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STEP OUTSIDE THE DOOR: AN ETHNOGRAPHY
OF HOMESCHOOLING IN NORTH TEXAS

by

HANNAH MAY KELLER

Presented to the Faculty of the Honors College of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
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November 14, 2014

ABSTRACT

STEP OUTSIDE THE DOOR: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF HOMESCHOOLING IN NORTH TEXAS

Hannah May Keller, ANTH

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2014

Faculty Mentor: Ritu G. Khanduri

Homeschooling is now recognized as a rapidly growing and, for some, a preferred method of imparting grade-level education to American students. It is important to note that homeschooling impacts and shapes family and community, thus providing a unique perspective on anthropological considerations of modernity, education, and subculture. Despite this, few studies have explained the growth in this form of pedagogy. This paper attempts to fill this gap through an ethnographic study of homeschoolers in North Texas. In particular, this study focuses on the reasons behind homeschooling and the cultural perceptions of homeschoolers in North Texas. Research for this project is based on an analysis of qualitative data from twenty interviews, including homeschooling parents and admissions officers at local colleges.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN, ‘HOMESCHOOL’?”

In the 2014 winter Olympics, a young unknown athlete became the first to win gold in the newly created event Slopestyle Snowboarding. Sage Kotsenburg, a decidedly untraditional 20-year-old, enjoyed the sport, akin to racing down an icy course filled with massive concrete jumps. When his turn arrived, he participated without reservation, although more experienced athletes had already opted out of the course, citing safety concerns. He noted that he was happy just being able to compete in the Olympics.¹ His gumption in performing a novel trick earned him worldwide recognition and the honor of a coveted gold metal.

Kotsenburg was homeschooled.

His parents utilized a popular online homeschool curriculum to support their children’s competitive goals, giving of their time and money to allow their children to compete professionally. Kotsenburg noted that AOA (Alpha Omega Academy), which promotes classical and Christ-centered curriculum, was a “springboard to my education, the opportunity to enjoy life experiences a traditional classroom never could give me.”²

¹ A Wild Ride from Homeschool to Sochi Andrew Branch 2014

² Alpha Omega Academy Congratulates Former Christian Homeschool Student on His Advancement to Winter Olympics 2014

The young Olympian is one of many athletes who have turned to alternative forms of education, and brought positive attention to homeschooling.

Although homeschooling has been practiced throughout American history, it has recently become increasingly popular and undergone social and cultural transformation. In *Homeschool: An American History*, Milton Gaither describes how prior to European involvement in America, the Native Americans had long practiced a form of homeschooling.³ However, children were seen as a community responsibility, not solely a parental obligation. Widely accepted in the United States of America in the 18th and 19th centuries, homeschool went into decline with the advent of public schools in the beginning of the 20th century. Early colonial government, not wishing to repeat the “non-Christian” teachings which they felt characterized European schools, created a system in America in which parents were responsible their children’s religious education. Homeschooling was methodologically and rigidly enforced until school systems promoting “American” values were established in the nineteenth century. The establishment of public schools was used for the assimilation of immigrant children into American culture, and attendance was enforced. Education shifted from home to the public sphere. As parents, disturbed by the way children were increasingly put into academic and esoteric categories, began to remove their children from schools in the 1970s, friction developed between the homeschool communities and public school system. Certain factions, including conservative Christians, were quick to understand that homeschooling offered the freedom to teach their faith. Although they were among the first to homeschool, homeschooling is no longer exclusive to conservative Christian groups although Christians continue to be the majority stakeholders in this form of

³ Gaither 2008:12

education.⁴ Studies have described Christians to be 70-90 percent of the homeschooling population.⁵

From 1980 to 2000, homeschooling has jumped from an almost unrecorded minority to an estimated one to two million students. This growth represents between two and three percent of the school-aged population, and an annual growth of seven percent every year.⁶ Many parents, such as the Kotsenburgs, are now choosing to be increasingly hands-on in their children's education. Homeschooling has also received a boost from institutional interest in recruiting and supporting homeschooled students. The United States military offers homeschoolers lucrative bonuses for college graduates.⁷ Homeschooling provides a means to reach both cultural and academic goals. Homeschooling has tended to be associated more closely with Christian faith, the middle class and European ethnicity. Previous research notes that parents' identities are important to this decision. Homeschooling parents often perceive that public education is failing their children in cultural and religious goals. Through homeschooling they protest the ideas their children are offered, which may be contrary to the parents' beliefs.⁸ An alternate perspective contends that homeschooling embodies modernity and the individual nature associated with Western culture.⁹ Jung's ethnography of South Korea describes how parents perceive homeschooling as mainstream American culture, and use it to assert their modernity.

⁴ Gaither 2008: 9-12, 46, 110, 142-75, 201

⁵ Murphy 2012:14

⁶ Murphy 2012:15

⁷ Army Bonus for Home-School Graduates n.d.

⁸ Shellenberger 1998:9

⁹ Jung 2008:29

Building on previous research, my research focused on examining what sustains the growth of the homeschooling in North Texas. I considered why parents choose to homeschool and how they engage socio-cultural stereotypes as they homeschool.

To address this question, I conducted an ethnographic study of homeschooling in North Texas. Texas, the second most populous state in United States, has arguably the most liberal laws concerning homeschooling. Homeschoolers are not required to register, making it difficult to obtain accurate statistics. However, it is estimated that 2.79 percent of school aged children are homeschooled in Texas.¹⁰ The ethnographic method provides an opportunity to engage with participants and to listen to them describe their experiences with homeschooling. It gave me a glimpse into the informants' lives and their social world. To gain a diverse perspective, I interviewed sixteen parents.

As a former homeschooled student, I already had connections with a homeschooled community. While I had hoped to interview parents of many different religious, social and ethnic categories, I was unable to establish contacts with homeschoolers who did not know me or a common friend. Homeschoolers often mistrust outside research, not knowing how or if their choices will be respected. Many of the parents I interviewed belong to one of three communities: my church, which is Orthodox Presbyterian; the Christian Homeschool Alliance of Texas (CHAT); and a locally based mission organization. I also interviewed three admissions officers at the University of Texas at Arlington, which I attended, and Tarrant County College. Their descriptions gave an idea of the academic readiness and social challenges homeschoolers face in higher education. Given the limited scope of this study and the high Institutional Review Board (IRB) restrictions on interviewing children, I opted to interview only parents.

¹⁰ Zeise n.d

As the growing popularity of homeschooling has spawned a subculture, researchers have begun to realize the potential of its educational and social impacts. In the chapters that follow, I describe how parents emphasized their decision to homeschool as an individual choice shaped by faith, academic excellence, and economics, which I term an “investment strategy.” It is important to note that the critique of public education and private education articulated by my informants echoes concerns expressed by non-homeschooling families. My research shows that the growth of homeschooling is connected to this subculture’s construction of an alternate model of education and its aim to nurture children to become ideal individuals. These models of education and ideal individuals are central to homeschooling families’ construction and imagination of an alternate American culture. My research reiterates previous findings related to cultural resistance and modernity,¹¹ mother’s investment in their children’s childhood¹² and the maintenance of their faith and subculture.¹³

¹¹ Jung 2008

¹² Lois 2013

¹³ Shellenburger 1998

CHAPTER 2

HOMESCHOOL: A LITERATURE SURVEY

First, education in the home has been constant throughout the period [of American history], but its social meaning has changed dramatically.
Milton Gaither, *Homeschool: An American History* (2008)

Previous ethnographic research has brought attention to modernity, gender dynamics, subcultures and critiques of the state. With ethnographic data gathered over ten years in Illinois, Mitchell Stevens' *Kingdom of Children: Culture and Controversy in the Homeschooling Movement* (2001) described US homeschoolers as diverse, brought together by a need to provide an extensive, personalized education. He discussed how homeschoolers demonstrated the centrality of schooling in a modern lifestyle. Parents viewed the education system as incompatible with their children's learning. Many also considered homeschooling the most efficient manner to integrate religious teaching. Mothers used homeschooling to both follow traditional family roles and expressed agency through their choice to be a stay-at-home-mother and homeschooling. They are more than just "housewives," and control a majority of the family agenda and education. the term housewife typically refers to a married woman who primarily works at home, caring for family and household affairs. Stevens noted how the stereotypes given homeschoolers, including lack of socialization and Christian ideals, do not "neatly fit" the families he interviewed. However, certain homeschool communities are less inclusive of diverse ethnic and religious parents. The question of the parents' faith and pedagogy,

versus their children's individual rights, continues to be debated by school administrations and parents.¹⁴

In *Home is Where the School is* (2013), Jennifer Lois described her eight years in Cedar County, in the Pacific Northwest, researching the opinions homeschooling mothers received and the choices they make. She examined in-depth the decision to homeschool and the impact it made on individuals. Many mothers expressed satisfaction in their children's academic achievements and love of learning. As their children began to leave and the mothers looked ahead, they recognized an upcoming identity shift. Mothers developed justifications to respond to the cultural stereotypes and validate their emotional investment. In aligning their choices with culturally acceptable emotions (such as love and sacrifice), mothers found that their decisions to stay at home were more accepted. But the stress of juggling chores, school and relationships can lead to emotional burnout. Lois ends by describing how the emotional drive to sacrifice and invest in children is defined by the short span of childhood. This becomes problematic and stressful when the children come of age, as mothers find it difficult to re-enter previous professions.¹⁵

In *Contested Motherhood: Self and Modernity in South Korean Homeschooling* (2008), Jae Hung Jung describes how homeschooling became a method of cultural resistance and was conceptualized as an experience of modernity in the shadow of American culture. Homeschooling is symbolic of the individual's adoption of Western individualism and modernity. South Korean parents utilize both unschooling (allowing the child to decide what subjects to study) and homeschooling, wishing to facilitate their children's creative capacity and moral development. He also describes the emotional

¹⁴ Stevens 2001:10, 43-51, 72-76, 107, 153, 190

¹⁵ Lois 2013:120, 165, 183-7

intimacy and solid parent-child relationships which further the homeschool investment. This study is important for its description of homeschooling abroad. South Koreans face many of the same stereotypes prevalent in the U.S., including questions about socialization and educational success. In particular, questions of socialization are thorny, as Korean society values social connections. “Who you know is more important than what you know.” Homeschooling is seen as an impediment to professional and social success and socialization is one of the most frequently assessed aspects of homeschooling. In addition, homeschooling in Korea is limited by class divisions and lack of legalization. As social mobility is frequently tied to education, families are taking stronger stances on providing that education. Children are important products of parental accomplishment to them. Mothers, restrained by societal traditions, project their hopes on their children’s accomplishments. In contrast, mothers in America are more likely to be perceived as reverting to tradition when they homeschool. When parents perceive that the schools have failed them socially and academically, they search for alternative education.¹⁶ Jung’s research reveals how modernity and American ideals impact education in South Korean society. Although he uses this research to discuss a dichotomy of tradition and modernity, it is secondarily useful in contrasting the impacts of modernity on South Korea with the United States. Modernity, in the form of western ideals, has created culture shifts through expanding technology and global forces.

While the above studies also show how homeschooling has been used to construct an image of American culture, Eva Shellenberger’s ethnography demonstrates how homeschooling has produced a distinct subculture in Pennsylvania (1998). Although a controversial choice, parents choose to homeschool to better serve their children’s

¹⁶ Jung 2008:9-11, 20-23, 58-67, 103, 117-120

educational, social, and moral needs. Shellenburger also postulates that parents may be homeschooling to find personal fulfillment and meaning in life. They also seek to provide a stronger role for family in modern society. She notes that homeschooling may be viewed as a form of political protest, as parents wish to avoid government control of their children's education. Parents expect their children to maintain Christian culture in a religiously diverse society. As such, there is conflict between the public school system and homeschoolers. The families socialize their children by forming their own networks and homeschool community. Shellenburg argues that educational policy should analyze the potential of homeschooling for social impact. This study reiterates previous findings that although homeschooling is strongly tied to religion, faith is not the sole factor in the homeschooling decision.¹⁷

Other research has concentrated on the academic and social performance of homeschoolers. Jennifer Bachman's *STEM Learning Activity among Home Educating Families* (2011) has analyzed the ability of homeschooling families to provide STEM related courses. Parents' goals are integral to the child's learning. They struggle to provide STEM content academically with a view to inculcating a lifelong love of learning. She notes that parents tend to seek opportunities in the community such as co-ops, to provide a background or support for these subjects¹⁸.

In American society, it appears that nearly everyone has a vision of how society should be changed. Pamela Moss articulates this concept through her ethnography, *Benedictines without Monasteries: Homeschoolers and the Contradictions of Community* (1995). Homeschoolers use pedagogy as a means to reject both state and school

¹⁷ Shellenberger 1998:377-89, 398, 427, 454-7, 467

¹⁸ Bachman 20011:372

communities. In stepping back from society, they find it necessary to create new communities. Homeschooling parents have engaged in different (homeschooling) communities with different levels of involvement.¹⁹

There has been relatively little work done on minorities in homeschooling, despite the fact that they are a rapidly expanding segment of the homeschool population. Here religion and diasporic identity surfaces repeatedly as the motivation for homeschooling. Mazama and Lundy, in their article “African American Homeschooling as Racial Protectionism” (2012), have conveyed the motivations and aspirations behind African American parents who homeschool. Often the Eurocentric curriculum, teacher attitudes, and academic displacement lead to African American dissatisfaction with the system. Parents also worry that their children will experience mistreatment in the public schools. To counter this, and to exercise agency in their children’s education, parents decide to homeschool.²⁰ Laura Sun discussed homeschooling and Chinese immigrant parents in her dissertation, *Dare to Homeschool: Faith and Cultural Experiences of Chinese Christian Mothers* (2007). She argued that Chinese mothers supported their Christian faith, but countered Chinese cultural experiences, and that their Christian communities sustained their decision.²¹ Similarly Richard Kaplan has studied the development of homeschooling among western Buddhists who wish to retain their values.²²

Cultural anxiety is not unique to ethnic and religious minorities in the US. Robert Kunzman’s *Write These Laws on Your Children: Inside the World of Conservative Christian Homeschooling* (2009) has documented homeschooling teaching about

¹⁹ Moss 1995:118-119

²⁰ Mazama and Lundy 2012

²¹ Sun 2007:3

²² Kaplan and Rinpoche 2008

Christian citizenship, and has examined how these children learn to independently analyze data. In contrast to perceptions of homeschooling, one family in Kunzman's study allowed their daughter to switch to public education at her request. Some parents see homeschooling as a way to foster their moral traditions in contrast to academic ideals. Others focus on teaching their children to love the acquisition of knowledge. Parents also wish to provide a solid religious foundation for their children before they internalize contrary worldviews. Kurzman noted that both homeschool and public schools sometimes degrade into teaching a child to pass exams, although both systems also allowed the child opportunity for social development in addition to academics. While these parents express deep-rooted convictions about what their children should internalize, the public school system, with its broad spectrum of moral ideals, is riddled by conflict on this matter. Homeschooling presents opportunities and challenges, an alternative establishment for citizens who must learn to engage and respect each other.²³ In sum, ethnographic studies of homeschooling explain how homeschoolers see themselves in relation to the larger community. In withdrawing from this community, they choose to create new and alternate social ideals.

²³ Kunzman 2009:9, 37, 65, 96, 159, 183, 112, 222

CHAPTER 3

NARRATIVES: THE ETHNOGRAPHER AND PARTICIPANTS

I never had the desire [to homeschool]. But, we lived in Guatemala. The church had a school. They wanted me to teach music in exchange for educating the children, but all the discipline was through yelling; and all the learning by memorizing. So, we went with the [homeschool] curriculum my sister-in-law used.

—Isabel²⁴

Blistering Texas heat beat down upon my head, the kind of fierce heat from which there is no escape. The crumbling asphalt road was like a dozen others in the countryside, bordered by neatly trimmed lawns and tufts of high grass. My path led me beneath patches of shade interspersed with a face full of sunlight. Brick houses hid behind trees and a long row of hedge, neatly marked by iron numbers. Numbers didn't mean anything to me; I searched for the "last house on the left before the bridge." I was looking for a friend of a friend, my first taste of ethnographic fieldwork. I've never been especially prone to misdirection, but the stress of interviews was making me nervous enough to second-guess myself. The road curved, gently sloping down to an older concrete bridge, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Ten minutes later I was inside the long brick home, listening to a mother over her children's rambunctious play.

3.1 "I Need You to Sign This."

When I first began planning an outline for this project, I never imagined some of the places it would lead me, or the people I would meet. The parents I wanted to

²⁴ All names are pseudonyms, to protect the anonymity of the informants.

interview were voids in my imagination, colored by the excitement of fieldwork. But before I could begin, I discovered the dull tedium and rushed anxiety that is paperwork. While I read, researched, and pieced together my own theories, I waited for the day when I could listen to the experiences of my informants. Anthropology taught me to hear how people relate to the world and express their culture and identity. As an ‘insider’ to homeschooling, I could provide answers to motivations behind the decision to homeschool. As an anthropologist, I needed to step back and be prepared to hear my informants speak about their own motivations for homeschooling and its contribution toward shaping a model education. In this role I had to also be prepared to question and analyze taken-for granted truths claimed by homeschooling parents and their critics.

The anthropological concepts of emic and etic are often at the forefront of a researcher’s mind. How can we, as anthropologists, yet human beings, keep a critical and analytical distance from our subjects? This can be complicated by the personal background of the researcher. In my case, an emic perspective as a former homeschooled student gave me background knowledge and opened doors for me to interview participants.

Several misunderstandings between overzealous social workers and homeschool parents, and their struggle to pass and maintain legislation favorable to homeschooling have left a bitter taste in many homeschooling parents’ mouths. Parents tend to associate media exposure and requests for interviews as attempts to stereotype homeschooling as a lifestyle that is antisocial and constraining. Thus homeschoolers are understandably reluctant to open their doors to researchers, not knowing how they might be portrayed, or

whether their views would be appreciated.²⁵ Parents in my study stated that people see them as unsocialized introverts, or think their child has physical or mental handicaps. Jennifer Lois, in her 2013 ethnography, described the process of gaining the acceptance of the community. She was neither a homeschooler nor mother, and initially appeared to have nothing in common with her informants. She stated: “Because it endeavors to uncover the meanings people give to their lives, field research requires a great deal of trust and rapport between researcher and the subjects.”²⁶ In contrast, the world of homeschooling was already familiar to me. Yet this did not mean that I was welcomed by all homeschooling families. I was refused interviews. I emailed five local co-ops, and received replies from one. When I failed to gain access to the homeschooling families I hoped to interview, I decided to turn my attention to my own community. I started within my own local Presbyterian church; almost all the children in this church are homeschooled. Members introduced me to friends, many of whom are part of a locally based mission organization. All are married. Many are of European descent, although one informant is Asian and one is Mexican. Most describe themselves as Christian. Some have only one or two children: others have ten. All appear to be middle class, based on the appearance of their homes and possessions. The majority of my informants live in close proximity in the Metroplex. In particular, the mission provides housing where many families have formed a community. Their flexible schedules and common interests have helped form a cohesive bond, and become part of the subculture.

²⁵ “As for the survey, not knowing how the information will be used, we are advised not to participate unless we know for sure it is conducted by an organization we know for sure where it stands in supporting homeschooling,” a respondent emailed to anthropologist Laura Sun (Sun 2007:17).

²⁶ Lois 2013:26

Having grown up around several of my informants, I already had their trust. Instead of an anthropologist, my informants saw me as a friend of their children. They could situate my research within my past identity as a homeschooler, and were interested in my excited descriptions of anthropology. Several sought out other parents to help me. Being introduced as a friend gave me instant status, validating my requests. As a member of the homeschool community, informants understood I had knowledge of some of their struggles and hopes.

To get at the answers to my questions on homeschooling, I interviewed sixteen parents, one leader of a homeschool co-op, and three admissions officers, at the University of Texas at Arlington and Tarrant County College. Thirteen of the sixteen parents were women. Although the decision to homeschool is generally made by both parents, frequently the mother is most involved in the day-to-day tasks. Five parents attend my church, eight attend CHAT, and six belong to the mission organization (Table 3.1). Seven parents belonged to more than one of these communities; two parents belonged to none.

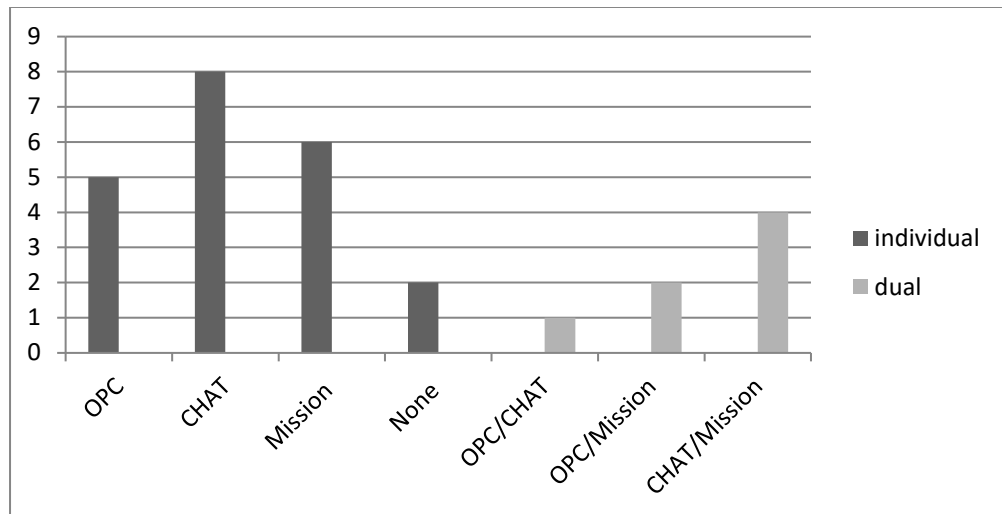


Table 3.1: Parents' affiliations; Number of parents is sixteen; Table considers both the individual affiliations and any parents who belonged to more than one community.

I asked the parents ten questions, designed to examine the motivation for joining the homeschooling movement, and to assess why they remained a part of it. Several questions revolved around the stereotypes homeschoolers face. In order to assess cultural shifts and determine how homeschoolers are viewed in society, I asked parents to describe how people reacted to the news that they homeschooled, and if they thought American culture was becoming more accepting of homeschoolers. Their answers provided the themes of identity, investment strategy, outsider perceptions of the subculture, and homeschooler reactions that I address in this study. Another perspective on homeschooling came from admissions officers in colleges. The admissions officers I met were familiar with homeschooled students since a significant number enrolled in the local colleges, and this proved to be an excellent source for me to gain an independent perspective on homeschooling.

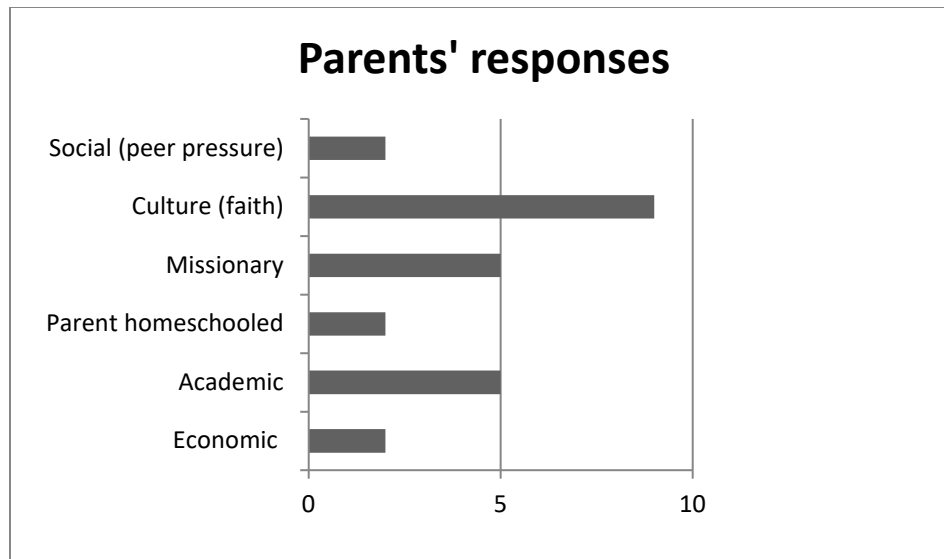


Table 3.2: Total number of parents is 16. Note that many parents gave more than one answer.

When I asked parents why they decided to homeschool their children, many responded by describing their homeschooling experience as a process of trial and error. Isabel, who homeschooled her three children, determined that the private school pedagogy fell short of her expectations. Even though she had no prior wish to homeschool, yelling and memorization were inappropriate, and she sought an alternative. Her perceptions and desire for homeschooling shifted, and it fulfilled a deficiency. This was a pattern in several interviews. From this perspective, homeschooling offered parents more control over how their children were educated.

“My firstborn is very peer-oriented, will do anything to be accepted.” Emma’s discovery that her son would injure himself in order to be accepted by peers led her to consider homeschooling. At the time, she did not know any homeschoolers. She did not stress problems with the academic portion of public schools, but with social aspects. Elena, a mother of two, described a similar theme. “We didn’t like the influences of

school. We've noticed [negative behavior] in others [publicly educated]." Parents endeavored to control the pedagogical and social environments to which their children were exposed. Homeschooling provided a means for them to remove the child from these influences, while they considered ways to replace perceived negative experiences with positive outcomes. Emma explained how they joined a homeschool group, "to give the kids friends with common interests." Parents were persuaded by the control homeschool offered. In this way, the journey they embarked upon includes not only their children's future, but their own. They underwent a lifestyle change, which began when they took their children's education into their own hands.

This journey brought peace, conflict, joy, struggle, hope, and resolution to their family. For some, at the end of their homeschooling career, the hopes and promises of this choice did not bring about the expected results. Many stated that their perceptions and ideals of homeschooling changed since they began, the process evolving as they came to understand more about themselves and teaching. The reason parents began homeschooling is not necessarily the reason they continued. Parents interviewed most often stated faith as a major motivation for homeschooling. This was conveyed through values, a calling, or missionary service. Informants often described various secondary reasons, including individual attention for struggling or advanced children. Often these motives become intertwined, and different ones become more important at different times.

3.2 Faith

My research demonstrated that faith is an important motivational factor for homeschooling. Nine of sixteen respondents stated that values were an essential

advantage of homeschooling. It ensured their children imbibed convictions central to their faith. Bethany, a mother of ten, stated that initially she wanted to know what her children were learning, because she felt directly responsible to God for their upbringing. She identified herself as a Christian. Other parents, including Samuel, a father of three, agreed. “We wanted to instruct them in the ways of the Lord, make sure they knew more than just facts, and were concerned about moral teachings in public schools.” Samuel also identified himself as a Christian, wishing to teach his children traditional biblical views. When I asked them to explain convictions central to their Christian faith they pointed to putting Christ first and living according to His Word, the Bible.

Several parents articulated the decision to homeschool as a calling. When asked why he chose to homeschool his daughter, Carter responded “No idea. Just wanted to. A calling.” He further explained this choice as a preference over daycare, and subsequently public school. He and his wife wanted their child to learn creatively and comprehensively, without peer pressure. Both Ana and Sarah, with thirteen kids between them, explained that God wanted them to homeschool. Sarah wished to base her children’s education “on the Word of God.” Ana removed her son from a private school, saying that their subsequent children would make it difficult to continue to afford private school. She quickly saw the benefit of homeschool, as her son still could not read after a year in private school. Through her teaching, he quickly caught up to his peers.

In these interviews, public schools were frequently evoked as a repository of an unacceptable belief system. Parents expressed concern over teachings in public schools and worried that their children would internalize values contradictory to their faith. Parents emphasized their disapproval of public schools for exposing children to drugs and

sex, which were seen as morally corrupting. Through these their children would be corrupted by the external forces of the public school. Elena said: “I didn’t want the kids to be exposed to sexting, cussing and immoral influences.” Sarah agreed: “I’m excited to see a lot of homeschooled girls not dating serially. They have value in their lives, and think for themselves.”

The “Quiverfull” movement is one such example. Large families are considered necessary for saturation of Christianity into modern culture. Some adults coming out of the movement have reported extreme restrictions on choice, whereby all decisions were made solely by the father.²⁷ In some cases, women homeschool and birth large families because they have been told it is the only way to get to heaven. Wishing to return to biblical principles and protest a modern cultural which is seen as being immoral, some homeschoolers take that ideal to the extreme and create legalistic forms of their faith.

While certain homeschool subcultures utilize alternative education to reinvent patriarchy in a modern age, others allow for balanced decision making by both parents. One father I interviewed admitted it was necessary to convince to his wife to homeschool. “It impacted [her] more, she’s from a family of teachers.” But one woman informed me that her husband had been reluctant, for similar reasons. “His parents were not supportive. Mostly because it is not the thing to do.” Most of the women I talked to indicated that homeschooling was a mutual decision. None of them appeared to regret it. Traditional Christian beliefs assign specific gender roles, which appear to align well with homeschooling, perhaps explaining why homeschooling is so closely tied to Christianity in America. However, homeschooling is not limited to fundamentalist Christians, but is

²⁷ Marcotte 2014

also being used by many other religions as well. Both Christians and Muslims have been labeled extremists and fundamentalists, restricting both to society and the individual. Critics of homeschooling have voiced concerns that homeschooling is used to further extremist ideals. The American homeschooling discourse can offer powerful insights into examining how gender roles are produced.

Gaither quoted Zygmunt Bauman's idea of "liquid modernity" to explain how the individual is free within culture, molding homeschooling to enhance their modern lifestyles. Bauman describes modernity as "melting the solids (of culture)" to discover a new culture.²⁸ Faith is not the only reason for homeschooling; the modern drive for education and parental control may also become a factor. Homeschoolers are creating a new form of education and subculture, one which allows them to take charge of their children's education. As modernity enhances travels, this new aspect created strangers as cultures begin to interact and share space. Modern mankind places boundaries to claim uniqueness and to separate from "the other."²⁹ Homeschoolers often attempt to maintain separateness from other subcultures through their educational practices.

Many participants in this study described how they initially began homeschooling while pursuing a missionary career. As I noted earlier, a majority of my interviewees were part of a missionary group. My informants served in a number of different countries, including Chad, Ethiopia, Guatemala, and Iraq. Thus, their evoking missionary activity as a reason for homeschooling is understandable in this context and resonates more broadly. In the past, missionaries delegated the education of children to boarding

²⁸ Bauman 2000:3

²⁹ Bauman 2000:107

schools. Now, missionaries tend toward homeschooling. This has been a recent shift, one which has made homeschooling the norm for missionaries.

Peter and Elena began homeschooling their children after moving with their family to Chad. In the remote village to which they were transferred, the educational system was below expected standards. The main form of learning was rote memorization, with no creative outlet. Rote memorization is seen as an archaic pedagogical model. Hands-on experience and creativity is prioritized and valued as a modern pedagogical model. This concern was repeated by other missionary parents. When the local system provided poor quality education, many felt that the most economical option was homeschooling.

Several families also practiced homeschooling because they anticipated doing so in missionary work. Michelle began homeschooling to make the anticipated move to Africa easier for her children. Previously the children were enrolled in a private school, but she wanted to test out various curriculums before carrying the books overseas. Interestingly, while missionary activity turned parents towards homeschooling, in some cases homeschooling turned parents towards missionary activity. Jenny and her husband had no plans to be missionaries when they removed their children from a private school. She described this as “a calling to make major life changes,” and it was “the best thing at the time.” Both felt a need to honor God in how they spent their money, and were convinced that spending a significant portion on private school and modern life was not the best. Living a “simpler life” enabled them to consider missionary work in Iraq. No longer able to afford their house, they had fewer ties to the States.

Missionary families tend to serve a five year rotation, with four years spent abroad and one in the US.³⁰ During the year on furlough (stateside), these families must decide whether or not to continue homeschooling their children, or to enroll them in public schools. Isabel and her husband decided to homeschool their children in Guatemala after discovering the school disciplined children through verbal abuse. She notes that they have only been in the US two years, and it “didn’t make sense to bother [enrolling children]. The majority of kids in the area are homeschooled.” Many of the missionaries attached to this organization live in housing nearby. Close proximity to like-minded families allowed them to build a community. When their children completed the day’s work, they spent the rest of the day socializing. The availability of a homeschool community may be a factor in the decision to homeschool in the US, in addition to avoiding the complexities of enrolling in the school system. The missionaries form a fluid community, attaining friendships with adults and children who understand what it is like to move and leave friends every few years; a revolving door where someone is always coming or going.³¹

Moving back to the U.S. is a big transition for missionaries. Homeschoolers with missions experience found more acceptance overseas than in the U.S. Peter remarked: “the Africans weren’t surprised—because everything white people do is different.” Nicole noted that Americans weren’t surprised to discover they homeschooled while they were overseas, but expressed confusion and displeasure when they continued to do so in the states. “In Africa, it was acceptable...[here] people think we are doing a disservice to the kids.” For American families abroad, homeschooling was perceived as “different”

³⁰ This varies by family and organization.

³¹ Not all parents opt to homeschool upon returning to the U.S.; Michelle sent her children to a private school and was interested in doing so again.

and therefore part of their American culture. However, upon their return to the states, homeschoolers found this difference positions them as marginal to American culture. In other words, homeschooling is readily perceived as American culture abroad, but not so in the U.S. This demonstrates how American culture can be reimagined differently in the U.S. and abroad.

3.3 Homeschooling Subculture

Homeschooled children have different educational, social, and cultural experiences than their counterparts in public schools. Homeschooling is designed so parents can exercise control over these aspects. Bourdieu argued that schools perpetuate a culture (habitus), and have more ability to shape young students than their families.³² Parents indicated that the public school's teachings were unacceptable to them. "The school system is unsalvageable," one informant told me. "As a Christian, it could not get to where I am happy." Several parents felt that the public schools were "intolerant" or at least unsympathetic of their Christian faith. Isabel mentioned "being tired of the public schools not including Christians. They'll teach about other religions, but teaching Christianity somehow discriminates against everybody else." Instead of spending six to eight hours daily in school, homeschool students remain at home or in situations under their parents' control. Therefore, homeschoolers must produce a subculture to replace what they rejected. The conservative Christian movement, often tied to homeschooling, constructs itself as counter-cultural. Parents often find that cultural concerns justify their decision to homeschooling.

"I'm not totally trying to shelter them; there are reasons we [as a society] don't let kids drink, or drive before a certain age, we want them to be old enough to handle it.

³² Nash 1990:435

Same for ideas, movies,” Michelle stated. Nor was she the only parent to express this. The stereotypical homeschooler has little knowledge of (much less access to) drugs, gangs, or sex, to the point where he or she cannot function in the “real” world. Parents expressed concern over *when* their children encounter these things, not *if* they do. Restricting access by age enabled parents to build a prior foundation, so the child could handle the concepts in an appropriate manner.

Peter noted: “You don’t really see how the worldview has become their own, until they make choices without parental input.” Two other parents said that homeschool influenced choice to a certain extent, but friends and maturity were equally important. Michelle articulated: “Homeschool makes it easier [to instill values].” Parents hope that their children will be able to make “good” choices because they are not constantly in a “negative atmosphere.” The day-to-day transmittance of morals, cultural values, and lifestyle impact the child’s goals and decisions.

“Homeschoolers are part of a different culture. Not a bad thing, but they feel separate.” Jenny said. Lara added, “The children are looked on as outsiders, they don’t quite fit in. We get a subculture, like in the church youth group. The teens split into two groups—homeschooled and public schooled.” In order to counter this, homeschoolers actively seek out and create their own social networks.

The overwhelming majority (twelve of sixteen) parents interviewed affirmed their belief that homeschooling shaped their children’s lives. Jenny responded, “Absolutely! They have a more cohesive sense of family, and will make career choices based on that. A BIG difference in behavior.” Allison added: “Socially, I have seen tremendous benefits. Just being around people, instead of sitting at a desk, being herded around.”

According to a *Reader's Digest* (September 2014) article titled "Thirteen Things Homeschoolers Won't Tell You," number twelve rearticulates this frustration. "Why do public school parents always ask about socialization? Sitting quietly at a desk all day does not seem very social to me." Often, education is directed by political ideals, not what is best for the individual's learning styles and social ability. Children are expected to spend six to eight hours in a classroom, whether they need to or not. Homeschooling, with its flexibility, gets the children away from a desk and places them in interactive environments.

Tiffany, who has several adult children, has watched her children learn how to interact with people of varying ages and backgrounds. "They are more aware that people are raised differently, because homeschoolers are more easily able to interact with people of all ages....I notice that my kids have friends of all ages." Other parents agreed, including Isabel: "There is more interaction between adults and kids, not as much of a division." She added: "They just enjoy friendships [without peer pressure]." Homeschooling, with its flexible hours, gives children the chance to spend more time in multi-age groups, whereas in public schools children are generally restricted to groups of their peers. Carter stated: "They reach maturity much faster. Not bad, but hard to deal with." Transitioning from child to adult is difficult for most children, particularly in a modern culture.

Emma noted how "some [publicly schooled] kids have thick skins. Homeschoolers, not so much." In a public school, peer pressure is a driving force. Being different can result in pressure to conform, and children learn how to handle that

pressure. Those higher on the popularity ladder shape the acceptable, causing stress on those who do not fit their preconceived norm.

However, Bethany disagreed that public school was necessary to teach children diversity and social norms. She was bullied for “messaging up the curve” by not intentionally failing exams. She saw her children flourish as homeschoolers, developing self worth and confidence. By removing her children from negative pressures, she enabled them to take their own time in discovering how to interact. As a result, her children “had only to mention the family name and were hired.” Homeschoolers, with interaction between many age groups, are accustomed to being among and relating to people of all ages.

The unorthodox methods utilized by parents have created a new subculture. Subculture is a diverse variation within a culture. Ken Gelder states in his book *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (2007), that “subcultures are social worlds, and conformity or non-conformity must be understood in social terms.” At times, subcultures are at a certain level disconnected from the larger culture, with a focus on the priorities and necessities of the subculture’s goals. Gelder further describes how subcultures carry narratives of their origins to embody their purpose.³³ He also discusses how these narratives may be a product of both the subculture and the culture around it. Dick Hebdige, in his book *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, also describes how subcultures revise symbols of the larger culture to express resistance.³⁴ Homeschooling parents have, to varying degrees, placed their children outside of the “norm” of public schools. The Homeschool subculture necessitates a connection between parents and

³³ Gelder 2007:3-4

³⁴ Hebdige 2002:17-19

children and the homeschooling community. While many homeschoolers articulate ideals and experiences as part of this identity, outsiders have often created and imposed alternate identities upon them. Many of these fragmented sub-cultural narratives are articulated stereotypically in American culture.

Different homeschooling subcultures serve to bring together subsets of homeschoolers. A Google search brings up dozens of different co-ops in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Jenny stated: “I’ve heard of co-ops that are not religious based, more mainstream.” Many are religious: Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, or claiming no religion; others are academic, and some are restricted to an ethnic group. Some homeschooling parents do not find them useful, others order their school years around classes offered.

Thirteen out of sixteen parents had joined a co-op at some point in their educational career. Co-ops range from the social atmosphere of CHAT (Christian Homeschool Alliance of Texas) to the legal protection of HSLDA (Homeschool Legal Defense Association). Most parents joined to provide like-minded friends for their children. Emma described how they underwent a transition, going from the “odd ones” to understanding that “all of these kids [at the co-op] are like me.” Jessica concurred: “Give the kids opportunity to be with other kids.” The social benefits were not only for the kids. Elena stated: “Social interaction for both. Staying home was not easy.” Homeschool co-ops provide parents a chance to gather and meet others.

In addition parents sought out co-ops for academic support. Especially before the turn of the century, homeschooling appeared experimental. Parents often had little idea how to make this new system work. Bethany said: “Originally [we joined] for support and to learn how to homeschool. To do weird stuff, because it was all weird.” Co-ops

provide social organization of “weird” and socially deviant homeschoolers with friendships and support for both parents and children.

Other parents joined a co-op to provide their children with additional academic advantages. Co-ops often present opportunities for activities, including sports and field trips. The social gatherings stimulate friendships and provide the stability of an organizing entity. Lara enrolled her children in CHAT so they could be involved in the robotics program. It “was important not to be stuck at home. There are so many ways to get involved.” Isabel preferred CHAT over other local co-ops because of cost and academics. While enhancing classes were helpful, the ridged eight-hour daily schedules of other co-ops were too reminiscent of public schools. Homeschoolers value their flexibility, the right to decide to join or forgo an organization. Cater explained: “We were not impressed. It was not necessary [for socialization or academics].”

3.4 Private Schools: Social and Economic Aspects

Although parents opt out of public schools because of faith, they do not necessarily gravitate towards religiously-oriented private schools. Homeschool parents are divided on their opinions of private education. This is surprising, because private schools are run by religious organizations, hold out the promise of faith-based education and alternate pedagogical methods, and are not required to teach state curriculum. The reluctance for private schooling begins with its exorbitant fee structure, which can only be an option for upper class families.

Several parents expressed a wish to join a private school, lamenting the high costs associated with this education. Michelle, a mother of four, the oldest of whom is eight, stated that she enjoyed the private school she attended. However, the steep costs of

this education for her growing family were prohibitive. For five hundred dollars, she could educate all four of her children for a year, a fraction of the cost of a private institution. Isabel made an interesting suggestion about the relationship between expensive private education and the growth in homeschooling. She held that if private schools were more affordable, perhaps homeschool would not have experienced a massive surge in growth. Isabel's observation highlighted the economics of faith-based homeschooling. Households with modest means and large families had little choice but to homeschool.

Economic considerations were not the sole hurdle to private education. Just as public schools were believed to be sources of moral corruption, some parents harbored doubts about private education. Jenny articulated that a faith-based private institution's "worldview is not always biblical." Sarah agreed: "They [private schools] are not always like-minded theologically." While many parents desire for their children to receive religiously-based education, they disagree on the specifics. Another parent said she heard that "troubled children are sent to private school." A private education did not necessarily remove parental concerns of peer pressure, curriculum, and flexibility.

Nine of sixteen parents held that both the flexible curriculum and pacing available in homeschooling made it distinct from public and private schools. These parents wished for more control than a private institution could give them. This concept of control comes from the ability to choose any curriculum—or none at all. Today, there are a vast number of resources available for homeschooling. Tiffany stated: "The curriculum is selected by you. The cost varies greatly." Much of this curriculum is based on a conservative

Christian viewpoint, as companies have learned there is a sizable market in this area. Homeschool curriculum from other viewpoints remains costly, but is available.

The question of whether or not homeschooling will become multi-generational is of interest to critics, advocates and education researchers. However, evaluating the long-term impact of homeschooling in contemporary America will require a wait for the currently homeschooled students to come of age. The characterization of the distinction among homeschooling, public schools, and private schools emerged from the parents' own schooling experiences. Since homeschooling was illegal in Texas prior to 1980, it is presumptuous to argue that homeschooled parents inadvertently homeschool their children. "Homeschooling," one informant stated, "was illegal in Texas prior to the 80s. How could any of us have been homeschooled?"³⁵ Bethany explained how she was bullied in public school for "messing up the [grade] curve." She felt her education was a joke, and didn't prepare her for anything in the real world. Other parents wished they could have been homeschooled. Ana said she likes to learn, and never realized she could learn "like this," with flexibility and intensive studies. Although he attended a public school, Carter saw his father as his best teacher. Parents who attended public schools could articulate the problems with the system, as they experienced it themselves. Several parents had an obvious desire to ensure their children never dealt with those problems.

Not all parents were negatively impacted by a public education. Tiffany saw that the culture and education her public school provided was very different from the one her children attended. She described how the system had changed. Homeschooling may be a

³⁵ When I asked parents about their educational background, fourteen respondents (of sixteen) said they were not homeschooled, while two had some experience as a homeschooler. Out of those fourteen, eleven attended public school, and two attended private institutions.

reflexive action, a way of dealing with perceived inefficiencies of public education and slow degradation of the American educational system at large.

Two mothers cited their homeschool experience as playing a role in the decision to homeschool their children. Michelle was homeschooled for one year, which she described as “a failed experiment.” Her mother was not at home, and all siblings were away at school, resulting in little extra-curricular activity. She resolved this issue with her own children by ensuring they receive sufficient extra-curricular activities and social engagement. Meanwhile, Lara’s parents were missionaries in Africa. She spent time in private schools in Germany and then transitioned to a private tutor in Africa. She described this experience as positive, but noted some of her friends had less productive experiences. Both Michelle and Lara had familiarity with the same homeschooling subculture in which they chose to place their children. While their homeschool background impacted both childhoods, in neither case did this acquaintance seem to be the deciding factor in homeschooling their children. However, being homeschooled introduced them to the possibilities and alerted them to the potential challenges.

3.5 Academic Excellence

“Public schools are designed to fit the average—the middle fifty percent—of the population. The other fifty percent—twenty-five above the average and twenty-five below—will not be able to utilize these services to their full extent,” one of my informants stated. Academic excellence, whether or not it is articulated in conjunction with faith, is an increasing concern of homeschool parents. Those who would otherwise have no concern with the public school system’s curriculum and cannot afford private education, find that this focus on the majority often leaves other children unaided. Eight

parents stated that time spent one on one with their children was an immeasurable emotional and academic advantage of homeschooling. This claim of individual attention, leading to better learning outcomes, echoed private school approaches that tend to emphasize small classes and promise better academic results.

Homeschooling was not at the forefront of Tiffany's radar as her children settled into the public school system. Each child, like herself, demonstrated advanced academic capability. At this point the school's priorities and hers clashed. Noting her child was bored in class, she requested the child be moved up a grade level. The school's response, which she considered unprofessional, was for "the child to sit and color until the class caught up." At that point, the only doable option left was homeschooling. Since then, Tiffany has been able to tailor the education to her children. The individualized attention enabled by homeschooling was cited again and again by parents. This attention allows children to excel in areas where they might otherwise fail. Carter cited a Harvard study which stated that teachers get about three minutes of one-on-one interaction with the child. Other parents echoed a variation of this claim, but came to the same conclusion: public schools do not allow for as much personalized attention as they provide through homeschooling.

Allison had two reasons for homeschooling: one for each daughter. Both her biological children (one son, one daughter) attended a public school until the family adopted a daughter from India. Upon learning the child spoke little English the school opted to send her to the English as Second Language (ESL) program. During this time, she was immersed in as much Spanish as English, causing further distress as she struggled to acquire English. In addition, the young student had several learning

disabilities and social difficulties. Allison was not able to address her child's needs while she attended school, nor could the school handle the child's behavior.

Additionally, her biological daughter hated public school. Although only in second grade, she was under intense pressure to perform academically. She was required to retake the state test twice, so the school could claim her on their passing record. After careful consideration, Allison and her husband decided to homeschool all three children for one year, so that their adopted daughter could learn English at home and their biological daughter could learn in a supportive environment. However, once the year ended, they continued homeschooling. "It was what they needed," Allison stated. Homeschooling allowed her to focus on all her children's needs. The older two were given the option to return to public school: an offer both turned down. One-on-one attention helped both her daughters to develop a love of learning, and the flexibility of homeschooling allowed them more time to socialize.

3. 6 "They Come Cheaper by the Dozen"³⁶: Homeschool as an Investment

"I treasure memories from early on, sitting with the kids, working and teaching basic stuff. Being able to participate." (Peter, 9.25.2014)

It is *time* that provides a nucleus for family and creates the child-parent relationship so crucial to homeschooling. Homeschooling parents informed me that the time spent with their children was invaluable. They invest massive amounts of time and money into their children's education, hoping they will be prepared for college or a job. The sacrifices parents make represent the time and earning potential of at least one person, and can often equate to full-time tutoring. In such cases, even parents with many

³⁶ This refers to a book describing a family with twelve children in turn-of-the-century America. When asked if the children were all his, the father would cheerfully reply, "they come cheaper by the dozen." (Gilbreth 1948)

children can provide more individualized attention than any teacher in public or private schools.

Sixty-one percent have four or more children.³⁷ Large families are a different dynamic than small ones. Homeschooling allows families to invest in each child, including those with many children. While not all homeschool families have more than the average number of children, a significant portion do. Homeschooling parents in this study had an average of 4.7 children, well above the national average of 2.06. When asked if people expressed surprise upon learning the family homeschooled, several parents replied “not when they see how many we have.” Bethany articulated that people count the children and state “I betcha homeschool too!” Large families have become synonymous with homeschooling. A certain disconnect exists between these families and American culture. In contrast to American culture, these parents are choosing to have many children. The decision to have many children is extremely personal, and represents rejection of modern values and an alternate investment strategy.

Investment is also conceptualized as the benefits parents receive from producing academically and morally adept children. As noted earlier this can be framed as part of “a calling,” a critique of public education, a convenient arrangement to complement a missionary career, and as financial rationality. Parents worldwide, particularly among those of the upper class, invest heavily in the next generation. The parents I interviewed are middle class, able to afford to have only one parent working.

Bourdieu argues that schools must create a universal pedagogy, which can encompass the needs of unique individuals.³⁸ “Homeschooling lets the student evolve, to

³⁷ Murphy 2012:25

³⁸ Bourdieu 1990:437

become more self-directed,” Carter asserted. Parents told me how their students were able to grasp concepts at their own pace. They found that the public school’s pedagogy did not encompass their child’s learning capacity. Class is important to Bourdieu’s discussion, as some students are more able to benefit from school instruction. Integration of all types of students into the current school system is problematic.³⁹ The majority of homeschoolers are middle-class.⁴⁰ Students with a stronger family life and higher economic class have a higher probability of success. However, homeschooling middle class parents are trying to increase these odds through increased personal interaction.

Bauman described modernity as “melting the solids,” allowing humanity to create anew. Modern mankind claims to be unique and separate from other cultures.⁴¹ In contrast to previous traditional parenting, modern parenting is characterized by fewer children and an investment in material and academic advantages. Raising the perfect child is perceived to be crucial in a modern society. Parents challenge these appearances of perfection when they have many children, and they invest heavily in each. Homeschooling is often tied to this. Instead of investing in a high quality school, the children are kept at home, massively reducing educational costs in some aspects. Purchasing school uniforms for one child is expensive, for six it would be outside of their budget. Parents have the entire day to spend individual time with each child. Time invested results in deeper relationships and increased academic performance.⁴² It is this academic performance which can enable children to seek higher degrees. Former

³⁹ Bourdieu 1990:437

⁴⁰ Murphy 2012:27

⁴¹ Bauman 2000:3, 107

⁴² Gaither 2008:211

homeschool students with high SAT/ACT scores can apply for and receive scholarships, enabling them to achieve higher education.

“If a person decides to homeschool, they must be dedicated. They can’t just say that homeschool is fun and freedom, which is true to a certain extent. I had to decide—because my mornings are not free. There are things I had to give up. The parent must make a commitment.” Although homeschooling has tangible benefits, parents make decisions to give up some personal goals. Homeschooling parents are directly responsible for their kids 24/7. In addition to teaching them morals, traditions, and responsibility, they must also ensure that the child attains elementary educational skills. They give up job opportunities and personal time. Parents are not shy in describing how they pay school taxes *and* for all the costs associated with homeschooling.

In addition to the academic advantage of one-on-one time with each child, homeschooling solidifies parent-child relationships. Parents repeatedly voiced their gratitude for spending that time with their children. Ana states: “It’s nice to know I taught them to read.” Parenting can be considered a second career, and homeschooling enables a parent to retreat from outside responsibilities and concentrate on their children. In some families, both parents have a career and homeschool, either shuffling work schedules to accommodate or one taking a lighter paycheck. In the end, most informants found homeschooling as rewarding as any other job. A few disagreed, including one who stated that she “was tired. Had it.” While homeschooling fits many schedules and lifestyles, it is not the best strategy for everyone. Homeschooling is considered, not a substitute for a career, but an actual career. Parents assume responsibility for the children all day long, without the relief of an eight hour school day. However, as Bethany articulated: “I get to

see the value everyday....that light bulb moment.” Parents appear more likely to continue investing in home education when they see the fruits of their labors.

When asked if a reform of the public school system would be sufficient for them to place their children in public school, nine parents said they would continue to homeschool. Jessica said: “Honestly, I just like being with my children.” This is not to say that all relationships of homeschoolers are restricted to parents or siblings, or that all homeschool parents have healthy relationships with their children. Allison stated that homeschool was “more emotionally worth it, getting to know my kids as people.” Samuel agreed that “the intangible benefits are far greater.” Homeschooling parents are aware that children swiftly grow into adults, and many made an effort to engage their children in this early stage. Homeschooling allows parents to spend time that would be otherwise devoted to a career with their children. In what might be seen as counter-cultural, these parents challenge convention by taking on a full-time teaching role.

Parents find homeschooling a reflexive exercise, in which they receive emotional and interpersonal benefits. Talents and training could have been utilized in a career are used to broaden their teaching abilities. The time, energy and money invested have multiple implications for society, including who is able to utilize this form of investment. While the time spent teaching is equivalent to having a private tutor, not all families possess the ability to sustain the economic loss from a stay-at-home parent. Whereas having and investing in only one or two children was previously seen as a first world privilege, homeschooling is changing this dynamic. In order to meet and sustain the economy to raise and home educate a higher number of children, a college education is nearly always necessary.

Teachers in public schools are required to have higher education. What level of education do homeschooling parents tend to have, and how does this impact their decision to homeschool, and their children's education?

“Obviously homeschool is not for everyone. The parents need to be educated.” Lara, mother of five, stated (9.29.2014). One of the biggest disadvantages she cited, and that was echoed in my interviews of other parents, was accountability—not only to ensure the child stays on track, but for the parent to compensate in areas where their education may be weak. Murphy, in his 2012 collection of homeschool statistics, noted that homeschool parents are somewhere between “somewhat” and “consistently” better educated than parents who send their children to public school. An estimated ninety percent of homeschooling parents earned a high school diploma, and forty to fifty percent a college degree.⁴³ Carter stated that both he and his wife had graduate degrees, and many of the other parents interviewed had at least some level of college education.

How crucial is a college degree to the success of homeschooling? Sarah, mother of seven, testified that she had no formal education, and was “a high school dropout who failed everything.” Although she admits they never finished a school year, four of her seven children love to learn, which was her primary goal as a homeschooling parent. Two of her children entered higher education, and one is completing her doctorate studies. One disadvantage that several parents admitted was their weakness in a subject area. Both Allison and Isabel said they were not strong writers. However, this does not automatically result in a child not attaining this skill. Parents compensated through co-ops, homeschool groups which offer academic and/or social opportunities, to ensure their children would not fall behind.

⁴³ Murphy 2012:17

The parents I interviewed made thoughtful decisions to homeschool. However, even when both parents had equal academic credentials, it was the mother that was the primary homeschooling parent. Women gave up lucrative careers to follow their personal convictions to provide an education for their children. How do they reach the decision that the mother should be the primary teacher? This may be due in part to traditional expectations.

Through homeschooling, women are stepping into more “traditional” gender roles and also countering stereotypes about modern families in which women are expected to join the workforce. In a modern society, both parents are often expected to contribute to the family’s financial earnings. Mothers with a higher degree contend that their education better prepare them to educate their children and wish to be treated as any other professionals. As professionals, many simply want, as Lara states, “respect for this choice. People don’t take homeschoolers as serious. Because they physically drive to school and are taught, why is it assumed they learn more than those who open a book and read?” Her statement highlights the perspectives of homeschool mothers, who see their actions as an investment in their children’s future, yet are frustrated that their time appears to be considered insignificant by those who do not homeschool. Several of my informants noted negative responses when they chose to become stay-at-home mothers. Michelle cited a “bias towards stay at home mothers, because of a bias against children.” She felt that the mainstream American culture looked down at her for having more than the “accepted” number of children (she is expecting her fifth), and this was conveyed to her through disapproving glances and sharp words. Isabel, another parent I interviewed,

recalled a similar experience. She stated that one lady was “adamant that I should teach Spanish [at a local school] and the kids should be in [public] school.”

CHAPTER 4

BEYOND HOMESCHOOL: PERCEPTIONS OF THE SUBCULTURE

To determine the college readiness and success of homeschool students, I interviewed two admissions officers, one from the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) and one from Tarrant County College (TCC). I also interviewed an advisor from the UTA Honors College. One admissions officer had been homeschooled; the other was homeschooling his daughter. All three offered insights into the approach homeschool students' use in approaching college, and their academic and social readiness.

College is an important aspect of American culture. More and more, high school students find that they need a college education to apply for most jobs. Most homeschool curriculum does not cover college, leaving further education no longer in the hands of the parents. However, as the movement has grown, a handful of alternatives have sprung up. Some of these present flexible schedules and massively reduced time span to the completion of a college degree in order to draw prospective students.

Dual-credit is an increasingly popular option for homeschoolers. Local DFW colleges offer classes free of charge to high school students trying to get a jump on college. Lara told me: "Mountain View [Community College] loves homeschoolers. It raises their GPA. They have positive experiences, and say the students are usually responsible [in class]." Many of the parents have taken the initiative to enroll their teens. Peter stated: "Not so much [because of] academic [reasons], it helps with the transition to college, without all of the peer pressure of a high school." Other parents agreed. Jenny

said, “It gives them experience, while still at home.” Teaching the kids independence, but still supporting them was important to parents. College, in contrast to high schools, allows for flexible schedule, accredited classes, and provides a wider variety of subjects. Socially, there is usually less drama and more professional interaction.

In a world offering dozens upon dozens of career choices and hundreds of academic options, homeschool parents wish to support their children as they become independent. Other parents were adamant that college provided a social experience they could not replicate. Michelle said: “I don’t think online college is a good idea. You need interaction, exposure.” Jenny agreed: “You learn so much about socializing, beyond academics. You learn independence, how to manage a schedule and deal with professors.” In going to a campus, homeschool students gain confidence and skills as they interact outside family and the subculture.

UTA admits an estimated twenty-eight hundred freshmen each semester, about forty of whom are formerly homeschooled students. 1.43 percent of UTA freshmen are homeschoolers. While the admissions officer at TCC did not know the precise number of homeschooled students, he estimated them at three to five percent of the campus population. It appears that around half of the estimated number of homeschoolers in Texas are enrolling in local colleges. One Advisor described homeschoolers as middle/low class. Economic status appears to be middle class, comfortable but not rich, which agrees with data collected by Joseph Murphy.⁴⁴ Advisors described the students as a fifty-fifty blend of male and female, but the UTA advisor said “if I had to lean one way—male.” In terms of gender, there is no difference between those seeking a higher education.

⁴⁴ Murphy 2012:27

In the UTA Honors College, about three percent are homeschooled. The college is a self-selected entity, and has an overall high percentage of homeschoolers. The advisor explained how homeschoolers tend to be academically advanced and seek smaller social groups. This tendency leads them to the Honors College. “Homeschoolers bloom here.” Homeschoolers are considered a good fit in the Honors College. “Homeschoolers don’t tend to get sidetracked...they have a sort of independent study quality.” On a large campus, there are dozens of clubs and societies for students with which to associate. The Honors College allows academic acceleration and the independence many are used to, and provides a social dynamic comfortable for many formerly homeschooled students.

Advisors were enthusiastic about the advantages of homeschooling. Every advisor said they were self-motivated and academically advanced. Adam, from UTA, said the students tended to enjoy learning, and he “hadn’t met one not in a field they loved.” This love of learning is often in conjunction with high SAT and ACT test scores. However, homeschool students who do poorly on the tests may never appear on the advisor’s radar. Other research suggests that homeschoolers have a wide variance between test scores.⁴⁵ Homeschool students who apply at UTA and TCC are at least as prepared as their publicly educated peers, and in some cases, more so. When it comes to handling the academic workload, advisors agree that homeschool students are consistently ahead of their peers. They have learned the study habits needed to juggle what often amounts to four or five classes a semester.

Socially, however, the advisors had mixed opinions. The Honors coordinator said: “I know there are many levels of homeschool, but they are still not used to 35,000 other students.” The TCC advisor saw this as normal, because “The adjustment [to college] is

⁴⁵ Kunzman and Gaither 2013

hard for all. The homeschool students I followed loved it, found college new and exciting.” Adam stated: “Homeschoolers are less concerned with the way people see them, as with their [academic] performance.” Social readiness is harder to judge. While many students take a semester or two to settle into college, others adapt quickly to the social demands. As the TCC advisor stated: “Homeschoolers have an emotional advantage—they aren’t jacking around [goofing off, wasting time].”

Although dual-credit is becoming a trend in homeschool education, many homeschool students entering college have never spent time in a traditional classroom. Adam noted he received questions from homeschoolers about how to be engaged in class, along with technical aspects of what classrooms look like. At TCC, the advisor said: “Homeschoolers ask pertinent questions, are on top of things.” The students recognize their lack of experience in college, and wish to balance this with information. Advisors provide assistance, providing the answers to dozens of ceaseless queries. In contrast, parents of homeschoolers worry more about safety on campus.

4.1 Homeschool and America: Rethinking Stereotypes

“Twenty years ago, it was incredibly weird. It was considered very antisocial. All the time, questions: ‘what about socialization?’ ‘Damaging?’ ‘What were you thinking?’ a few years before, they were arresting homeschoolers. We took them to court and won.” (Bethany, 8.28.2014)

“It’s an accepted and growing part of American culture. Idealizes the American spirit—independence and self sufficiency.” (Carter, 9.24.2014)

Several parents experienced family friction following the decision to homeschool. Part of this may stem from a lack of knowledge about homeschooling. Peter said: “My relatives wondered about it. [However] my father had heard good things, which he’d tell

me.” Nichole sums up many informants’ words: “You can’t make decisions based on what other people believe.”

Most people received a mix of both positive and negative feedback. “Are you nuts?” “Is that legal?” “I could never,” and so on. These reactions can be a barometer of how the culture perceives homeschoolers. Parents stated that people displayed puzzlement, curiosity, confusion, sympathy, excitement and anger. People who had never interacted with homeschoolers, but had heard of or seen homeschoolers who fit the “stereotypes” may be more likely to react in such a manner. However, those who regularly interact with homeschoolers appear more likely to understand and sympathize with them.

Parents also experienced positive feedback from family and friends, particularly those acquainted with homeschoolers. Ana felt encouraged: “I’m doing something important.” Encouragement and positive interaction can make all the trials and difficult days worth it. Other parents, particularly those who had homeschooled for some time, were unaffected. Tiffany remarked: “Positive remarks can reconfirm my decision, but after homeschooling for twenty years, I’ve gotten past the need to get defensive. Doesn’t affect me, I’ve been there, done that.” Carter stated: “It becomes part of you. I’m generally proud.”

Having attended public schools, many parents didn’t think they would ever homeschool. Allison’s parents taught at a private school, and she previously perceived that “homeschoolers are weird. People in prairie skirts.” Several parents acknowledged the stereotypes they and their children are faced with. They were quick to clarify that they were “normal:” their children had friends, spent time in sports, listened to popular music,

distancing themselves from the “unacceptable” homeschooler America recognizes. Their defensive modes show how the perceptions of outsiders cause conflict. Although they choose to remain separate from American culture in some aspects, homeschool parents did not want their children to be considered outsiders. Adam, the UTA advisor, tells people who want to know one thing people would never guess about him: “I was homeschooled.” As more homeschoolers begin to step outside their homes and interact with those outside their subculture, Americans can form opinions based on how the homeschooler does or doesn’t fit the stereotype.

When asked if they thought people did *not* consider homeschool to be part of American culture, most parents answered “not anymore.” Jenny replied: “I think right now people are more accustomed to knowing people who homeschool. I’ve heard of co-ops which are not religious based. More mainstream.” Emma added, “Now they do....millions homeschool now, they’d be stupid not too.” As the homeschool movement has grown, people appear to be more accustomed to the idea that parents are taking this role in their children’s education. Peter said: “[Homeschool is] still a minority, but most people consider it a mainstream option.” Parents report less negative feedback today than when they started.

Homeschooling has become a big movement in conservative Christianity, yet Samuel was “taken aback by Christian responses.” Other believers harried them over biblical principles such as “salt and light,” claiming they were removing the Christian influence from the school system. Homeschool is still more accepted among Christian families than the mainstream. Bethany stated: “Homeschool is part of the American religious culture, and is becoming part of the American culture.” Isabel responded: “You

have to understand, my main circle of friends are in church community, homeschoolers. When I was single, and friends' homeschooled, people were like, 'why? Send them to school.' Don't hear as much of that anymore." Isabel now has a daughter in college.

Two parents did not think that homeschooling was becoming mainstream. Samuel replied: "Most people wouldn't consider it. Think homeschool is weird, occult, child abuse. This puts pressure on homeschoolers to prove themselves, which is distracting." Homeschoolers find themselves juggling responsibility for their children's education and answering the population's inquiries. Michelle stated: "Most people consider public or private [schools]. There's a bias that kids are a burden, so why keep them at home?" Although homeschool stereotypes are being challenged, the cultural preference for small families and working parents continues to present a problem for the homeschooling movement.

Several parents expressed their belief that homeschooling articulates American ideals. Sarah said: "It started with the founding of America. When it started in the eighties, people were shocked. Not now. People have learned about history." While homeschooling may represent a minority, it is sometimes perceived as more socially acceptable when founded on tradition. Cater enthusiastically stated that not only was it accepted, but homeschooling "idealizes the American spirit of independence and self sufficiency." Americans like to be in charge and express individualism. Homeschooling allows the parent to take direct control of their children's education and tailor the education to each child. Parents have the ability to take time off school during the year to travel, visit relatives, or conduct extra-curricular activities deemed essential. They argue

that their children receive a more rounded education and spend time cultivating their interests.

4.2 A Tale of Two States

Texas has notably liberal views on homeschooling. Homeschoolers are not required to register, submit year-by-year records of their curriculum and progress, or complete state testing. Other states are considerably stricter. In conducting the interviews, I noted that many informants told me Texas was more accepting and open to their decision to homeschool. One state in particular, California, stood in contrast to Texas. The impacts of individual laws and state influence may shape how homeschooling is perceived by the larger American population as a whole.

In 1981 the Texas Education Agency established a policy that stated that “educating a child is not the same as a private school institution, and therefore, not an acceptable substitute.”⁴⁶ Four years later, they were sued after one hundred and fifty families had been prosecuted for homeschooling. The legal outcome of this action (Texas Education Agency vs. Leeper, et. Al.) resulted in a complete reversal, whereby homeschool was quantified as a private school, as long as the parents teach five core subjects. In addition, the state currently has no legal jurisdiction to define what curriculum may be used. Hailed as a victory for parental rights, this action led to a rapid increase in homeschooling in Texas. As they are not required to register, the exact number of children homeschooled is unknown, but researchers tracking participation in homeschool associations and co-ops estimate a thirty-nine percent growth by year.⁴⁷ These rates are considerably higher than the estimated rates for other states.

⁴⁶ HSLDA Legal Memorandum on Homeschooling in Texas n.d.

⁴⁷ Homeschooling Is Growing Worldwide (Learn in Freedom) n.d.

California law is more complicated. Although California law does define a homeschool as private school, that legislation plays out quite differently. According to HSLDA, homeschoolers can: 1) fill out a yearly private school affidavit, 2) enroll in a private school satellite program, 3) be tutored by a state-certified individual for a minimum of three hours a day, or 4) enroll in an independent study and use public school curriculum.⁴⁸ Any one of these options require parental certification, state controlled curriculum, or large amounts of paperwork, which homeschoolers seek to avoid. Access to homeschooling requires large amounts of time and money, and can be a hassle in California. How does the difference between the two state legal requirements impact the acceptance of homeschooling?

“I think it’s become really popular...especially in the South, more accepted,” Nicole said. “This is the Bible belt, more family style education.” American culture has been divided between North and South since before the civil war, and the South still retains more traditional values of family and church. Jenny responded, “In California, [there were] rumblings of the state cracking down. When we came to Texas, [we were] happy to discover they were lenient.” Other parents agreed that it “depends on the state,” and certain states make homeschoolers feel unwelcome. In Texas homeschooling is especially well accepted.

Two informants lived previously in Washington and Indiana. Both agreed that homeschooling was much more accepted in Texas. Allison described how she had moved from Indian to Texas. “Here in Texas, there are so many [homeschooling] people that it’s common. In Indiana, although there were seven hundred people in our church, only three families homeschooled. Here, it’s fifty-fifty.”

⁴⁸ HSLDA n.d.

“When we started, in California, people were still talking about social development. Not sure if it’s the state, because the kids are older, or if attitudes have changed,” Jenny said. With the rapid increase of homeschooling in Texas since its legalization, Texas has become more accepting of homeschoolers. More people in Texas are interacting with homeschoolers, and through this process social barriers and stereotypes are breaking down. Homeschooling is certainly part of Texas culture. Texas’s homeschooling growth may also be impacted by families who transfer to Texas, because of the legislation. In which case, a significant portion of homeschooling families in Texas may come from the relocation of previous homeschoolers.

While more Americans are comfortable with the notion of homeschooling, many of these may be clustered in certain states. The American legitimization of homeschooling has led to an increased global preference for alternative education. Even as America begins to reassess homeschooling, other nations are assessing homeschooling in America. Homeschooling is growing at both the national and international levels.⁴⁹ Homeschooling has the potential to shed light on globalization processes.

⁴⁹ Kunzman and Gaither 2013

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

HOMESCHOOL, THE OPEN DOOR

Homeschooling has shaped the lives of thousands of people. Yet it has not received adequate scholarly attention in research on education or anthropology. As an alternate form of education that combines religious, financial and academic expectations, homeschooling is a fruitful cultural site for examining how a subculture imagines and produces model citizens and social beings. There is considerable scope for expanding research on homeschooling by exploring cross-cultural frames and the participation of minority groups in the US.

My ethnography of homeschooling in North Texas explores why parents choose to homeschool. In explaining their choice to homeschool parents gave me a glimpse into their social world and a unique subculture. Ethnography provides an in-depth glimpse into the hopes and outcomes of the decision to homeschool. As a former homeschooled student, I can describe my experience and why my parents choose to homeschool me. I was surprised by the number of parents who were interested in private schools. While I expected to hear how homeschoolers are stereotyped as unsocialized, I did not anticipate how adamantly parents described the social opportunities their children received. Most parents agreed that homeschool was becoming more socially and culturally acceptable, having seen major advances in the past twenty years. Five motivations emerged from my interviews: belief, economics, academics, peer pressure, and missionary service. In

explaining their motivations to homeschool, parents compared and contrasted public schools and private schools, including those that are faith based. Parents described how their expectations of homeschooling might not have been fulfilled. Often, a readjustment of long-term goals was necessary. It is important to note that not all parents who begin homeschooling continue long-term. In the process parents imbue homeschooling, public school, and private schools as having a particular moral order, and as spaces with varying degrees of parental autonomy.

Parents' devotion to their children's education and the time and energy they pour into their children's education can be described as an alternative investment strategy. This investment includes a calculation of time and resources as well as a projection of successful outcomes. Such outcomes include an assurance of quality education, strong emotional ties and an academically and socially adept individual. Parents continually reevaluate their strategies for educating their children. The intangible benefits parents described are often a rewarding benefit for their decision to forgo, at least in part, a career. Jenny stated: "Knowing what I know now, I would not give up those years for anything." In most cases, it is the mother who elects to opt out of a career. This gender dimension of homeschooling reproduces the stereotype of the mother as a nurturing parent and deserves more research. Parents I interviewed looked forward to their children attending college. Most preferred that their children attend a traditional college, but were open for their student to decide which route they favored. College admissions officers in North Texas found that homeschool students were academically college ready, although they needed time to adjust to college life.

The growth of the homeschooling subculture demonstrates cultural struggles with modernity. Parents wish to sustain a counter-culture, rejecting the broader culture's religious and academic ideals. Although they are perceived as returning to traditional gender roles, women chose homeschooling, yet have high educations and career experience. This subculture presents the way tradition is reframed in modern contexts, echoing Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity."

Homeschooling showcases parent's desire for their children's education. Parent's fight with the teachings of public and private schools symbolize their wish for control. Homeschool student's different social, cultural and academic experiences create the homeschooling subculture. Often, children embrace this pedagogy. Homeschooling impacted how children viewed cultural and moral aspects. Thus the choice of pedagogy, such as homeschool versus public education, shapes moral and cultural decisions.

There is considerable potential for further exploring the significance of homeschooling in the US and abroad. Research on education and educational policy should take advantage of the new and rapid diversity in the homeschool movement. Further research should consider the minorities within American culture, as well as the reinvention of homeschooling in other contexts and cultures. Research on homeschooling abroad has potential to reveal the ways that modernity and education intersect. The rise of homeschooling is not restricted to the United States. Studies show that homeschooling is rapidly gaining ground abroad.⁵⁰ Statistical data from Kunzman and Gaither's research (2013), notes in depth the estimated growth and social, academic, and legal ramifications

⁵⁰ *Home Education Regulations in Europe and Recent UK Research* covers the legal situations in Europe for homeschooling parents, and compares it to similar US research (Taylor and Petrie 2000). A similar article, also by Petrie, examines the rights of parents to homeschool under certain circumstances (Petrie 1995). Several articles have also been written in non-academic literature on the recent growth of homeschooling abroad.

in many countries.⁵¹ Although homeschooling in America is not a mainstream form of education, other countries, including South Korea and eastern Africa, perceive it as American culture and embrace it as a marker of modern identity. As people in other lands begin to interact with homeschoolers, they gain an appreciation for the flexibility and family dynamic it offers. Homeschoolers internationally perceive this practice to be a symbol of their modernity in practicing an “American” custom.

The data on the growth of homeschooling worldwide also begs the question why is homeschooling becoming a popular option abroad? Globalization offers a possible framework for situating this worldwide growth of homeschooling—a subject that deserves further research. Globalization is defined as an “increasing flow of trade, finance, and culture...brought about by the sophisticated technology of communications and travel.”⁵² Arjun Appaduri describes “ethnoscapes,” as landscapes of people who utilize technology to maintain their individuality. In a rapidly globalizing world, pieces of cultures may be dispersed, allowing for inclusion of homeschooling practices in other parts of the world.⁵³ Current research has shown that homeschooling is on the rise in many countries, including Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and South Korea.⁵⁴ Many of these countries look to the United States as a model, due to its liberal legislation pertaining to homeschooling.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Kunzman and Gaither 2013

⁵² Lewellen 2002:7

⁵³ Schau 1996

⁵⁴ Kunzman and Gaither 2013

⁵⁵ In 2008, a German family of seven requested asylum in the United States, fearful that German authorities would remove the children from their home because they homeschooled. Such an action, which might be considered extreme in the United States, was due to the illegal nature of homeschooling in Germany. The case was closely followed by advocates of homeschooling in the US, who expressed concern that the outcome might impact their ability to homeschool.

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