trust and serves to bond a woman to the man she is with. Oxytocin at work in a wife who is sexually intimate with her husband helps produce long-term connectedness which is good for children.

But bonding is like glue. It can't be undone or ripped apart without great emotional pain. Once, I asked a young woman why she was spending nights with her boyfriend. She responded, “Well I was hoping that if I did, he would ask me to marry him.” During another visit, she told me how much she liked tending “their” garden and decorating “their” house. “But,” I asked, “when it's the end of the day and you sleep over, whose bed do you sleep in? Do you think of it as his... or ‘ours’?” Her eyes dropped. Her shoulders slumped. She whispered, “It's his.”

A great many young women, despite the cultural acceptance of multiple partners, want to be married to one man and make a nest for their children. But a woman's consent to play house without commitment of marriage actually encourages many young men to postpone marriage.

“I'm just doing what everyone else is doing. I'm normal.” So then why is this girl so depressed and unhappy? Because it is simply abnormal for a woman to be in conflict with the design of her own body. “Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of liars . . . who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish” (Isaiah 44:24-25).

At the Lighthouse, we take matters of the heart very seriously. We want to guard the physical and spiritual health of a young woman just as we want to guard her right to a childhood, right to girlhood, and right to maidenhood.

Linda Bartlett is the co-founder and president of the Lighthouse Center of Hope and author of *The Failure of Sex Education in the Church: Mistaken Identity, Compromised Purity* (Amazon), www.ouridentitymatters.com Miriam Grossman, M.D., is the author of *Unprotected*. This article was first published in *LifeDate*, the quarterly publication of Lutherans For Life.