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A Dissertation

entitled

Homeschoolers on Homeschooling: In Their Own Words

by

Jeff Humason

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Higher Education

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The University of Toledo
August 2012
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An Abstract of
Homeschoolers on Homeschooling: In Their Own Words
by
Jeff Hu
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Higher Education
The University of Toledo
August 2012

This study investigated the perceptions of homeschoolers focusing on their
perspectives and comments in order to gain insight as to the reasons they homeschool.
The overarching results revealed that homeschoolers in this study perceived institutional
schools as places devoid of moral absolutes, and the reasons institutional schools seem
to lack the values homeschoolers desire are more indicative of the state of the American
family than American institutional schools.
I would like to dedicate this study to my wife and my parents.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge everyone who helped, especially Cynthia Beekley.
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Chapter One

Introduction

This research study seeks to explore the reasons that parents who homeschool their children choose to do so and their perceptions about the value of homeschooling as a viable and legitimate educational option. This research study also seeks to explore the thoughts and opinions of parents who homeschool their children about the benefits and deficits of public and private schooling. By choice, parents who homeschool their children typically do not seek to be interviewed about their preferred methods of educating their children, nor do they seem especially eager to answer to school districts or other governing agencies. “Even less is known about homeschoolers. They and their families are difficult to locate, and when found, they respond to surveys at notoriously low rates” (Uecker, 2008, p. 563). Because many parents who choose to homeschool their children frequently remain unreported in typical statistical data gathered by educational governing bodies, collecting accurate data from parents who choose to homeschool their children can be challenging at best: “Although growing, the literature about homeschooling is extremely limited” (Barwegen, Falciani, Putnam, Reamer, & Stair, 2004, p. 41). Research has been conducted on homeschooling, yet much of that research describes the history and causes of homeschooling from a relatively broad social perspective while arguing either for or against the merits of homeschooling. As an alternative, this research seeks to explore the perspectives of parents in midwestern states who actively homeschool their children. In order to explore these perspectives and capture their thoughts on relevant issues related to homeschooling, this researcher will interview eight parents (four married couples) in their own homes, or at a location.
mutually agreed upon by the researcher and the participants. To further increase the level of candidness, the names of all participates will remain anonymous, and every possible effort to protect their identities will be made.

**Background of the Problem**

**Historical influences on homeschooling.** The United States has an interesting and rich educational history. The first European settlers and colonists came to a wilderness that demanded they live as pioneers in encampments and natural dwellings that they constructed out of their surroundings, which were very unlike the lifestyle they were accustomed to in Europe. Coming from England in the early 1600s, a Charter called the London Company sent 105 men in three ships to America. These men established Jamestown in Virginia in 1607, and this settlement was the toehold that led to the colony known as Virgina, which was 95,000 strong by 1715. From this steady growth, the complex social structure that in many ways emulated European society budded in North America. However, Americans eventually became very different in their educational practices from Europe.

**Pursuit of equality.** Thomas Jefferson was born in 1743 to a mother whose family was among the first Virginian settlers and a father who was a wealthy land owner. Jefferson became a lawyer and was in the house of Burgesses, the first assembly of elected representatives in Virgina; a group formed by the Virginia Company to motivate English farmers and craftsmen to produce more commerce by offering land ownership instead of sharecropping. Jefferson’s writing exposed the crippling practices of the educated elites of his time (of which he was a member) that allowed only the wealthy to be formally educated. During his career as a lawmaker, writer, political
leader, and college president/founder, Jefferson attempted to get Virginia to start a public school system that would allow more equal access to the young people of Virginia because, at that time, only the children of the wealthy were formerly educated. Jefferson’s efforts were not well received by the wealthy powers of Virginia at that time because of a more rigid social caste system that excluded the poor and favored an elite, wealthy class of landowners and patriarchs. Jefferson was unable to gain acceptance of his ideas about inclusive education because the wealthy in Virginia did not want to pay taxes to fund it. Jefferson’s concept of “the more general diffusion of knowledge” was his way of dealing with what he observed to be a threat to liberty. Conversely, the wealthy land owners of Jefferson’s Virginia saw Jefferson’s diffusion of knowledge as a threat to their liberty. Eventually Jefferson’s efforts prevailed. Jefferson clearly understood that an educated citizenry was needed to generate and maintain the newly created American government--a system of government that would place its ultimate powers with the governed, or the people. As the background and history of education in the U.S.A. began to evolve, it did so along with the problem of why anyone would want to homeschool their child(ren) when so many professional education options were available. In considering this evolutionary educational path, Gaither (2008) has asked the following question: “How did homeschooling go from being (a) a practice that was carried out as a matter of course by thousands of Americans early in our history to (b) a practice that was hardly done at all as more and more Americans embraced formal schools, to (c) a practice that has re-emerged in our time as a powerful educational alternative?” (p. 226). The answer to Gaither’s question can be found, in part, in two early examples of the way in which formal education arose
out of the religious and social contexts of a nation grappling with its newly emerging identity. The following two examples of school law illustrate that the current educational system in the United States did, in fact, evolve from homeschooling.

**Religious and social contexts.** Prior to 1852, laws regarding the education of children and adolescents in the United States were written to ensure that the youth of the United States were educated in some way, but these laws did not spell out mandatory attendance of schools in the same way compulsory attendance laws do. Widely considered the first known example of school law in the United States, the Massachusetts School Law of 1642 provides insight into the values early Americans placed on education and the processes by which it was to be carried out. More specifically, this law is an example of legislation that concerns itself more with the outcomes of education and not necessarily the attendance of schools:

Forasmuch as the good education of children is of singular behoof and benefit to any Common-wealth; and whereas many parents & masters are too indulgent and negligent of their duty in that kind. It is therfore ordered that the Select men of every town, in the severall precincts and quarters where they dwell, shall have a vigilant eye over their brethren & neighbours, to see, first that none of them shall suffer so much barbarism in any of their families as not to indeavour to teach by themselves or others, their children & apprentices so much learning as may enable them perfectly to read the English tongue, & knowledge of the Capital Lawes. (“Massachusetts Bay School Law of 1642,” n.d., para. 1)

Here, the 1642 law identifies those who were to serve as the educators--i.e., those “[s]elect men” in every town who were to watch families to make sure they did not
neglect the education of their children (para. 1). The 1642 law further outlined the curriculum:

[u]pon penaltie of twentie shillings for each neglect therin. Also that all masters of families do once a week (at the least) catechize their children and servants in the grounds & principles of Religion, & if any be unable to do so much: that then at the least they procure such children or apprentices to learn some short orthodox catechism without book, that they may be able to answer unto the questions that shall be propounded to them out of such catechism by their parents or masters or any of the Select men when they shall call them to a tryall of what they have learned of this kind. (“Massachusetts Bay School Law of 1642,” n.d., para. 1)

This part of the 1642 law required families with children to teach their children religion at least once a week. The teaching was tested, again by the “[s]elect men” of the town (para. 1). The 1642 law concluded with a final mandate to teach young people some kind of meaningful skill or trade that would allow the young person to be independent and warns that if no such education took place that met the standard of these “[s]elect men,” the youth were to be removed from the home and given to other “masters” until they became young adults (para. 1).

Inasmuch as the Massachusetts School Law provided a framework for general educational outcomes and penalties for not at least attempting to achieve these outcomes, it nevertheless did not concern itself with mandatory attendance of any school. Based on the Massachusetts School Law of 1642, it can be inferred that formal schooling (as we know it in modern terms) had yet to become incorporated into the social, economic, and
cultural contexts operating in early American history. Rather, the Massachusetts law sought only to regulate some form of meaningful education to the point that young people would be self-sufficient enough to contribute to the commonwealth.

A second example of the way in which formal education arose out of the emerging religious and social contexts and reveals the nature of education in the early years of the United States is the Massachusetts Law of 1647, also referred to as “the old Deluder Satan Act”:

It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, ...It is therefore ordered that every township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to fifty households shall forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read, whose wages shall be paid either by the parents or masters of such children, or by the inhabitants in general.... And it is further ordered, that when any town shall increase to the number of one hundred families or householders, they shall set up a grammar school, the master thereof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the university....” (“Massachusetts Law of 1647,” n.d., para. 1)

The template for our current educational system can be seen in the Massachusetts Law of 1647, and this law has been widely considered the first attempt at legislating public school policy in the United States. The Massachusetts Law of 1647 directly legislated or “ordered” the “set up” of grammar schools once any town reached 100 families. The 1647 law also mandated that the master of the grammar school needed to be able to instruct the students of the school so that they may be able to attend “the university”--
i.e., Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts, since it was the only “university” in existence in 1647, chartered in 1636, 11 years before “Ye Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647.” This important early education law mandated every town that reached the size of 50 families to hire a teacher to teach the youth of the town how to read and write. The emphasis placed on education in the Ye Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647 cannot be minimized. With this Act, the once fledgling society that has become the modern world and the example of freedom among all nations fully acknowledged the need for literate citizenry. In fact, ignorance was clearly seen as a threat.

To fully acknowledge the letter and spirit of the “Ye Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647,” it is also important to note what by today’s standards would be considered a blatantly didactic voice: “It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures...” (“Massachusetts Law of 1647, n.d., para. 1). This is the opening line of the 1647 Law in the puritanical language that was fitting to the time period. It contains an outdated, ridiculed, albeit sobering, message absent in the public laws of today and most mainstream educational writing today. The opening line of the 1647 law illustrates the belief in a very real presence of good and evil, specifically “ye old Deluder Satan.” More importantly, the law acknowledged that the free will of people can be employed to overcome the “chief project” of evil: “to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures” through education (para. 1). This language clearly illustrates the thinking of the time and the importance of a Christ-centered alliance for the authors of the first law regarding public education in the new world.
Compulsory attendance. In its early history, the United States did not endorse compulsory school attendance. “The first colonists home educated their children out of necessity, since settlement schools were not yet established” (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009, p. 306). The current system of mandatory school attendance arose through a series of economic, political, and social exigencies that shaped the educational landscape and the contexts in which education derived its purpose. Over time, the frequency and or daily practice of educating the nation’s children became increasingly important, and as a result, formerly local and relatively informal policies were codified and used to form more formal public school systems. These public school systems were a direct result of compulsory attendance laws mandating that children attend schools for a predetermined portion of the calendar year. Compulsory attendance became standardized in the United States over a nearly eight-decade span, starting in 1852 with Massachusetts and ending in 1929 with Alaska, which was the last state to mandate school attendance (“State Compulsory School Attendance Laws,” 2005). During this time, the United States became a country that valued the idea of sending children to schools from early childhood through young adulthood, and this evolution gradually eroded the process of educating children and young adults in homeschool settings. The reasons for this have less to do with a desire to eliminate homeschooling but rather to bring about social improvements and unity in the fledgling country and to increase the industrial productivity and competitiveness of the United States. With this approach in mind, it is not surprising that the evolution of compulsory school attendance laws in the United States coincides with westward expansion and the American industrial revolution (Field, 1979).
Thomas Jefferson was a primary contributor to the compulsory education movement as his philosophy regarding the high ideal of self-government relied on an informed and educated citizenry. Jefferson’s desire to form a perfect system of governance—one that kept the governed safe from tyranny as well as from those who take and hold leadership positions through unearned privilege and abuse their power—required intelligent, active participation by those governed as well as those in offices of leadership. This desire is revealed in one of Jefferson’s letters:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. (Jefferson, 1820)

Currently, compulsory education is endorsed by all 50 states and has become an accepted foundational component of American life.

**Economic and political influences on education.** Jefferson’s ideas about education held that the primary components of learning included virtue and talent. Jefferson rightly believed that genius naturally occurred in the poor and wealthy alike. To cultivate and utilize the most intelligent people in the republic Jefferson dreamed of, Jefferson suggested that the people themselves must be educated so they could handle such responsibility. In order to educate the population, Jefferson pursued creating a public elementary education system in Virginia in 1779 with A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge as a way to get tax-funded public schools started.
Jefferson’s idea of tax-based public education was not popular in 1779 Virginia as Jefferson’s idea to offer education to all the children of Virginia was rejected by the conservative, wealthy vote of that time. In 1779, the conservative majority, (wealthy land owners who had the right to vote) of Virginia wanted nothing to do with Jefferson’s “liberal” idea that they should pay taxes to educate the poorer people of Virginia. The economy of early Virginia was driven by agriculture as tobacco was the main commerce. No doubt the land owners of 1779 Virginia viewed Jefferson’s liberal ideas about educating everyone as a threat to their liberty. Conversely, Jefferson viewed the threat to liberty primarily as an ignorant populous being ruled by elitists and their network of family and friends.

Westward expansion. As westward expansion continued, the Embargo Act of 1807 – conceived by Thomas Jefferson as a means to prevent war between the Americans and either France or Great Britain – was in fact a contributing factor in the War of 1812 (O’Rourke, 2007). The War of 1812 served to spur the United States into advanced industrialization as Americans recognized the need for better roads, innovative industrial practices, and independence from imported goods (Smelser, 1968). The nineteenth century brought about amazing and exponential American economic growth, though an unfortunate byproduct of rapid industrialization was harsh working conditions for many Americans, including children (De Schweinitz, 1959). Until the first child labor laws were passed, the widespread use of children as inexpensive laborers was commonly practiced.

As Americans began to take note of the abuses of child labor, this became another compelling reason to legislate compulsory school attendance (Doepke &
Zilibotti, 2005). In response, the country began to fully embrace the idea of a nationwide and systematic form of education.

**The industrial period and its impact on education.** The industrial period in America influenced homeschooling economically, politically, and socially. Economically, America was still a place where only people who could afford to educate their children did so. Around 1820, America began to develop into a country that had a strong infrastructure due to the Embargo Act of 1807. As Americans became more self-reliant and mobile, America began to become self-sustaining. Industrial technology advanced, and mass production of goods became the norm. This, in turn, triggered a migration from rural areas into cities; urbanization began to take place. According to Hirschman and Mogford (2009), the most significant change the Industrial Revolution brought was “the decline in agriculture (from 48 to 25% of the workforce) and the rise of manufacturing employment (up from 14 to 25%)” (p. 902).

This extreme urbanization changed the landscape of public education as well. Specifically, urbanization caused a tremendous strain on education. According to Webb (2006), “Larger numbers of people moved to cities to find work in the factories. In 1920, for the first time in history, more people were living in cities and towns than in rural areas. Factories and businesses were starting to dominate the economy. Urban school facilities were stretched as attendance soared” (Boers, 2007, p. 47).

Like those people who abused others as they capitalized on slavery in the South to grow tobacco in the early colonial years, the early industrialists capitalized on the least expensive workers they could find: women and children. “In the United States, in the early industrial period (1820-1840), factories in New England utilized the unskilled labor
of women and children (Goldin & Sokoloff, 1982); however, in the second Industrial Revolution (1860-1920), unskilled immigrant laborers were the dominant factory manufacturing labor force” (Kim, 2007, p. 5). The practice of putting children (even small children) to work in strenuous and dangerous conditions was common in the first part of America’s Industrial Revolution; however, measures were eventually taken that provided more protection for children and mandated the minimum amount of education (three hours per day) children were to receive (e.g., the Mills and Factories Act of 1833 and the establishment of the Children’s Bureau in 1912).

**Immigration and its impact on education.** As political and economic situations in Europe became unbearable, many people responded to the lure of the American Dream and the opportunity to earn a living and have a better life. According to Kim (2007), “The century between 1820 and 1920 defined America as a nation of immigrants or a ‘melting pot.’ During this century, more than 33 million people entered the ports of the United States. Immigrants from Europe came in massive waves until the era of open immigration ended with the passage of the 1921 “Emergency Quota Act” (p. 3). According to Webb (2006), “From 1900 to 1920, 900,000 immigrants arrived per year (Boers, 2007, p. 47). Webb further stated that “While industrialization and urbanization increased, new waves of immigrants were arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe to put even more demands on cities and on schools” (Boers, 2007, p. 47).

As immigration continued, it was important for most new Americans to be good Americans. In other words, many immigrants wanted to prove that they were part of the American culture, and they wanted a chance to provide their children with a significantly better life than what they experienced in their country of origin (Nugent,
1992). Naturally, then, the process of formal education was recognized as a mechanism that provided a clear path to a brighter future and better life. Bettering the lives of their children was one of the most significant motivations for the widespread acceptance of compulsory attendance laws. Immigrants wanted their children to have the language and other knowledge to succeed in the U.S.A. According to Olneck (2009), one of the most important influences on education brought about by immigration was language policy: “Examples abound of demands for homeland-language classes to be taught in the public schools, and... then languishing for lack of enrollment. This was true of Italian classes in New York public schools between 1906 and 1910, as well as of Polish classes in New York from 1910 to 1915 (Zimmerman, 2002). In 1931, after Polish had been authorized as an accredited subject in Chicago’s high schools in which 25 or more students requested it, only four public schools were teaching the language” (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 382).

During subsequent years, the issue of language continued to be a point of debate not only as a matter of public education but also as law. According to Linton (2006), World War I heightened anxieties about national loyalty and immigrant assimilation. The Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917 required publishers of foreign-language news to provide English translations. During and following the war, a patchwork of state and local language laws emerged. Many states prohibited the teaching of German in the primary grades. The governors of Iowa and South Dakota issued decrees prohibiting the use of any language other than English in public places or over the telephone (Piatt, 1990). Schools required children to take language loyalty oaths. A 1919 Nebraska
statute banned teaching any language other than English before the ninth grade (Dillard 1985; Marckwardt 1980, p. 4)

**The Scopes trial and its impact on education.** In 1925, a complex movement in education as well as modern culture took place in the form of the monumental Scopes trial. Long-accepted educational practices that did not include scientific concepts and theories promoted by Darwinism were challenged when a teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, by the name of John Thomas Scopes purposefully assigned Darwinian concepts to his high school science students. Scopes, a high school teacher and part-time football coach, was persuaded to assign the work to his students by a school board member and local politician in order to bring attention and, more importantly, commerce to the quiet Tennessee town.

The entire event was intentionally promoted, and the media circus that ensued attracted the attention of educators across the United States. Harrison (1995) described how Dayton, Tennessee, handled the Scopes Trial: “It sprang from questionable purposes; all parties concerned had dubious motivations and goals. Dayton’s townspeople were swindled by an eager desire for fame and greedy hopes for local prosperity from a public relations-backed publicity spectacle” (p. 1).

One particularly significant fallout of the Scopes trial was the divisive impact it had on the ways that appropriate public education was defined and implemented. According to Allgaier and Holliman (2006), this controversy was not limited to the United States: “Within the science classroom and in discussions about the curriculum for science [...] the question of whether religious explanations about the origin of life
should be taught in addition to scientific accounts in compulsory science education has sparked controversy in several countries for decades...” (p. 264).

**The advent of Catholic/private education.** As social, political, economic, and other forces shaped the landscape of public education during the early part of the 20th century, new issues emerged (or rather prior issues re-emerged) that again challenged the role and purpose of education. “The home-based education of the past was nearly always done for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. Sparse population and limited resources meant that formal schools were impracticable for many in colonial America or on the western frontiers of the nineteenth century” (Gaither, 2009, p. 331).

However, Catholic schools emerged as one method of preserving religious traditions that had come under scrutiny in the public school system as Catholics started and maintained their own educational systems partly as a form of self-preservation because they were minorities in a Protestant American culture. However, the Catholic schools that were once full of students are much less populated in present times. “Today, only a small minority of parents send their children to Catholic schools” (Sander, 2005 p. 257). In another educational reversal, specifically in the trend of homeschooling since the 1970s and 1980s, “Homeschooling gradually has become a popular method of instruction once again” (Lips & Feinberg, 2009, p. 22).

**Transition of homeschooling from a liberal to conservative practice.** Clearly, the path traveled by public education policies and laws has not been linear or even consistent. Differences in values, advancements in technology, various economic forces, and differing social perspectives all have resulted in a serpentine path of development for educational practices, and at each stage of this development, educational practices
(particularly those related to public schooling) have been affected. As a result, one identifying characteristic of the history of education has been the concept of transition. “Homeschooling rose several decades ago through the efforts of two vastly dissimilar groups: religious fundamentalists and the ‘unschoolers’ ” (Stevens, 2001, as cited in Aurini & Davies, 2005, p. 462). As these differing cultural forces interacted, the result has been a shift from liberal to conservative practices from the 1970s to the present time. However, as more people have chosen homeschooling as a viable educational option, the practice has become more diversified. With this diversity has naturally come division and differing opinions about the role and purpose of education within a democracy--in particular, division among conservatives and liberals:

Homeschooling was not at first considered by many conservatives. In the 1960s and 1970s most conservatives were still trying to keep public school values consistent with their own. But while activism gained them victories in some locales, conservatives rightly discerned that they were losing the battle over control of the nation’s public schools. The 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court decisions outlawing organized school prayer and school-sponsored Bible reading shocked and devastated many conservatives, and over the ensuing decades many of them began pulling their children out of public schools and placing them in upstart Protestant day schools. (Gaither, 2009, p. 338)

In response to the encroachment of secular values into public schools, Kunzman (2010) has suggested that religious fundamentalists have responded by increasing their interest in homeschooling: “Homeschooling offers religious fundamentalists a potent means to resist the encroachment of secular culture on their families. The philosophical and pedagogical flexibility of homeschooling provides an educational environment
especially suitable for parents to cultivate a particular set of values and commitments in their children” (p. 24). As with most opposing social forces, a degree of synthesis has characterized the progression from a liberal to conservative practice and from a secular to a religious one:

The cultural left and right may argue incessantly, but they speak the same language, share a similar set of background beliefs. Since the 1960s, many of the most radical Americans on both sides of the political spectrum have been more interested in local community and self-determination than in national identity. Conservative and liberal Americans have had radically different private visions of the good life, but they have all shared a commitment to private vision.

(Gaither, 2009, p. 335)

**Homeschooling as an anti-establishment practice.** According to Gaither (2008), Americans valued the idea of sending their children to public and private schools from 1852 up to the 1960s, when counter cultural ideology began to motivate people to homeschool their children. Gaither has reported that both the left and the right engaged in their own countercultural movements: “The social and political changes of the second half of the twentieth century made bedfellows of both radical leftists who wanted nothing to do with conventional America and conventional Americans who wanted nothing to do with a country that in their view had sold out to the radical left” (p. 233). Gaither (2008) further wrote that “By 1970 many leftist activists concluded that any real change must come instead from a compelling alternative society” (p. 227).

One representative of the counter cultural movement was John Holt. Considered by many to be the grandfather of the modern homeschooling movement, Holt challenged
America’s schools in 1964 with his book *Why Children Fail*. Holt did not want to change or correct public schools; rather, he wanted nothing to do with them. While describing the totality of his views on how ineffective the educational system had become, Holt wrote, “Today, everywhere in the world, that [i.e., ‘something that some people do to others for their own good, molding and shaping them, and trying to make them learn what they think they ought to know’] is what education has become and I am wholly against it” (Holt, 2004, p. 229). Holt believed that schools were oppressive institutions that prevented the natural development of children and young people.

Holt was a school teacher for more than 10 years before committing to the idea that homeschooling was the best way to educate children. Holt admonished people not to turn their homes into miniature versions of schools as they educated their children. Similar to Holt, Ivan Illich also warned against the use of institutionalized learning as a form of social control. Illich, a Catholic priest/missionary to South America, was charged with training missionaries for mission fields in South America by the Vatican in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Illich was chosen for this job due to his prior missionary work and his ability to speak multiple languages fluently. Once put in charge of the school whose purpose it was to train missionaries, Illich systematically began to sabotage the school in a subversive action to prevent missionaries from being successful.

As the discord of the 1960s continued to counter the ideology that formed the industrial backbone of the United States, homeschooling, an old idea, was reborn as an alternative way to change what many liberal-thinking activists viewed as an oppressive establishment (Gaither, 2008; Kunzman, 2010; Lyman, 1998, as cited in Collom, 2005). Interestingly, the counter-culture thinking typically aligned with left-wing ideology has
been credited with the initial rebirth of the modern homeschooling movement, but more recently it has been right-wing conservatives who have been identified as the largest homeschooling group in the United States (Rudner, 1999).

**Statement of the Problem**

Little research has focused on directly asking parents who homeschool their children to articulate in their own words the reasons they have chosen to homeschool. As Houston and Toma (2003) have pointed out, “Scholars have not examined systematically households’ decisions to educate children at home or to home school” (p. 920). According to Houston and Toma (2003), “For the most part the little that is known about those who homeschool is anecdotal or based on surveys by advocacy groups for home schooling” (p. 921).

Modern home schooling families appear to devalue public schools as evidenced by an increasing attrition rate accompanied by an increase in the number of parents who have chosen to homeschool their children. The number of homeschooled students has increased from 360,000 in 1994 to 790,000 in 1999, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001). According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2009), “Data from the 2007 NHES [National Household Education Survey] survey show an estimated 1.5 million students (1,508,000) were homeschooled in the United States in the spring of 2007” (p. 1). According to Princiotto, Bielick, and Chapman (2004), “This represents an increase from the estimated 1.1 million students who were homeschooled in the spring of 2003” (as cited in Institute of Education Sciences, 2008, p. 1).
At the heart of this ongoing conflict is a debate between states’ rights to determine educational goals and curriculum and parents’ rights to do so. For example, consider the following comments of the U.S. Supreme Court from Pierce v. Society of Sisters, 268 U.S. 510, 535 (1925):

While a state may compel the education of children, parents have a fundamental role in deciding how it should be done in their family. A parent’s ability to direct the upbringing and education of their children is a fundamental right. Accordingly, regulations adopted by a state to further its compelling interest in education can conflict with these parental rights. As the Supreme Court famously noted, “[t]he child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations (as cited in Dumas, Gates, & Schwarz, 2010, p. 65).

Studies on homeschooling have discussed this educational approach from broad social perspectives. These perspectives have included examining homeschooling as a social movement (Collom, 2005), examining homeschooling as an exit strategy that undermines the common good (Lubiensky, 2010), and examining homeschooling as a way of supporting core fundamentalist principles (Kunzman, 2010). However, many studies on homeschooling have included very few personal experiences of homeschooling parents or their rationale for choosing to educate their children within a home environment.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is twofold: One purpose is to explore the reasons why parents choose to homeschool their children and to do so by seeking information directly from active homeschooling parents. This exploration is designed to discover more deeply what motivates parents who homeschool their children to take on the enormous responsibility of educating their children academically when public and private schools have historically provided academic as well as character education for more than 150 years in the U.S.A. Some new insights that may emerge from this study include parents’ motivation (at its deepest level) for choosing homeschooling as a primary educational option, steps that institutional schools can take to improve instructional practices or learning environments, and potential ways of creating educational climates to regain or attract the homeschooling population back to the institutional education setting. A second purpose of this research study is to further the ongoing investigation into the reasons why homeschooling has become a growing trend over the past three decades. Homeschooling is a current educational trend that has continued to grow consistently. Parents have reclaimed an educational practice that was undertaken out of necessity when it was first practiced in the early United States (Knowles, 1991). However, reasons for homeschooling have changed across time, and this study seeks to explore some of the reasons for those changes.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions about the value of homeschooling among parents who have chosen to homeschool their children?
RQ2: What perceived deficits do parents who homeschool their children attribute to other educational choices (e.g., public/private schooling)?

**Significance of the Study**

While many studies on the topic of homeschooling in the United States have been conducted, very few have explored the perspective of active homeschooling parents. As a result, this research study is significant for several reasons. First, this research study will provide a platform and reference point for further study and investigation into the topic of homeschooling. Second, this information can help support further study of homeschooling to the point that comparisons can be made between research and current perceptions of practicing homeschoolers related to homeschooling. Third, by exploring the reasons parents choose to homeschool their children and making these reasons public, administrators of public schools may gain insight about ways to modify educational practices that attract or help home school parents in their endeavor to deliver the highest quality education possible. Fourth, public schools may benefit from this study as they gain insight into homeschooling and may be able to offer aid to homeschooling families or find a way to attract homeschoolers back to public education through modifications of current public school practices. Fifth, homeschooling families may benefit from this study as a way of gaining insight into the reasons why members of their learning community have chosen to homeschool their children. Sixth, the results also may offer insight to families who homeschool their children by illuminating the perceptions of other practicing homeschoolers. Finally, it is hoped that public school policy may eventually be modified in a way that will produce better learning outcomes for our
nation as a result of the information that emerges from this study as well as policies regarding homeschooling.

Definition of Terms

*Cultural Relativism*: A relationship of perspectives within a culture whose commonality is that some central part of thought, evaluation, experience and even reality is relative somehow to something else. For example, moral principles, justification of standards and even truth are said to be relative to other things like culture, language or biological makeup.

*Home Schooling*: An educational process where children stay at home and typically are instructed by a parent or parents.

*Institutional Schools*: Schools that are located in a building where students attend on a daily basis to receive instruction from professional teachers.

*Moral Absolutes*: A clear, foundational definition of and distinction between right and wrong, specifically regarding moral topics. Specific moral topics that are either right or wrong; not debatable as to their classification of right and wrong. Criticized as unrealistic or impossible by proponents of the term: cultural pluralism. Held dear by proponents of the term: cultural relativism.

*Public schooling*: An educational process whereby professional educators teach children, youth, and young adults in a school paid for by the taxes of the community.

*Policy*: Rules and regulations that govern the educational process.

*Public Schools*: Government schools that are mainly funded by taxes and operated by professional educators.
Private Schools: Schools/learning institutions that are mainly funded by tuition and charitable donations and operated by professional educators as well as religious institutions.

Online Schooling: An educational process whereby students receive either full or partial educational curriculum online. Online schools can be public charter schools, private schools, as well as pay per course. Online schooling can be done anywhere there is internet access and a functional computer.

Assumptions

This research study is based on several assumptions. One assumption is that all of the participants will respond openly and honestly during the interview process. Another assumption is that because some participants are acquainted with the researcher, the participants will feel at ease, and because they may feel more at ease with the researcher, they may speak more openly and freely. A third assumption is that through a semi-structured interview process, participants will respond to the research questions in ways that will reveal further information about homeschooling that could not be accounted for or predicted before the interviews--i.e., the questions will lead to further inquiry and new topics of study.

Limitations and Delimitations

This research study was subject to several limitations. First, because this research study employed a case study method, the results may not be generalizable to populations beyond the individuals interviewed. A second limitation to this research study is possible biased perspectives since the researcher and some of the participants have been acquainted in dual-role relationships.
This research is also marked by several delimitations that provide the boundaries for this study. First, this research is confined to the study of eight participants (four married couples) who homeschool their children. Some of the participants are acquaintances of the researcher and were selected, in part, because they are known to the researcher, so it is assumed they will provide open and candid responses. Second, the participants for this study include only active homeschooling parents who have been homeschooling their children for a period of not less than 10 years.

**Summary**

While there are clear reasons that justify homeschooling as it has been historically practiced, the reasons for the modern homeschooling movement are more complex. This research study seeks answers to questions from active homeschooling parents in hopes that reasons and thoughts will emerge that provide clear and informational text to help readers to better understand why active homeschooling parents choose to educate their children at home. The information that emerges from this case study will hopefully provide not only a better understanding of the topic but also a basis for further study and research into the modern homeschooling phenomenon.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

This research project is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 consists of an introduction of the study that gives a background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, rationale, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of the terms, assumptions, and limitations and delimitations. Chapter 2 reviews and analyzes research from a variety of sources, including scholarly journals, organizational websites, books, and scholarly articles on the topic of homeschooling.
Chapter 3 presents the methods that will be used in this study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 summarizes the results of this study and provides recommendations for further research.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Homeschooling has become an increasingly popular educational option for parents of school-age children in the U.S.A. Though it is difficult to measure exactly how many people have chosen to homeschool their children, the research shows noticeable growth over the years. In the early years of the twenty-first century, the parents of approximately 600,000 to 800,000 students chose to homeschool their children (Lundt, 2004). That figure rose substantially during the subsequent six years, and in 2011, the U.S. Department of Education estimated that the parents of as many as 2,000,000 students in the U.S. had chosen to homeschool their children. (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). While there are many questions about homeschooling and the reasons why people choose to homeschool, there is no doubt that the U.S.A. is a country that has placed increasing value on the idea of homeschooling in favor of declining interest in public schools. As homeschooling has recently increased as a popular educational practice, so have a variety of myths surrounding this practice.

Myths about Homeschooling

Isolation. The most frequently cited objections to homeschooling have been related to the idea of social isolation. While most students do in fact attend local public or private educational institutions (i.e., institutions where students and school staff meet in a building on a daily basis), it seems understandable that common stereotypes of homeschoolers might depict homeschoolers as inept or awkward in social settings.

As most school-aged students matriculate in large numbers and associate with other school-aged students in their own age group every day in a traditional academic
environment, social norms and mores develop within each learning community. Factors that influence these norms and mores include school climate, learning environment, peer pressure, and school culture. Because of these factors, it is easy to understand how students who are not engaged in traditional educational activities in traditional academic settings with a large peer group around them throughout the school day might have their “social skills” questioned. However, according to Romanowski (2006), the myth that parents who homeschool their children are restricting their social development is probably one of the most prevalent beliefs:

Probably the most widely held misconception of homeschooling is the myth of socialization. This myth was born out of a misunderstanding of what homeschooling is really like and rests on the assumption that school is the only effective means for socializing children. The mistaken belief is that homeschooled children wake up and hit the books from 9:00 till 4:00, locked away in their homes with little interaction with the outside world. They are socially awkward, lack essential social skills, and have difficulty relating to others in social situations. However, this is simply an outdated stereotype. Yes, there are some homeschooled students who are social misfits, but there are also public school students who lack adequate social skills. (p. 125)

Parents who have elected to homeschool their children have often encountered the question about socialization from other parents, teachers, and administrators who are not involved in homeschooling. The answer to this question has come for many of these stakeholders in the actions of homeschooled students.
They often have found that the maturity level of typical homeschooled students is qualitatively different from many institutionally schooled students inasmuch as homeschooled students are less exposed to adolescent culture and more exposed to the culture of adults. For example, through increased adult interaction, homeschoolers are apt to learn more mature ways of communicating as well as the nuances of adult conversation and listening skills.

Part of the problem associated with the question of socialization is how it has been defined. If the measure of socialization is based on the number of hours spent in large peer groups of adolescents learning the mores and behavior patterns of current adolescent culture, then homeschooled students are undoubtedly not well socialized. However, if the measure of socialization is based on active participation in community and civic functions, then many homeschooled students are doing very well when it comes to socialization. As Romanowski (2006) has pointed out, “The argument was that homeschooling isolated students from the world, including political and social involvement.... [However], homeschool graduates are actively involved in the political process and are more engaged as citizens compared to the general U.S. population. These findings dispel the myth that homeschoolers withdraw from society and their civic responsibilities” (p. 126).

Homeschooling advocacy organizations like the National Home Education Research Institute have conducted and published scholarly studies that critically examine the issue of a perceived lack of socialization among students who have been homeschooled as well as studies that examine the social influences that shape the behaviors of students in traditional school settings. The results largely have indicated
that young people attending traditional schools more often decide to be loyal to a peer
group even to the point of protecting misbehaving peers or engaging in inappropriate
behaviors themselves in order to gain the respect of their peer group. In fact, some
evidence has suggested that traditional public and or private schools expose students to
behaviors that most parents would consider undesirable for their children. This situation
has been attributed to (1) exposure to a large numbers of peers and (2) relatively low
adult supervisory levels. While this kind of “anti-social” socialization is not a new idea
to most people, it points to the question not necessarily of whether students are being
socialized but rather the quality and nature of the social influences available to
homeschooled students and students who attend traditional schools. (Medlin, 2000, p.
107).

There are many options for Americans when it comes to educating their youth,
and homeschooling has quietly become an option that has attracted all types of people
with values ranging from counter-cultural to conservative and everywhere in between.
The idea that homeschooling students are not socialized adequately or that they are social
misfits is an idea that has been challenged and addressed by researchers in a scholarly
fashion as well as by homeschoolers themselves. Typically veteran homeschoolers have
not been phased by the issue of socialization and have most likely heard this question
from individuals outside the homeschooling arena. For example, “Research on the
question of socialization suggests that children are thriving in the home school
environment and that much can be learned from looking more closely at what home
schooling families are doing” (Medlin, 2000, p. 120).
**Academic performance.** In addition to the myth that homeschooling socially isolates children in a counterproductive way, a second pervasive myth has also persisted in the collective psyche of those within the educational community. This myth suggests that children who have been homeschooled suffer in their academic performance. However, Delquardi, Duvall, and Ward (2004) note that “data consistently show that home schooled children typically score higher than the national average on achievement tests” (p. 141). Ray (2010) also has reported that students who have been homeschooled outperform their peers who have attended traditional schools: “Homeschool student achievement test scores are exceptionally high. The mean scores for every subtest (which are at least the 80th percentile) are well above those of public school students” (p. 22).

Even in early grades, homeschooled students have been shown to outperform their peers, and the differences increase exponentially as students advance in grade level: “[H]ome- schooled students in grades 1–4 perform typically one grade level higher than their public and private-schooled peers. However, by grade 8, the average home-schooled student performs four grade levels above the national average” (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009, p. 310).

Clearly, one of the most compelling points about homeschooling is that on a national average, homeschooled students score higher on standardized tests. This fact may be surprising because it is infrequently advertised by traditional schools for self-evident reasons. As most students follow a normal or mainstream course of education, it is atypical to pursue learning using an alternative pathway. In other words, institutional schools have been considered the mainstream form of education for more than 150 years in the U.S.A. Whether it is because homeschooled students represent a relatively small
percentage of the total school-aged population, the possibility that homeschooled students have an overall attitude that is favorable to learning and achieving good results on standardized tests, or some other reason, homeschoolers trend toward higher academic performance as a whole (Wilhelm, Firmin, 2009).

Others have argued that homeschooled students experience barriers in achieving their full academic potential as they pursue post-secondary options. According to Romanowski (2006), “The argument is that without a high school diploma, grades, and SAT or ACT test scores, homeschooled students have a difficult time getting into good colleges and universities” (p. 128). On the contrary, Romanowski has further observed that “Not only do colleges and universities boast that their place of learning is supportive of students who have largely been homeschooled, but universities actively recruit homeschoolers [since] these students scored higher than the national average in English, reading, and the overall composite of the ACT” (p. 128).

By taking educational matters into their own hands, homeschooling families assume an awesome responsibility. As a result, most homeschoolers do not take their responsibility to educate their own children lightly. The decision to homeschool, to take a child from a school of professional educators and educate them at home, is an important decision with life-long implications. Like any other worthwhile pursuit, when it is planned for and discerned carefully by intelligent and caring adults, the results can be remarkably good.

Motivated parents/teachers translates into motivated learners. This in and of itself may be the reason the homeschooled population has outperformed the
institutionally schooled population inasmuch as institutionally schooled students must
attend school by law (as the only other options are homeschooling or online schools).

Students in institutional schools are sometimes completely disengaged and or really do not care about education at all. Such students are subjected to standardized tests, and the schools that have under performing or apathetic students enrolled suffer the consequences due to punitive aspects of the NCLB. The fact that there are disengaged students and at times less-than-motivated teachers in institutional schools has been a recipe for disaster and one that has led to a progressive move toward homeschooling.

There is more to it than just academic performance for the typical homeschooling parent even though academic performance has shown to be greater in homeschooling situations as a whole. According to Burkhart and Randall (2009), the main reason people choose to homeschool is parental autonomy and defining and sharing personal values with their own children. With this as the impetus for homeschooling, academic results have received secondary emphasis, but despite the original reasons for homeschooling, the academic results have been impressive. The idea that “untrained” educators (parents and caregivers of children) can generate academic results that are better than professional educators must come as an unsettling fact to the professional education community.

Parental Options

The modern-day resurgence of homeschooling is credited to counter cultural thinkers like John Holt of the late 1950s and 1960s. “The structural flexibility of homeschooling, and the space it provides both literally and ideologically, lends itself to counter cultural movements of all kinds. For instance, it also supports a socially
progressive critique, which is where the modern homeschooling movement gained early inspiration, in the writings of John Holt” (Kunzman, 2010, p. 18).

The current trend in homeschooling has broadened its practice to any kind of thinking or social/political definition. Ironically, members of the counter cultural left who homeschooled their children in the early 1970s in communes across the U.S.A. in an anti-establishment attempt to change the U.S.A. (or escape) to a more counter cultural definition dissolved into a more Christian-centered right group of homeschoolers by the 1980s (Romanowski, 2006). This transition represents an interesting shift in the practice of homeschooling. However, in today’s current group of practicing homeschoolers, one can find any number of differing social/political viewpoints. As the movement has grown and continues to grow, it includes more people from a variety of religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. According to Romanowski (2006), “The stereotypical view of homeschooling families is one of a conservative Christian family who homeschool in order to pass on Christian values to their children and protect them from the world... However, religious and conservative families are not the only ones homeschooling their children... Both the political left and right of homeschooling are active today” (p. 128).

From a national education standpoint, the U.S.A is a country that can be characterized by the variety of choices available to people who live here. While many countries around the world enjoy a measure of educational options it is probably safe to say that no other country in the world offers as many choices as the U.S.A. when it comes to learning and formal education. The availability of knowledge is widespread and impressive. The U.S.A. works to make public education free and appropriate for all of
its citizens and is likely to continue in vast, open learning communities that place a high value on the autonomy of the individual.

Most U.S. citizens would agree that an intelligent citizenry is the main ingredient to a free civilization. Thomas Jefferson made the following statement: “Educate and inform the whole mass of the people...they are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty” (Jefferson, 1820). Free to succeed, Americans have lived in a land of educational opportunity. However, Americans also have suffered from problems within the learning communities of their children’s schools. In order to resolve these problems, Burkhart and Randall (2009) have suggested the following:

Parents have three options: first, the loyalty option or passive acceptance of the status quo with the trust and hope of eventual improvement; second, the voice option or raising of one’s voice as an individual or as a group to create awareness among customers (other parents) and school administrators (firm managers) of the necessity for change and improvement; and third, the exit option where the parent removes their children from their current school and placed them in another school or private sector. (p. 244)

While Burkhart and Randall do not specifically mention homeschooling by name as an option, they have discussed the “exit option,” which is/can be a way to refer to homeschooling used by those typically in favor of young people attending learning institutions verses homeschooling.

Homeschooling parents seem to have a different perspective on education and the place education holds on their personal scale of priorities as further stated by Burkhart and Randall (2009):
However, the area of academic challenge and excellence, which was the first concern for parents who chose the magnet and private schools, was not one of the concerns for the parents who were homeschooling their children. The homeschoolers’ major concern had to do with sharing and defining their personal values with their children and having parental autonomy. (p. 248)

**Various Forms of Homeschooling**

The definition of “homeschool” encompasses a broad range of home-based educational options, but within this spectrum, a variety of “subgenres” of homeschooling options have been identified. According to Lundt (2004), “Despite this lack of governmental support, alternatives to the public schools have been in operation for most of the 200-year history of public education. They exist in the form of home schools, democratic and free schools, folk education institutions, Montessori Schools, Open Schools, independent schools, private schools, and parochial schools. There is an ever-increasing number of alternatives to public schools that students and parents may employ to acquire an education” (p. 21). In its simplest form, homeschool often has been considered education that takes place in the home. According to this definition, even students who attend traditional schools in some sense are homeschooled when they complete homework at home with the help of a peer, parent, sibling, or other relative. However, demarcations can be made among various forms of homeschooling based on several factors.

**Online schooling at home.** Because the Internet has provided wide-open educational opportunities to learn anywhere the Internet is accessible, online schools have flourished. They have continued to expand and refine their already impressive
ability to deliver world-class academics to anyone with Internet access. “Schooling at home” is a term that has been used to describe the process in which online learners participate at home, especially when online schools are public, charter online schools. These online schools are required to report attendance, issue and grade assignments, and keep track of learning hours, just as their brick-and-mortar counterparts are required to do. Typically, “learning coaches” (usually a parent or relative) have been assigned to students to help log attendance and to provide academic assistance to students as needed. At the high school level, online schools attach credits to courses based on Carnagy units, just the same as any accredited high school.

Private accredited online schools have shared the same responsibilities, and the private, accredited online learning experience also has required reporting attendance and learning hours. The experience in private or public online schools (as compared to charter schools) is similar to that of a private online school in that “schooling at home” requires that private and public online schools report attendance, provide regular progress reports, and adhere to normed grading scales. In its strictest sense, homeschooling differs from schooling at home via an online school in that traditional homeschoolers typically are not required to report attendance or progress to anyone, depending on the location of the homeschool. Some school districts ask that parents provide the curriculum of homeschooled students and want to be apprised of extensive details regarding the education that homeschooled children in their districts receive.

**Hybrid.** Even the earliest attempts at institutional education could be considered a form of hybrid education in that students spent the majority of their day in classrooms and then completed additional assignments at home. Together, these two locations
formed the basis of what has been considered a hybrid form of education. This relatively simple form of hybrid education has expanded to include a wide variety of additional options that parents have combined to provide unique and tailored learning opportunities for their children. For example, according to Cambre (2009), “Parents have pursued the option of homeschooling their children part-time and opted to place them in public schooling part time to supplement home instruction” (p. 63).

Huerta, González, and d’Entremont (2006) have noted that in addition to brick-and-mortar schools and the home environment, homeschooling has expanded to include resource facilities that provide flexibility and availability:

Home school charter students may participate in teacher- or paraprofessional-directed lessons at school resource centers. Formal lessons are common in science instruction, both because parents may lack expertise in the subject and because it is not economically feasible to provide all families with expensive equipment. Formal lessons are also common in extracurricular courses such as music, art, physical education, carpentry, and other subject areas. Resource centers are also used for computer laboratories, tutoring centers, and parent–teacher conferences, but they primarily serve as stockrooms for the vast curriculum libraries and equipment collection that is provided to home school charter families. (p. 110)

**International Considerations and Ethnic Differences**

While research on homeschooling has been conducted primarily in the United States, countries beyond the borders of the U.S. have experimented with homeschooling options and experienced a variety of results: “In contrast to the United States, the laws
concerning home education widely vary across the European Union. At one extreme, several Member States completely restrict any type of home education; at the other extreme, some Member States recognize home education as a valid educational choice and leave the decision to parents” (Koons, 2010, p. 148).

Because the U.S.A. is a single country made up of member states with a unifying federal government under one constitution, it seems self-evident that laws and regulations regarding homeschooling would be more consistent than the European Union (EU). The EU, with member countries, each with their own rules and laws, may have similarities in regulations across the entire union, but the fact that the union is composed of bordering countries that each reflect historical, sovereign identities and mores prevents the same kind of consistency that has been found in the U.S.A. pertaining to matters of law.

Therefore, the E.U. has established a variety of laws regarding the practice of homeschooling, including some that are completely prohibitive of homeschooling. For example, according to Spiegler (2003), “Home education in Germany is not allowed as an alternative to public schooling. It is unknown to most people and until recently, widely unnoticed by educational and sociological research” (p. 179). Great Britain, on the other hand, currently allows homeschooling and has experienced a large growth in homeschooling: “Recent estimates in Britain suggest that the numbers in home education have grown from somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 in 1998 to something in excess of 150,000 in 2007, though in the Badman Report the known numbers sit at around 80,000. Under a Freedom of Information Act request, the UK television station

Comparing Great Britain to the United States regarding homeschooling practices reveals that while the British homeschooling movement has been growing, it has not been growing as fast as the U.S.A.’s homeschooling movement. Additionally, the rationale driving the homeschooling movement in Great Britain has appeared to be less religiously motivated than the U.S.A.’s home schooling. As Conroy has further pointed out, “The United States has seen even more substantial growth, with possible numbers of somewhere between 1,500,000 and 2,000,000 home educated students. Many of those who home educate in the United States do so for religious reasons, while in Britain the population of homeschooling parents tends to be altogether more variegated” (p. 330).

While Conroy has suggested that Great Britain’s impetus for homeschooling is less religiously motivated and backed by a greater variety of reasons, some research has suggested the same trend in the U.S.A. After describing the British poet and critic Edmund Grosse’s homeschooling experience as “stifling isolation” as well as paternalistic and religiously oppressive, Kunzman (2010) had this to say: “Images of religiously inspired oppression such as this have dominated public perception of homeschooling until only recently, when it became apparent that home schoolers are an increasingly diverse group running the gamut of pedagogical philosophy and methods” (p. 17). Kunzman’s comments suggest that stereotypes have been prevalent in perceptions of homeschooling and, based on this information, direct insight through a more accurate understanding of homeschooling is needed.
According to Varnham and Squelch (2008), Australia also has embraced the homeschool movement:

For increasing numbers of children in Australia and elsewhere school has returned to the home, with their parents as their teachers. The rise in popularity of home schooling raises important questions relating to the right of choice, the responsibility and the control of education. (p. 194)

As Varham and Squelch have noted, homeschooling has grown in popularity in Australia, much like it has in the United States, and its growth has raised important questions about the regulation of education. The responsibility of educating children is not without consequences, as an educated population makes for a healthy nation.

The importance of the topic of homeschooling (not only in the United States but also globally) is illustrated by the fact that international considerations related to the topic are similar to domestic considerations here in the United States, and regional regulations vary as each municipality grapples with the topic. Regarding international considerations reflected in the literature about homeschooling, one thing is abundantly clear, and that is that perceptions of currently practicing homeschoolers have played an important role in gaining insight on the topic.

**Language Bias**

For a variety of reasons, members of the educational community have been wary of the unregulated nature of homeschooling and viewed it as a threat on a number of levels. These perceptions have been reflected in subtle ways, including the language used to discuss homeschooling options.
The “exit option.” One example of subtle language bias against homeschooling is found in the term “exit option.” The use of this term to describe homeschoolers who choose to leave the traditional institutional school system for the purpose of homeschooling seems benign; however, it has reflected a subtle negativity in articles that have tended to portray an unfavorable view of homeschooling. For example, Lubienski (2000) has stated, “Second, as an exit strategy, home schooling undermines the ability of public education to improve and become more responsive as a democratic institution” (p. 207).

Lubienski has referred to homeschool as an “exit strategy.” His statement asserts that homeschooling “undermines” public education in its ability to be “responsive as a democratic institution,” clearly maligning homeschooling as an unfavorable option. In fact, Lubienski has suggested that homeschooling actually has been detrimental to public education by preventing it from being as responsive as it could be were homeschoolers required to return to public schools. The use of the term “exit strategy” suggests that homeschoolers have chosen flight over fight or have chosen to escape rather than remain involved and work to improve the public schools, and his nomenclature unwittingly has perpetuated a subtle language bias in the literature surrounding public schooling vs. homeschooling debate.

“Home sheltering.” The term “home sheltering” has also been used to describe homeschooling. Similar to the term “exit option,” the term “home sheltering” also reflects negative connotations and has been used as a way of reflecting bias against homeschooling. The following excerpt illustrates more deeply the subtle biases associated with the term “home sheltering”:
Question: Several of my friends who home-school maintain that home-schooling keeps children away from bad influences within the peer group and other inappropriate situations at school. Is it realistic to keep a child sheltered from such things? How are they going to know how to function in the real world?

Answer: Home-schooling and sheltering are hardly synonymous. A parent shelters by preventing a child from encountering realities that would be helpful, not harmful, to the child. For example, a parent who helps her third-grade child with his homework every night, making sure he answers every question correctly, is sheltering. She is preventing her child from learning that he is capable of meeting challenges on his own. (Rosemond, 2003, p. 2)

Rosemond’s response to an anonymous questioner accurately reflects the logic behind the term “home sheltering,” as it implies that effective homeschooling will not prevent a child from being exposed to realities that will be helpful, such as gaining confidence by learning to complete work independently.

In the context of many current conversations taking place in administrative board rooms as well as in literature focusing on the topic of homeschooling, the terms “home shelterers” and “exit option” have been intended as derogatory terms.

**Reasons for Homeschooling**

As long as human beings have existed, they have educated their young. Before there were schools, the learning process was less formal and more individualized. Prior to the mid 1800s in the United States, institutional schools as we know them today—i.e., with compulsory attendance laws—did not exist, and homeschooling was common practice. Not until 100 years later, in the mid 1960s, was the idea of compulsory
education in institutional schools challenged by Americans. When compulsory attendance laws were challenged, the laws changed to legalize homeschooling as more and more people opted to homeschool their children. The emphasis on the value of homeschooling versus public schooling has oscillated from era to era as educational reform has evolved. According to Jackson (2005), “The history of compulsory education suggests that coercion and resistance go hand in hand, and that criticism of the use of restraint and coercion in the formal administration of learning is as old as schooling itself.

Such criticism includes the work of Jean Jaques Rousseau and Leo Tolstoy, who argued that schools violated a child’s nature” (p. 65). Jackson has suggested that the idea of compulsory attendance, or coercing people to attend school, is counter intuitive and counter productive. In other words, he suggested that people have a natural disposition or tendency to learn--some more than others, some more efficiently than others, excluding disabilities--and that the natural inclination to learn is ruined by compulsory attendance laws.

The United States enjoys a wide variety of learning opportunities, and U.S. citizens are free to pursue those opportunities. The importance of learning and learning at a level that is significant enough to be competitive has been a point of debate in current times as well as throughout history. The conflict between the pressure to compete successfully and the altruistic human nature of learning as an esoteric experience for each individual allowing optimal time for reflection and growth have been the factors that collide when policy and legislation decisions about public schooling are made. The ability to compete clearly has triumphed over the altruistic goals of learning as public
schools in the U.S.A. have been held to a challenging standard when competing on a
global stage to produce the world’s best and brightest people in accordance with those
challenging standards. Government mandates, such as NCLB, Goals 2000, and E.S.E.A.
aimed at improving the public schools in the United States all have made an impact on
public schools and the process of learning. Public schools in the United States have been
in a continual state of reform for at least 100 years. Perhaps the biggest change in public
school law in the last 50 years has been the allowance of homeschooling.

Fringe or Not Fringe: A Matter of Perspective or a Matter of Fact?

Because homeschooling has not been considered a form of mainstream education,
and because some homeschooling parents have been viewed as counter cultural, some
members of the more structured educational community have viewed homeschooling as a
form of “fringe” education. Like many movements that can trace their origins from
transgression to tolerance to acceptance to full embrace, the homeschooling movement
has also followed this social trajectory.

According to Wilhelm and Firmin (2009), “Presently, home schooling is a
significant movement that public school educators cannot simply ignore as ‘fringe’ ” (p.
303). Yuracko (2008) also has suggested that “homeschooling in America is no longer a
fringe phenomenon” (p. 123). However, Roberts, one year after Yuracko’s statement,
suggested that homeschooling is still a “fringe” practice. Although still viewed as
separate from the mainstream form of education, the perception of homeschooling as a
fringe form of education suggests that Roberts’ perception of homeschooling represents a
movement away from the idea that it is a “threat.” As Collom and Mitchell (2005) have
noted, the perception of homeschooling has shifted: “Then we argue that this
[homeschooling] is an ‘alternative’ (rather than ‘oppositional’) type of social movement” (p. 274).

While not necessarily labeling parents who prefer homeschooling as “fringe” elements, Kennedy and Gust (2005) have suggested that parents advocating homeschooling have non-mainstream views on vaccination. This apparent trend toward skepticism regarding the safety of vaccines suggests that parents who choose to homeschool their children may also represent alternative viewpoints regarding other issues typically considered as foundational in a democracy.

Although parents who have chosen to homeschool their children often share common demographic characteristics, to stereotype them as “ultra conservative” or “far right wing” may be largely unfair. In fact, the homeschooling movement is not homogeneous. It includes people that belong to a wide spectrum of political/ideological, religious, and educational beliefs, and it cuts across racial and class lines (Sampson, 2005). Kunzman (2010) has suggested that “the point of such a comparison, however, is not to imply that homeschooling ultimately fosters religious fundamentalism. The structural flexibility of homeschooling, and the space it provides both literally and ideologically, lends itself to counter cultural movements of all kinds” (p. 18)

Granted, as Stevens (2001) has noted, there are, in essence, two general groupings within the home school movement: “Christian” and “inclusive.” However, there are some perspectives that are shared across these fault lines: a sense that the standardized education offered by mainstream schooling, and taught by teachers prepared in our teacher education institutions, interferes with their children’s potential; that there is a serious danger when the state intrudes into the life of the family; that experts and
bureaucracies are apt to impose their beliefs and are unable to meet the needs of families and children (Stevens, 2001, pp. 4-7).

These worries tap currents that are widespread within American culture and they too cut across particular social and cultural divides (Apple, 2007, p. 114). “If home education and public education rethought the “us versus them” attitude, education as a whole may benefit. Home education should not be scrutinized differently than public education; both home and public education should be considered component parts in America’s educational purpose.” (Olsen, 2010, p. 423)

Perceptions

As with many topics and issues related to the philosophy of education, people who have chosen not to practice homeschooling have relied on what they have seen, heard, experienced, and read about homeschooling to form perceptions of homeschooling and make decisions about its educational value. Out of disinterest or indifference, many people have not considered the topic of homeschooling as part of the mainstream discussion regarding educational policy. For those who have considered this topic, the information that is available to them often has come in the form of advocacy group information or shallow parcels: “For the most part the little that is known about those that home school is anecdotal or based on surveys by advocacy groups for home schooling” (Houston, Eugenia, & Toma, 2003, p. 921). In another study about the perceptions of homeschooling, McDowell, Sanchez, and Jones (2000) reported the following:

From this detailed examination and comparison of respondent perceptions and the known data about the population, the following conclusion may be safely drawn:
The respondents taking part in this study seemed to be rarely well informed, often misinformed, and totally uninformed about many aspects of the home schooling community and, most important, the efficacy of the home schooling process itself (p. 141).

The fact that little is known about homeschooling by those who are not actively homeschooling should not be surprising since the homeschooling community is relatively small compared to the number of families who choose to send their children to traditional/institutional schools. However, according to McDowell, Sanchez, and Jones (2000), the perceptions that non-homeschoolers have of homeschooling are “misinformed” and “uninformed” to the point that the “efficacy” of homeschooling is completely missed. At first, this may seem to have little to no consequence to the educational community. However, there are consequences associated with misperceptions about the value of homeschooling and about the impact homeschooling may have on a homeschooled student who aspires to attend college—questions such as How will the homeschooled student get accepted with no formal high school credits? and Will college enrollments decrease because of homeschooled students not being accepted? Engaging in healthy dialogue and attempting to provide answers to questions like these can alter perceptions about homeschooling and influence the effect that homeschooling has on the world of education. Fortunately for homeschooled students and colleges alike, as the number of homeschoolers accepted by colleges and universities has increased, dialogue about these and other relevant homeschool issues has become more common.

According to Wilhelm and Firmin (2009), “Although public universities at one time viewed high school graduates from home schools with suspicion, Wasley (2007) has
indicated that now the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction, and homeschooled students generally are in high demand. Generally, homeschooled applicants achieve above average ACT and SAT scores and aptly complete their college degrees” (p. 304). As Wilhelm and Firmin have noted, homeschoolers have been gaining admission to colleges and universities with higher than average ACT and SAT scores and graduating from college with little difficulty. This shift in perspective points to the importance not only of the increased academic performance among homeschoolers but also the important role of perceptions about homeschooling among members of the educational community, students, and their parents.

Some critics of homeschooling have characterized the homeschooling population as almost cult-like in their practices, mostly concerned with keeping their offspring from experiencing “the real world” in order to promote the religious belief system of the homeschooling parents. According to Kunzman (2010), “Stereotypes of religious homeschooling often involve parents creating brainwashed automatons, unable to think for themselves and either sequestered from society or determined to impose their worldview on others” (p. 26).

To those outside the homeschooling practice, the desire to homeschool may appear unusual, especially since the status quo has been compulsory attendance at school for more than 100 years. Using the same line of thinking Kunzman has described, one could argue that those who structure the current institutional education system are likewise determined to impose upon students a certain way of thinking or behaving who attend traditional schools. As a result, homeschooling has been perceived as a process that is different, unusual, and far removed from mainstream educational practice, and
therefore it has been subject to various types of misunderstandings and speculation. Wilhelm and Firmin (2009) also have noted that the perceived stereotype of a homeschool parents is again religious and conservative: “The contemporary, stereotypical image of home schooling parents often depicts a homogeneous, deeply religious, socially conservative sub-group of the population” (p. 307).

While it may be a “contemporary, stereotypical image” that homeschoolers are conservative and religious, that stereotype is apt to change very quickly as the changes in schooling accelerate rapidly. According to Gaither (2009), “Homeschooling is typically conceived of as a distinct educational practice that takes place in the home or private associations. But as we move into a new decade, the increasing hybridization of schooling and the blurring of lines between public and private are becoming prominent themes.” Kunzman (2010) also has pointed to the changing landscape of education when he asks the following question: “What exactly is public—beyond the funding source—when a student spends her days at home in front of the computer, but enrolled in a public virtual high school? The role of technology and distance education will almost surely re-shape the nature of schooling, and indeed the process is already underway” (p. 26). As Kunzman has pointed out, the change process is underway, and hybrid schools have begun to fuse the old and more traditional model of education with a new and emerging model, creating a blend of schooling experiences that defies traditional nomenclature.

Adding to these changes is the technology that drives them. Students today may enjoy a wider variety of learning experiences than ever before because current technology allows online learning to occur anywhere Internet connectivity is available.
Public funding for online education no longer covers only the cost of buildings, books, and athletic equipment; rather, now it also incorporates online curriculum and online support teachers and staff. Any and all profits from these online learning endeavors are routed directly to the owner of the online learning system. As a result, competition has increased substantially for public funds, and this competition drives a different kind of performance. In short, traditional schools have been threatened by the first truly new learning tool in 150 years, the Internet.

Because of new and faster technologies, the speed at which educational delivery systems have changed has been unmatched in history, and there is no evidence to suggest that the speed of this change will diminish anytime soon. For example, it took 77 years for compulsory education to become a national law starting in 1852 and ending in 1929. Later, as homeschooling re-emerged in the early 1960s, it took roughly 33 years to change compulsory attendance laws nationwide to allow homeschooling in 1993 across the U.S.A. At first, mainstream America did not approve of homeschooling; however, since that time, homeschooling has grown rapidly. This oscillation in educational and legal policy has not been without effect on the perceptions of homeschooling as a viable educational option. As Houston and Toma (2003) have pointed out, “Public perception of home education has also changed over the last 15 years. In 1986, a Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup poll found only 16% of Americans believed home schooling to be a ‘good thing’ (Lines 1996). In 1994, however, a Wall Street Journal-NBC News poll found 28% of Americans would actually prefer home education to in-school education” (p. 921).

Houston and Toma (2003) have presented strong evidence that perceptions of homeschooling have tended to shift over time. Both positive and negative images of
homeschooling have pervaded the public perception of this educational practice, and these perceptions provide an important site for scholarly investigation. As Olsen (2009) has pointed out, “As home education has grown, it has separated itself from mainstream public education and attracted scrutiny that creates more harm than benefit. As evidenced by Rachel and Jonathan, courts have scrutinized home education as something separate from public education and questioned home education's validity in America. This approach, however, is wrong” (p. 421). The educational community would benefit from more knowledge of the perspectives of homeschoolers. As Romanowski (2008) has stated, scrutinizing home education "is due, in part, to a lack of understanding by public school educators as to why parents choose to homeschool their children” (p. 421).
Chapter Three

Methods

Perceptions about the value of homeschooling have been varied, ranging from indifference to extreme prejudice. Modern families have appeared to devalue public schools as evidenced by an increasing attrition rate accompanied by an increase in the number of parents who have chosen to homeschool their children. The goal of this study was to explore the reasons why parents who homeschool their children choose to do so and describe their perceptions of why homeschooling is a viable option for their children’s education. This case study sought to explore the opinions of the participants regarding private and public schools--more specifically, the benefits and or deficits of public or private institutional and/or online schools.

This study investigated the perceived value of homeschooling among parents who have chosen to homeschool their children by investigating the perceptions of four married couples who have chosen to homeschool their children. In order to explore the perceptions of homeschooling from the perspective of practicing homeschoolers, this research design included a qualitative case study method featuring in depth, semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview approach allowed the researcher to engage in conversation with the participants that extended beyond the interview questions and allowed for follow-up questions.

As phenomenological study involves describing events or things about our world, this study sought to provide insight that raises awareness that can lead to better understanding of the phenomenon being researched. As homeschooling is a shared experience between all participants (and the researcher) in this case study, an
ethnographic or “portrait of a people” was also involved. Analyzing the data involved an “emic” approach, which means the researcher made an attempt to interpret the data from the perspectives of the participants (as compared to an “etic,” or outsider approach) (Pike, 1954). The emic approach was enhanced because the researcher has been and currently is an active homeschooler.

**Bias**

The researcher is an active Catholic homeschooling parent who has been married to an active homeschooling Catholic wife for 15 years; with one of 6 children enrolled full time in a local public school. While the convenience sample for this case study provided a high level of familiarity and therefore an increased opportunity to obtain candid responses from participants, the fact that the researcher is demographically similarly to the participants in terms of socio-economic status, background, and an active homeschooler necessarily means that bias was an inherent component of this study. With this in mind, the researcher attempted to remain aware of this bias during the interview process, when analyzing the data, and when reporting the data. The researcher also employed the use of a public school administrator as an objective independent observer, who participated by being present and observing each interview with the exception of one which was done over the telephone. The observer listened to the audio recording of the telephone interview with the researcher after the telephone interview took place. The purpose of the public school administrator being present was to help eliminate bias as the observer could listen for bias and discuss it with the researcher, in addition to the researcher’s own awareness of bias.
**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do parents who homeschool their children perceive the benefits and values of homeschooling?

RQ2: What perceived deficits do parents who homeschool their children attribute to other educational choices (e.g., public/private schooling)?

**Research Design**

The research method chosen for this study was a multiple case study design. According to Houser (2008), “A case study approach can illustrate life-changing events by giving them meaning and creating understanding about the subject’s experience. These strategies can result in a great depth of understanding about the phenomenon under study” (p. 339). According to Creswell (2003), case studies are appropriate when researchers intend to explore “in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals” (p. 15). The advantages of the case study method are that (a) the participants can provide historical information that may be pertinent to the topic of homeschooling; (b) the researcher has flexibility and a degree of control over the line of questioning during the semi-structured interview process; and (c) the participants may provide illuminating and specific answers to research questions, identify phenomena specific to homeschooling, and reflect the ways that homeschooling is perceived.

Because case studies are concerned with the study of subjective perspective(s) of individuals experiencing a particular phenomenon, they provide an excellent method for examining and identifying specific perceptions about the value of homeschooling. Case studies also provide a method by which to identify inaccurate assumptions about
homeschooling and the way it is perceived by those not practicing homeschooling, by
listening to the thoughts and perceptions of the participants in their own words. This
approach allows the researcher and the reader to examine the words of the participants
and think about what they mean.

This multiple case study approach was informed by a phenomenological
viewpoint, which has its foundation in personal perspectives and interpretations. It
emphasized the importance of the perspective(s) of participants—in this case, parents
who have chosen to homeschool their children. This research study is grounded in
subjectivity. As such, the goal of this study was primarily concerned with describing
rather than explaining and therefore has the potential to provide insight into the
motivations and perspectives of the participants’ subjective experiences and possibly
update conventional understanding or stereotypical perceptions of homeschooling.

Participants. The participants for this case study consisted of four married
couples. All participants were married couples who have chosen to homeschool their
own biological children. Some participants have participated in discussions with the
researcher about homeschooling through social gatherings prior to the interview
process. All participants were solicited by the researcher through convenience sample.
Participants were told about the study and asked if they would be willing to participate.
Once participants agreed to be interviewed, dates were set and adult consent forms were
signed by the participants. Participants were told that they were free to stop at any time
during the interview. All participants in this study will be given fictitious names for the
purpose of protecting their identity and for ease of reading.

Mr. Walton Mrs. Walton
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Caucasian Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>50 years of age</td>
<td>53 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>Mother (Medical Doctor, non-practicing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 children</td>
<td>6 children</td>
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<th>Mrs. Utah</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian (Malaysian born) Male</td>
<td>Caucasian Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>48 years of age</td>
<td>49 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher (engineer for 15 years prior)</td>
<td>Homemaker, homeschooling teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 children</td>
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<th>Mr. Smith</th>
<th>Mrs. Smith</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>African American/German Female</td>
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<td>34 years of age</td>
<td>37 years of age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mom</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 children</td>
<td>5 children</td>
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<th>Mr. Jones</th>
<th>Mrs. Jones</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caucasian Male</td>
<td>Caucasian Female</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

This qualitative study sought to explore the experiences of practicing homeschoolers and to reveal their thinking and their own perceptions regarding homeschooling. The study focused on a small number of participants selected by convenience sample. The method of data collection consisted of four components: (a) the participants, (b) the setting, (c) the instrument, and (d) the interview process.

Setting. The interviews were conducted in the mid-western homes of each couple participating in the study with the exception of the Smiths. The Smiths were interviewed over the telephone as they were not available to meet in person.

Instrument. The semi-structured interview guide initially consisted of 19 questions (see Appendix B) that were constructed based on a review of the existing homeschooling literature. The interview questions were reviewed by experts in the field of education and, after subsequent revision, organized and aligned with the research questions. One interview question (number 12) was eliminated in three of the interviews because it was found to be redundant as most of the participants (all but the Smiths) had children enrolled in some form of school other than their homeschooling (i.e. religious correspondence school, online public school, and a religious school that ran two days a week as a homeschool enrichment program).
The interview process. This case study was conducted using a semi-structured interview process. The semi-structured interview process facilitated the collection of in-depth perceptions and information through inductive methods, e.g., process discussions that evolved during the course of conducting the interviews and the phenomenological study of the perspective(s) of the research participants. Prior to the interviews, the participants were given time to ask questions about the study and sign an informed consent form indicating their agreement to participate in this study. During this pre-interview period, couples also agreed to have the interview audio recorded for transcription purposes. The 18 interview questions were asked sequentially unless participants had already answered a particular question earlier in the interview, in which case the question was omitted.

In addition to the primary researcher, a second objective observer also assisted in conducting three of the four interviews. The second observer was an administrator at a public school and participated in the data collection process by observing the interviewer for bias and to facilitate the data collection process to provide additional viewpoints and interpretations about the setting and the interview process. The purpose of the observer was to provide objective perspective to the researcher through post interview discussion of the interview contents to represent a balancing viewpoint--e.g., in favor of public schools. The observer took notes on an observation form during and after each in person interview to record dominant impressions, insights, and observations. Each interview lasted approximately one hour with the exception of the phone interview which lasted approximately half an hour.
The researcher and the observer discussed observations made by the observer after the interviews. Brief analytic notes were taken by the observer. The observer listened to the recording of the telephone interview with the researcher, and had brief notes and discussion to share with the researcher afterwards.

**Data Analysis**

After each of the four interviews were conducted, the researcher submitted the audio recording to a commercial transcriptionist, who transcribed the interviews verbatim. The transcriptionist provided the researcher with electronic versions (MS Word) of the transcripts as well as hardcopies of each transcript. The research used a process referred to as Descriptive Coding and involved three cycles of coding the data. The first cycle in the process was to identify what the participants were talking about by coding the transcripts with footnotes. The researcher read the transcripts through individually each one time. The second reading of the transcripts involved labeling the data with short, descriptive codes in the footnotes. The second cycle in the process was to examine the first cycle codes to identify themes or patterns in the first cycle codes. Any data given by four or more of the eight participants was considered thematic. The third cycle of the process was to look for similarity among the themes of the second cycle coding. Follow up questions were asked of one of the participants. One participant contacted the researcher to inform him that what they said about their religious school being like public school was perhaps not accurate. The thematic similarity that emerged is reported in chapter four.

All responses to questions were reviewed for thematic similarities. Observations made by the observer were recorded in brief notes and compared to verbal responses.
provided by the participants. After initially reading and reviewing all interview transcripts, the responses of each set of participants were coded. The codes were compared with one another in an effort to identify themes in responses that were qualitatively and/or thematically similar. Any emerging themes about the perceptions of the value of homeschooling were identified. In addition, any individual responses that stood out as unique or that illuminated especially interesting individual perceptions and subjective experiences pertaining to homeschooling will be reported in Chapter 4.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted with two married couples to test the data collection and data processing procedures (e.g., interview questions, audio technology, etc.). Based on the experience and the responses from the participants, minor revisions were made to the semi-structured interview guide. One question was reworded so that it reflected second-person voice “you” rather than third person “people,” which resulted in eliciting a more personal response from participants. A second pilot interview was conducted with a second couple, which allowed the researcher to become more familiar with the interview process and refine procedural issues. For example, an interview question was added that inquired whether participants minded being contacted again with follow-up questions at a later date. One interview question was omitted (No. 12—*Would you ever send your children to a local school? If so, at what point do you think you would?*) because it seemed to be redundant and was typically answered by participants in response to a prior interview question.
Limitations and Assumptions

Because all research is situational, this study is not without limitations. First, because this case study uses a convenience sample, the results may not be appropriate to generalize to a larger homeschooling population. Second, the presence of the researcher may influence responses from participants. Third, concerns about anonymity and confidentiality may prove inhibiting to participants, thereby influencing the candor of their responses.

Assumptions are also an important component of any research paradigm. It is assumed that participants will respond openly and honestly during the interview process. Further, it is assumed that the researcher will work to avoid personal bias as the interviews are conducted, reviewed, and analyzed.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the methods that were used to conduct this case study analysis. It includes sections on bias, research questions, research design, participants, data collection and instrumentation, data analysis, limitations, and assumptions. Chapter 4 presents the results of this case study. Chapter 5 discusses the findings and presents suggestions for future study as well as practical applications.
Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this research study was to explore the reasons that parents who homeschool their children chose to do so as well as the perceptions homeschooling parents have about the value of home schooling as a viable and legitimate educational option. This research study also explored the thoughts and opinions of parents who homeschool their children regarding the benefits and deficits of public and private schooling. By choice, parents who homeschool their children typically do not seek to be interviewed about their preferred methods of educating their children, nor do they seem especially eager to answer to school districts or other governing agencies. They and their families are difficult to locate, and when found, they respond to surveys at notoriously low rates (Uecker, 2008, p. 563). Because many parents who choose to homeschool their children frequently remain unreported in typical statistical data gathered by educational governing bodies, collecting accurate data from parents who choose to homeschool their children has been challenging at best. This researcher was refused names of homeschoolers by Local Educational Service Centers when they refused to share names of homeschoolers for confidentiality reasons.

This chapter represents qualitative data collected from homeschooling families consisting of married couples with biological children of their own. The participants are given fictitious names to protect their identities and for ease of reading. The families were selected by convenience sampling. One Islamic/African American family and three Caucasian Christian families participated in this research by volunteering to answer interview questions. Three interviews were in person; one was conducted on the
phone. The interview questions were organized to correspond to one of two research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions about the value of homeschooling among parents who have chosen to homeschool their children?

- Reasons for Homeschooling (Interview Questions 2-9)
- Perceptions of Homeschooling (Interview Questions 13-16)

RQ2: What perceived deficits do parents who homeschool their children attribute to other educational choices (e.g., public/private schooling)?

- View of Institutional Schools (Interview Questions 10-12)
- Costs and Benefits of Homeschooling (Interview Questions 17-19)

The interviews were audio recorded, then transcribed. After the transcription, the researcher coded the responses from the participants and used open coding and pattern coding models from The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (2010).

**Reasons for Homeschooling (Interview Questions 2-9)**

All participants recognized the influence that public school teachers held over the moral and ethical development of their children—for some participants, this influence was greater than they preferred. Participants indicated that, on the whole, they expressed a measure of distrust toward public school teachers. The distrust expressed by Mrs. Walton was the result of an extremely negative experience she had in a traditional public school during the 1970’s that violated her deeply held moral beliefs. Mrs. Walton remembered that during that time, Roe vs. Wade had recently passed to make abortion legal across the nation and that there was activism on the part of many teachers and students regarding the topic as well as other causes and issues of the time, such as
Viet Nam. A group of teachers assigned a writing project with the topic of why the Catholic church should not be against contraception and abortion. Mrs. Walton came from a devout Roman Catholic family. The teachers told the students not to tell their parents of the assignment; also, teachers instructed students not to take the assignment home but to do it at school. At the time of this incident, Mrs. Walton was a straight-A junior high school student. Mrs. Walton said she struggled and could not come up with words to even begin the assignment, so she smuggled it home to work on it there. Mrs. Walton’s parents asked what she was doing, and she tried to hide the assignment from them. When her mother talked with her and discovered what was going on, she went to the school. Mrs. Walton reported that she no longer had to do that assignment after her mom talked to the principal. Although Mrs. Walton went on to graduate from medical school, she did not want to risk her child(ren) experiencing the same dilemma in an institutional school when they are too young to really know what is happening: “And so seeing that firsthand, I knew that that would always be an issue, and not to say that all teachers are like that; you just never know when there is” (Mrs. Walton).

All participants expressed, directly or indirectly, concern that others would have as much or more influence on their children, which is reflective of Burkhari & Randall’s (2009) assertions that “homeschoolers’ major concern had to do with sharing and defining their personal values with their children and having parental autonomy” (p. 247). God was cited as the “ultimate motivator” by Mrs. Utah, who ended with the sentiment that if they were to send their children to school, someone else would have more influence over them:
I pray about it all the time, and God I guess would be the ultimate motivator and sometimes I think of what the alternative would be, sending them all off into different directions and coming home at the end of their school day and then they would have homework and this would maybe not be the quality time you want with the kids. Somebody else would be influencing them more than we would or I would. (Mrs. Utah)

This participant’s comments shared thematic similarity with the other participants in this study. Participants agreed that being a parent is a serious priority that includes the formation of their own children to what the participants “know to be true”. They also agreed that family-centric living is preferred to school-centric living due to either unwanted outside influence that, in the perceptions of the participants, goes largely uncontrolled in institutional school environments, or an absence of moral absolutes in institutional schools to offset the cultural relativism participants perceive in institutional schools. The following statements illustrate this pattern: “It is important to me to solidify their relationship as a family, and I don’t feel that I can do that with public education” (Mrs. Smith). “…so the goal initially was to get them out of that environment to a place where they had some responsibility and not just home responsibility but communal responsibilities as they are part of a community and that they have obligations to society. Not to spend 8 hours in school just around people their age” (Mr. Smith). “There is much more freedom to not only hit what is required, but also what we want to instill in the children” (Mr. Jones). “…and I saw the uphill battle, and I don’t want to fight that. I want to teach my kids what I know to be true and we may have a battle anyway in terms of living in a society and standing up for what is
right. So at least get a foundation for what is right and go from there. But to fight when you are a child and not know what you are fighting. Because I didn’t know that I was fighting something when I was a kid” (Mrs. Walton).

This would suggest that the overall motivation the homeschooling parents in this study expressed has to do with parental control of what values their children learn as well implying serious concern about the ability of institutional schools to educate their children to an acceptable standard of values, or at least control the learning environment enough so as not to detract from the values homeschooling parents so ardently desire for their children. Participants discussed factors that could not be managed in the family that would cause them to send their children to traditional schools, including special needs, health issues, and death. In other words, they generally reported that they would choose homeschooling unless something prevented them from doing so. The only participant who responded other than special needs, health issues, and death as reasons not to homeschool was Mrs. Utah, who said that homeschooling was a simply a preference: “I went to public school and even private school. There are advantages and disadvantages to everything, even home schooling. I guess home schooling is more of a preference than that I would think the other ones are unacceptable.” Mrs. Utah also discussed time constraints and other factors, including the notion of whether or not homeschool is the best place for her older children, or young adults in their family: “...lack of time sometimes, whether I have enough time to give them what they need at this age. Its easy at the primary age but when they get older they need more than I am giving them. That makes me consider occasionally whether this is the best place for them” (Mrs. Utah).
Managing the needs of the older children does not necessarily fall into the category of special needs. It does fit in with the idea that the participant was aware of her child’s needs and that those needs not being met through homeschooling. As this was the only response that did not fit neatly into the themes of illness, special needs, or death as reasons to not homeschool, it is duly noted. When asked why she preferred homeschooling, Mrs. Utah answered, “I like spending time with my kids and being the one to influence them, and we don’t have interruption of behavior problems. Well, actually we do we have a toddler in the family so we have interruptions of a different nature. I like that we can take them where they are at academically and spend more time on something and move ahead. Why spend more time doing the same thing when we can go on? If they have an interest in something, we can just follow that interest and learn about that. It has been nice for that.” Mrs. Utah’s statement above is reflective of Holt’s vision for homeschooling. Holt admonished people not to make their homes into miniature institutional school settings, and Mrs. Utah appears to have kept her homeschooling environment less than institutional, much to her and her family’s enjoyment.

The Joneses send two of their children to a hybrid, religious school two days a week. Mrs. Jones had this to say regarding her younger children at home and what might cause her to send them to an institutional school:

If a child has special learning needs, I know I am limited (laugh); every person is and, I think again because we are doing this for the benefit of our kids, that at that point it would be for us to look at another program or at something else, or
incorporate somehow, you know, possibly sending them to school part-time, possibly doing something; where there is a will there is a way.

Other participants were much stronger in their expression of what would have to happen in order for them to not homeschool their children. The Smiths were the most ardent in their statements regarding the topic of what would cause them to send their children to an institutional school: “Well I guess the only thing I can think of is if my husband died and I was forced to go to work and I would try to have others in my community try to homeschool my children, but if push came to shove, then I would try to find some alternative to put them in while I provided for them” (Mrs. Smith). Mr. Smith went so far as to say there is no alternative to homeschooling at all and that there would be nothing that would stop him from homeschooling: “No, I don’t see any way out” (Mr. Smith).

Participants also added that they were not necessarily against institutional schooling. Mr. Walton revealed his perceptions of what institutional schools should do or be like in order to be a “good school” as he commented regarding institutional schools. Mr. Walton’s perceptions help to reveal a broader scope of problems with society as a whole verses a problem solely with institutional schools. Looking at schools as a reflection of the culture the school is in or a micro-society within the larger society Mr. Walton speaks of days gone by when in his perception, schools reinforced the values of the home. In his statement below, Mr. Walton reveals the underlying notion that in a culture whose majority embraces relativism, meaning no absolute right or wrong on heavy moral topics, Mr. Walton does not perceive his family values being supported by the majority of institutional schools:
I’m not per say against schools. I think you can have good schools. There is value actually if you do have a good school cause that can reinforce the values of what goes on in the home. That’s good to have another authority backing up you as a parent. Because parenting is difficult to have consistency. Credibility comes from multiple people confirming what you are doing. And the culture we live in there is very very few of those, much less then there had been in the past generations. Schools could do well and function that way but I don’t see it that way any more. (Mr. Walton)

The perceptions that schools need to be better, and that schools have a lot of complexities working against them, were themes that arose from the conversations. Both Mr. Utah and Mr. Smith work in institutional schools. It was very interesting to hear their comments regarding institutional schools: “I know this sounds crazy because I work in the schools, you know, you work in schools too. Sometimes I think schools are here to literally dumb down. Because people who are not brilliant and intelligent are easy to get to do what you want them to do” (Mr. Smith). “I am just saying if we are spending a lot of our time just keeping everybody under control, then we don’t have as much time to develop their academic excellence because part our time is spent in the hallways monitoring that nobody is out of control and harassing other students because of age or size or whatever” (Mr. Utah).

Mrs. Walton said that her children could school themselves at the point they are now since they have the self-discipline to learn on their own. Only when they were younger would they have had to have help if one of the parents died or was incapacitated: “I think they could school themselves. But if when they were all very
young and still needed us more for things, then that might be where we would consider, if one of us were really ill or died, then we would need more help” (Mrs. Walton).

In addition, homeschooling parents in this study perceive homeschooling as the best option for their children to the extent that they would homeschool unless something would prevent them from homeschooling. And while the participants in this study did express a strong belief that their world view and religious values are major reasons for homeschooling, they seemed not interested in imposing these things on others as much as not having others’ world views imposed on them or their children: “No moral absolutes” (Mr. Walton).

Right, and the problem with that is that they actually teach something that is even worse, like immoral things are okay, seriously immoral things are okay and they kind of push that, force that, or if teachers don’t want to say it because they are stuck with it, kind of hard to hedge around that you know, and then there might be a kid who gets them in trouble for not doing it or saying it, so I think it is very hard. Its probably a hostile place for teachers and students who have any sense of moral compass. So it’s just not a great environment in and of itself. (Mrs. Walton)

While participants stated they do not feel supported by institutional schools in their family values, they expressed regret and empathy for the institutional schools as participants expressed that teachers and school personnel have their hands tied when it comes to the topic of moral relativism. In other words, teachers will stay out of discussions and making statements that could cause repercussions. If teachers do have a sense of moral absolutes, they will refrain from discussion with their students for their
own preservation: “I feel that the teachers have their hands tied behind their back as far as what they are allowed to say and not allowed to say” (Mrs. Walton).

As participants answered questions regarding any reasons why public or private learning institutions would be unacceptable to them in the education of young people (specifically their own children), again themes emerged that had to do with cultural relativism. Participants indicated that there were clear reasons public/traditional schools were unacceptable in the education of young people (specifically their own children) that varied from statements regarding a lack of moral absolutes to a desire for increased responsibility and control over their children’s education. Romanowski (2008) has confirmed that scrutiny of homeschooling by institutional schools “is due, in part, to a lack of understanding by public school educators as to why parents choose to homeschool their children” (p. 421).

As Mr. Walton put it, “In public school, they cannot teach any morals or values. You can’t agree on what is right and wrong. There is this huge spectrum of values out there. There is no cohesiveness to it, and so particularly the public school cannot offer that at all.” Mr. Walton’s statement above supports the point made by Lubienski when he says, “Hence, home schooling is a flight from the public production of values in a pluralistic society. Because we cannot reach a consensus about moral issues (which are reflected in how we educate), people tend to retreat from the idea of public production of civic virtue.” (Lubienski, 2000, p. 228). Mrs. Walton added, “The problem with that is that they actually teach something that is even worse, like immoral things are okay, seriously immoral things are okay and they kind of push that, force that.”
Mrs. Walton’s perception of institutional schooling is a clarion statement regarding what seems to be a foundational reason homeschoolers choose to homeschool. Regardless of the arguments surrounding the topic of homeschooling, i.e., the common good verses parental autonomy, it seems that the perceptions of the participants in this study share a strong parental drive to do what they perceive to be the best thing for their own children. These statements represent the clearest testimony to the perception of the participants in this study that institutional schools are places void of moral absolutes as acknowledged by Lubienski’s statements. The participants’ statements above give a clear example of the nature of the deficit homeschoolers perceive in institutional schools. Not only public schools, according to the data, but also religious or faith-based schools are perceived to have serious deficits due to moral relativism or a lack of clear definitions and maintenance of what homeschoolers perceive to be right and wrong. Thematically, the discussion resounded with statements that questioned religious schools’ moral climate, which will be addressed later. Participants discussed social and vertical integration factors in their responses when talking about what would attract them to an institutional school: “I know a family that worked it out here...with the school system and were able to send their son to apprenticeship school of construction training. They were still able to homeschool their child but still sent the child to those classes. Obviously you can’t do that at home if you do not know how to do construction. I mean the school systems were willing to work with the family and it was great” (Mrs. Jones). “...we look at some of the traditional ways of life, I mean traditional or not where the kids are brought up with the family and the whole
Participants expressed that if they could find a learning environment that fit their idea of meaningful schooling, it would be a reason for sending their own children to public or private schools. Participants also discussed what a learning community would have to “look like” for them to send their children to school. The discussion of such a learning community involved traditional family values and work. The idea that the school or learning community would support the traditional family was thematically evident. Participants expressed that if they were to find a school that had a learning environment such as a one-room schoolhouse, they would want to participate in that kind of vertically integrated school. As Ms. Smith noted,

If I found a one-room schoolhouse type of environment where kids were learning vertically rather than horizontally, and they were dealing with people older and younger than them and they would spend a lot more time outside a brick-and-mortar building and receiving education tools, I would enroll them in something like that.

Participants reported that they were not against institutional schools as they discussed the benefits of post-secondary options for high school students: “I mean, some of it is just access to the post-secondary option” (Mrs. Walton). Also expressed were special education needs being met by professional educators. Participants expressed respect for institutional schools and teachers, and acknowledged the important work teachers do.

Participants discussed their perceptions of public and private schools, and the responses the participants gave were unfavorable toward institutional schools, both
public and private/religious alike. Participants disclosed reasons that ranged from
general aversion to specific indictments. The most general comments when participants
were asked what their opinions were included statements about how institutional
schools are not very good and that competition should occur to improve institutional
schools: “I don’t think it is very good” (Mr. Walton). “I think there should be
competition” (Mrs. Walton). More specific comments included that institutional
schools are lacking as they make attempts to improve and that the problems are not the
teachers but the parents. One participant expressed the thought that institutional schools
attempt to “dumb people down.” Mr. Smith, an institutional school assistant principal,
actually commented that he perceived institutional schools as places that make people
less intelligent: “I think schools are here to literally dumb down.” (Mr. Smith). One
comment regarding Mr. Utah’s opinion of public and private schooling in general, when
he was asked his opinion on the two types of schooling, revealed a detail that was both
challenging to private (specifically Catholic) schools and insightful to his perceptions of
institutional schools: “Of course another way of answering that question is …What is
the real difference between a public school and private school?” (Mr. Utah)

It seems that Mr. Utah sees private (in his case, Catholic) schools as being no
different from public schools. This is a scathing indictment of Catholic schools coming
from a Catholic person. The idea of cultural relativism as a problem in Catholic schools
seems to be embedded in Mr. Utah’s statement. The notion of cultural relativism
continually appears to be a thematic problem in institutional schools as perceived by
homeschoolers. Mrs. Jones talks about her perception of institutional schools as trying
but lacking in their attempts to educate. Her comment illustrates clearly the theme of
problems with the family in our culture over problems in the schools. Mrs. Jones clearly indicts parents in her comment and expresses empathy for school teachers:

They are trying but they are lacking, and it is not so much the teachers, I believe it is the parents don’t want to do something so they throw it for the schools to do. If we don’t want to do sex ed, cover it for us. Sometimes, you get home when they get out you want extended child care. Schools can only do so much, then you have a class with 25-35 kids, some of them have behavioral problems, its just, its rough. Anyone I know who’s a teacher, a whole lot is expected and they don’t get a lot of support as far as government support, parental support…you know. (Mrs. Jones)

Mr. Jones, while agreeing with his wife’s comments, indicts private (in his case, Catholic) schools by saying that the private schools are after the students/families’ money, even though they provide what Mr. Jones perceives to be an “excellent education”:

I agree with my wife, but I have a little different skew on the subject because I went to Catholic school for a few years; then I went to public school for high school. They both have their pros and cons; they definitely are both lacking, but it seems the private schools are after your dollar; they provide an excellent education, but they really don’t care too much about the social aspect; they let the kids fend for themselves; they let a lot of things slide. And the public schools may not provide as pinpoint type of an education, but it’s there if a kid wants it… it’s just a matter of finding a teacher that has the energy still to care and that can connect with a kid. It’s a little lacking but overall… (Mr. Jones)
The perceptions the participants expressed in this section seem to reflect Lubienski’s statement regarding homeschooling as an exit option and provide insight into why Lubienski has claimed that the homeschooler is part of the problem when it comes to school improvement: “Second, as an exit strategy, homeschooling undermines the ability of public education to improve and become more responsive as a democratic institution” (Lubienski, 2000, p.207). Lubienski’s point is logical in that families with traditional moral bases may indeed cause a public school to be “more responsive.” However, the participants in this study did not express any belief in Lubienski’s logic. In fact, participants expressed that they observed public schools not supporting family or moral values and did not express any concern about changing public education, nor did they indicate that it was part of a civic responsibility for them to help public schools become more responsive, democratic institutions. This seems to be Lubienski’s point, however. Perhaps if families that homeschool their children were to send their children to the local public schools, the local public schools would be responsive to these families and support what these families believe about the public school, thereby changing the school, making it more democratic and or responsive. Mr. Walton, however, clearly addressed

Lubienski’s point from the homeschooler’s perspective when he articulated his perception of public schooling on the topic of moral relativism in public schools when he said, “In public school they cannot teach any morals or values. You can’t agree on what is right and wrong. There is this huge spectrum of values out there. There is no cohesiveness to it and so particularly the public school cannot offer that at all.” (Mr. Walton)
Based on the perceptions of the homeschoolers in this study, it seems that homeschoolers are not interested in making public schools better; moreover, it seems that homeschoolers do not perceive it to be possible for them to make their local public schools better. Mrs. Walton described her negative public school experience growing up to be a subversive fight over morally profound issues. Mrs. Walton seemed to perceive it as an ideological fight that she was not equipped to handle as a junior high student, and perhaps more importantly, did not even know she was involved in as a junior high student.

One may argue from Lubienski’s perspective that the school was responsive to Mrs. Walton by allowing the young Mrs. Walton not to do the assignment after her mother protested. While this argument may be logical, it seems that the homeschoolers in this study perceive moral absolutes regarding life issues as something that should not be challenged in the first place. Rather, it seems the homeschoolers’ perception is that moral/life issues should be taught and supported by their schools, and the homeschoolers in this study seem to perceive that their beliefs are not supported by their local school and actually cannot be supported by their local school due to the cultural relativity that is manifested in institutional schools. While participants stated they do not feel supported by institutional schools in their family values, they expressed regret and empathy for the institutional schools as participants expressed that teachers and school personnel have their hands tied when it comes to the topic of moral relativism.

All but one participant expressed that religion had a definite role in their decision to homeschool. Mr. Smith said that religion had no part in his decision to homeschool at the onset. Later he described taking time to study Muslim educational
practices, and he said it seemed to have an influence on him. His statement went from religion having no part in his decision to homeschool to suggesting later that religion actually did play some part in his decision to homeschool:

Yes, to be honest religion plays no part for me because initially when it didn’t play any part but then I started to see a connection to hmm there is a way that traditional Muslims educate and our current education system is counter to that in the sense that traditionally they wait until children turn about 7 years old. Prior to that they could just be in the world and play and not really engage in learning, but it only went up to 14 when kids were forced to start learning on their own that they were interested in. When they turned 14 they were required to look at what their interests were and start to delve off into that. So, that wasn’t my view at the outset. And later I took some time away from education to study traditional Islamic education. (Mr. Smith)

Participants expressed a deeply held belief that values and morals are crucial elements in the education and upbringing of their children and that institutional schools do not reinforce the values that are so important to the participants: “I think religion plays probably the biggest part in our decision to home school. It is not something I myself considered while growing up, but once I converted to Islam and I realized that these are the values I wanted to pass on to my children, but they are not enforced or reinforced in the public education system” (Mrs. Smith).

All participants had thematic similarity in their comments—i.e., that religion does indeed have a role in their decision to homeschool. Homeschoolers in this study reported that their religious beliefs play a major role in their decision to homeschool:
Well, the faith part of it is, again, the moral absolutes; the moral values are important for the formation of the child to know what is right and wrong, to have discipline, to be humanely well formed. That understanding comes from my faith, and we feel they get more of that or a better aspect of that in the home environment then they would in a school. The values and formation, concepts and understanding of that come from your faith, from our Catholic faith. (Mr. Walton)

Religious schools were compared to public schools in that the religious schools were perceived to be much like the public schools:

I don’t send them to religious school because I am not so sure that they are not that far away from the public school system, although you can, I mean in some religious schools, the values are not translated into the actions of the kids either, so they exhibit some of the behaviors that I don’t want my own kids to pick up from anybody else. (Mrs. Smith)

Mrs. Smith seemed to struggle with the question regarding children going to religious schools after her initial, clear, and bold statement that religious schools are not that different from public schools. Similarly, Mrs. Jones reported that “We do say yes, religion does play a part … as far as why we don’t send them to Catholic school, there’s isn’t a whole lot Catholic in Catholic schools… It’s just not there.” (Mrs. Jones).

While Mrs. Jones’s perception of Catholic schools is another scathing indictment of Catholic schools coming from an active, practicing Catholic, it is similar to Mrs. Smith’s comment regarding private schools, in her case Islamic schools: “I don’t send them to religious school because I am not so sure that they are not that far away from
the public school system” (Mrs. Smith). Both participants share a perception of institutional schools, regardless of private or public, that is a motivator for them to homeschool.

Mr. Walton intoned a similar perception of institutional schools: “I think there are advantages and disadvantages. I won’t say one is absolutely superior to the other. I still think you can have a decent school and it can be done well, but I don’t see it being done well” (Mr. Walton). Mr. Walton’s perception is similar to those heard from other participants in this study regarding reasons for not sending his children to religious schools, in his case Catholic schools. Mr. Walton said he does not see it being done well, and therefore he homeschools since it is the best educational choice for him and his family.

Mr. and Mrs. Utah have a child enrolled in a local Catholic high school. Their comments echoed the perceptions of Mrs. Jones on the topic of religious institutional schools. The Utahs’ perceptions were more tempered; however, they were telling in a thematic way--i.e., that their expectations seem to be higher than the performance of the institutional school their child attends, in this case a Catholic school: “There is a touch of Catholicism in the school, but we are not too sure about the spirituality.” (Mr. Utah) “It seems like its in there, but its not like the main thing that we are ‘Catholic.’ It’s in there but not like an umbrella.

That’s what it feels like to me anyway, that this is the main thing--that we are is Catholic. ...but from what I have seen and experienced, I don’t feel like that is their primary focus.” (Mrs. Utah) “And one of my recent things in Catholic schools are we truly Catholic.” (Mr. Utah)
It seems that homeschoolers are highly motivated by their religious beliefs to the point that they will not place their children in a setting that they perceive as a risk for compromising their children’s ability to understand and embrace their religious beliefs.

Participants discussed their awareness of their rights as homeschoolers, and none of the participants seemed to be concerned about their rights. Participants seemed to take their responsibility as homeschoolers seriously. In case someone were to challenge her as to why her children are not in school, Mrs. Jones stated that she carries official documentation with her wherever she goes--i.e., paperwork indicating permission to allow their children to be absent from school for the purposes of homeschooling. None of the participants said that their awareness of their rights has anything to do with their homeschooling their children.

Perceptions of Homeschooling (Interview Questions 13-16)

Participants discussed other homeschoolers and their perceptions of other homeschoolers. All participants responded with positive comments about other homeschoolers with whom they have come into contact or whom they know. Mrs. Walton commented that some homeschoolers seemed a little unusual: “Then you have some that are unusual, the couple is a little unusual” (Mrs. Walton). Mr. Walton responded to Mrs. Walton’s comment with the following statement: “I mean, it does take somebody who is willing to buck the conventional wisdom and oftentimes that’s somebody who is definitely different” (Mr. Walton). Other than these comments, which are not negative comments, participants’ perceptions of homeschoolers they know or have seen were decidedly positive/agreeable: “Universally, you can say that they’re much better behaved and more respectful than kids that aren’t home schooled” (Mr.
Walton). “The home schooling families that I know and who I have encountered are good people who are comfortable having my kids around and who have values that I share” (Mrs. Smith). “The people across the board are... not just only of our own faith and tradition but other people, even people of no faith tradition, they all seem like good people who are interested in the kids” (Mr. Smith). “They are nice people; that’s what my opinion is” (Mrs. Utah).

Homeschoolers’ perceptions of other homeschoolers they know and have been around included statements that the children are better behaved and more respectful than institutionally schooled children. One participant stated, “Universally, you can say that they’re much better behaved and more respectful than kids that aren’t home schooled.” Participants also agreed that people who homeschool share similar values and are good to be around. The responses were thematic in that they were complimentary of homeschoolers they have seen and know.

Participants discussed their perceptions regarding their own personal level of satisfaction with homeschooling with positive thematic similarity. As a point of analysis, participant’s responses ranged from a level of satisfaction just above mediocre to extremely satisfied. Mrs Utah responded, “I suppose that depends on the day, but I am not always totally satisfied, but I have a feeling that if my kids went to school I wouldn’t be totally satisfied with that either.” (Mrs. Utah) Mrs. Utah went on to say that she rated her level of satisfaction at 70% out of 100. “I don’t have to do things the same way I did the first day of school or the same way I did in the second grade with that child. I had the flexibility to change it as needed. How satisfied? Ahhh… 70%.” (Mrs. Utah).
Mrs. Smith seemed to be the least satisfied with the homeschooling experience overall as she rated it a six out of ten, ten being the best experience. Mrs. Smith cited monetary reasons as well as her state being less than conducive to homeschooling: “I think on a scale from 1 to 10 I am at about a 6 because living in Tennessee, it is not very conducive to supporting home school education—that and the fact that it is very costly if you want to do it right.” (Mrs. Smith) Mr. Walton reported that he was extremely satisfied with his homeschooling experience: “I am extremely satisfied. I was just saying today on the way home that I am glad we are doing this. I mean, we have three kids in college now, so we are starting to see the fruits of that. I mean, our children are unbelievable, and I attribute that to home schooling. I do. They are doing really well.” (Mr. Walton)

Participants discussed the idea of homeschoolers participating in local school programs and activities, and all agreed that homeschoolers should be allowed to do so. One of the major thematic reasons given by participants was that participants paid taxes and therefore should be allowed to utilize the programs offered at their local schools: “As long as we are paying taxes we should be able to reap the same benefits for our children that everybody else does” (Mrs. Smith). “I have no argument with that. We pay property taxes for the schools” (Mr. Smith). “Absolutely. I mean we are paying taxes, why not? I mean... I’m not in the system, but I’m paying the money!” (Mr. Walton). Initially, Mrs. Utah responded thematically with the rest of the participants; then the conversation turned to focus on how the children would be impacted by going to school only part of the day: “Well, I think we are paying the taxes for those schools, so yeah, I think we should be able to do that” (Mrs. Utah). “I think our kid would feel
awkward going into the one class when everybody has been there all day; I don’t know if it would or not. But yeah, we are paying for the schools” (Mrs Utah). “But there is the issue of being the odd child in that classroom; that might be a big thing” (Mr. Utah). “But it would depend on that kid if it would bother them or not” (Mrs. Utah). “But if it is an issue of several people all going there, it is different than just one person” (Mr. Utah). “They might be treated differently; there could be resentment” (Mrs. Utah).

In other words, participants all agreed that they should be allowed to selectively choose a class or activity to participate in verses having to enroll their children into school full time. Mr. Walton suggested that that the protocol might include “Almost like a menu-type approach... like, okay, we would like to partake in this aspect or piece because we have a vested interest. That would take a whole paradigm shift in the way we educate. But that would allow for whatever elective courses we take in college. We have an investment here, so our kids are going to attend these items and that’s it. I think that is the way education is going; I mean, it’s hybridization.” (Mr. Walton). This idea caused the Utahs to express concern about whether or not their children would feel awkward in school taking only one class while other children attended school all day.

Participants discussed the ways in which local schools could help to educate their homeschooled children, and all participants responded with thematic similarity that they did indeed think their local schools could help educate their homeschooled children. “I guess if they did have some kind of open scheduling, participation where I could choose a science class, or I could choose a shop class or some kind of skill that they are teaching that I think they are doing a good job at, I think that if they open that up to the home schoolers at no cost, that would be fantastic” (Mrs. Smith). “There are
some clubs and sports that they may have been able to have that they didn’t get to have, like choir” (Mrs. Walton). “…like post-secondary option or the advanced placement. It makes it easier to have extracurricular activities. The schools provide that easier than homeschooling does” (Mr. Walton).

“I think for science and stuff, it would be helpful for our kids to be able to attend some school close by and to be in science programs and labs and all that. It is not possible for us to turn the whole house into a chemistry or biology lab... maybe to a certain extent. It would be good to have interaction with people to go wherever they want and to come to certain places to do the stuff that only these places will offer... kind of like a cafeteria style” (Mr. Utah).

Some of the ideas expressed included allowing a menu approach to school so the family could select the courses and offerings. The idea of selecting classes that had morally neutral content, such as math, was discussed by one participating couple, Mr. Walton said: “I think they could maybe provide some online education. That would be a possibility.” Mrs. Walton: “Have the teachers then grade those things? Mr. Walton: “No. I mean in areas like math and some of these areas that are morally neutral. The parents would feel comfortable in using those topics that I would say are morally neutral.”

Other participants discussed sports, choir and band as activities they would like to have their children participate in as well as science and post-secondary options.

**View of Institutional Schools (Interview Questions 10-12)**

Participants who had children enrolled in school outside their homeschooling activities discussed reasons for enrolling their children in these schools. Most of the
kindergarten through twelfth-grade students who were enrolled in schools outside the home were enrolled in a form of hybrid school that fell into one of three categories: correspondence school, online school, or a religious-oriented school in which students spent two days a week. Mrs. Walton: “Two are enrolled in public charter school, virtual school, and one is enrolled in private home school that has a school in California, and they take care of his transcripts and verify the grades, and they have classes online too that you can order.”

Mr. Humason: “Is it correspondence courses as well?”

Mrs. Walton: “Yes, my son’s taking three classes through the school. Teachers do everything. They assign assignments; he does the work and turns it into them; they grade the work; they give the grades, so that’s the grade that stands. And two classes, one is computer Chinese that I can’t do anything with, but he can figure it out. The other one is math, and I can figure it out and tell him if he is doing it right” (Mrs. Walton). “We have two of our children enrolled in St. Augustine homeschool enrichment program. For us, it’s a nice hybrid; it’s a little more institutional; it’s been a nice mix. We have our oldest in junior high. Again, I think if we didn’t have them being responsible to another teacher where, you know, you have to turn in work to mom, but turning them into Mr. Brown [the teacher of record] is a little different. It’s good to be exposed to that--being on someone else’s timeline” (Mrs. Jones).

Two of the participants enrolled their children in institutional all-day high schools. One was a religious school and the other a specialized charter school. The reasons for enrolling their children in these forms of schooling ranged from the desire
for high-school transcripts to the desire that their children be held accountable for schoolwork to someone other than “mom and dad.”

Participants were asked about standardized testing, particularly whether they believed homeschooled students should be required to take state standardized tests. Only one of the participants was in favor of mandating standardized testing for homeschoolers.

I am going to disagree with my wife on this one because the achievement tests is cumulative/knowledge based test which structurally goes over what the state expects the students to know to a certain grade it may not be perfect and it may not give the overall complete picture of each student but as far as having a bar to set … that’s what the state set, and our goal is to get them to the point that they are proficient that they can pass it according to the state that’s how we become good educators of our children, I don’t have a problem with it. They are going to have to take several tests regardless of what their school situation is… because it’s a cumulative knowledge test I actually would put more faith in it. And when a kid would cram for it because it’s a general knowledge test its going to ask more general knowledge questions so it’s not like you are memorizing exact dates or specific answers so they want to know if you know how to solve math problems; which ones you do know which ones you don’t; and it’s a basis of measure for the school system so no… I don’t have a problem with it at all. Mr. Humason: so you think students should be mandated to take those tests?
Mr. Jones: “Well, if that’s what the state’s mandated for everybody in public or private school, I don’t see why homeschoolers wouldn’t be... I don’t see why they would get an exemption from it.”

The remaining participants were all against the idea of standardized testing; when asked if homeschooled children should be mandated to take standardized state tests, the participants responded very similarly: Mr. Walton put it bluntly: “I think it’s a bunch of crap. What’s the purpose of education? They start gearing you towards taking a test instead of educating you. I mean, why do you educate? Because you want to do it or because somebody’s standing over you to do it. I mean, you know…” (Mr. Walton). Another participant, Mrs. Utah, responded more mildly than Mr. Walton but with thematic similarity: “I suppose not. We are not getting any money from the government, so why should we. As long as they [the students] pass the GED eventually, that’s good enough for employers” (Mrs. Utah). Mr. Jones believed that standardized testing of homeschoolers would be a good idea and explained that because the state standardized tests are general knowledge tests that measure the accumulative knowledge of students, they represent a legitimate testing process. When asked if homeschoolers should be mandated to take the standardized state tests, Mr. Jones also agreed that it would be acceptable to mandate homeschoolers to take the same tests as all the other students in schools, so why not homeschoolers as well?

Participants agreed that not only were they qualified to teach their own children at home but went on to say that they were better qualified because of the intimate knowledge they have of their own children. The participants edified their comments by talking about the level of education they have themselves as well as their autodidactic
ability to learn things on their own through reading and studying: “I know we love are
kids more than anybody else does. We care more about our kids more than anybody else
does. We both have a lot of education.” (Mr. Walton)

Mrs. Walton: “I think that once you taught them the basics of reading and
writing, and if you know how to read and write and you know how to do some math,
they can learn a lot on their own. You can come in and do some guiding, but they do a
lot of the educating on their own. Kids have a tremendous capacity to learn, at least
ours do. So I think teachers can open up things that you don’t quite get or understand,
and that’s where there is value in that.”

Mr. Walton: “There are techniques and ways of teaching that we don’t have,
and sometimes things get a little intense around here, and that can be a negative too!”

Mrs. Walton: “You figure it out as you go too.” Mr. Walton: “It’s not perfect.”

Mrs. Walton: “And it is more one on one as well. That will make a difference.
Mr. Walton: “We know if they know the material or not.”

Mrs. Walton: “And we are not moving on until they do. I mean, we are not
going to sit there until tomorrow till they do it. I’ll say, ‘Let’s take a break or pick up
where we left off tomorrow.’ It’s not a big deal, and we’re not going to get behind
(Walton dialog). “Doctors don’t send their kids to the Dr. for a sprained ankle.” (Mr.
Smith)

I believe I am more qualified because I know my children, and I find it very hard
to believe that someone who has 30 other children to be responsible for in a
classroom would have that ability to recognize how and why my children learn
the way I do. Plus I am an avid reader so anything I don’t know I can read up on
and I am in a community of people who know a lot of different things, so this would make up for any kind of deficiency that I may have (Mrs. Smith).

I think that’s a fairly easy question. Because I am their mother and I want what is best for them and you know I am just right there with them to know what they need academically. I mean I don’t claim to be superiorly educated. I have taught school and so I did have certification, but I don’t think that’s what makes me good at home schooling. I think another mother who maybe just had a GED could equally do the job as well because she cares about her kids and knows them. And all the resources you could ever want are available to you between the community and the Internet and things you can purchase. (Mrs. Utah)

Well I would say that when we started out we didn’t really know for sure because we were doing something new, but I think at the end of a year or two of doing the home schooling there were all kinds of different standardized tests we could take, Michigan test or Iowa test, I think Iowa. So it was important for me to have the kids go through some of these tests to see where they were. That helped me build up my confidence and realize that this was a fine way of doing it and talking about some of the stuff they did while I was at work and I was occasionally able to help them out with the work as well. I think having a safe and healthy nurturing environment is an important aspect of schooling. I am not too sure if what I just said is being done in the schools out there right now. (Mr. Utah)

Because we know our kids the best. We’re constantly discussing our children’s progress. We’re the first to pick up on things. In my experience, our
cousins our family members, things were caught so far down the road that if they were caught earlier, things would be better. I’m not a perfect teacher but we are aware right off the bat because it’s OUR children. I’m not teaching a class of 20 where next year I won’t have any of these kids, I’m teaching these kids my whole life. Very much more vested in this. (Mrs. Jones)

I would say just the fact that we are the parents and we have a vested interest in our children’s education as any parent would, and again not to say the educators don’t care about their children but I think that parents care more about their own children. I think that parents pay closer attention to what their children are doing. Not always nobody’s perfect but I think that parents would pick up on things a lot faster. (Mr. Jones)

It was precisely their love and understanding of their own children that made them want to homeschool them. Participants came from a wide range of educational backgrounds, including high school graduates, teachers, nurses, and medical doctors. Their education level was secondary to their parental love and high regard for their legitimate authority as a parent. Participants provided telling remarks that revealed their thinking about the question regarding what makes them think they are qualified to teach their children: As Mr. Walton remarked, “I know we love our kids more than anybody else does. We care more about our kids more than anybody else does. We both have a lot of education.” Mrs. Smith said: “I believe I am more qualified because I know my children, and I find it very hard to believe that someone who has 30 other children to be responsible for in a classroom would have that ability to recognize how and why my
children learn the way I do.” And perhaps most tellingly, Mrs. Jones reported, “I’m teaching these kids my whole life. Very much more vested in this …”

Across the participants, the thematic response rang clear that as parents, they believed that they had a better ability to teach their own children than professional educators, regardless of their own educational level. All participants expressed the perception that their intimate knowledge of their children and their parental investment in their children is reason enough to consider themselves as good as a professional educator at educating their own children or better.
Chapter Five

Discussion

This research study sought to explore the reasons that parents who homeschool their children chose to do so and their perceptions about the value of home schooling as a viable and legitimate educational option. This research study also sought to explore the thoughts and opinions of parents who homeschool their children about the benefits and deficits of public and private schooling. Typically, homeschoolers do not seem especially eager to respond to surveys or participate in research study. As Uecker (2008) has stated, “Even less is known about homeschoolers. They and their families are difficult to locate, and when found, they respond to surveys at notoriously low rates” (p. 563). Because many parents who choose to homeschool their children frequently remain unreported in typical statistical data gathered by educational governing bodies, collecting accurate data from parents who choose to homeschool their children can be challenging at best: “Although growing, the literature about homeschooling is extremely limited” (Barwegen, Falciani, Putnam, Reamer, & Stair, 2004, p. 41).

Summary of the Problem

Relatively little research directly asked active homeschooling parents to explain in their own words why they homeschool. It seems that modern home schooling families devalue public schools as homeschoolers choose not to attend public institutional schools. Not only does it appear that modern homeschooling families devalue public institutional schools but also private and or religious schools as well. Studies on homeschooling have discussed this educational approach from broad social
perspectives. These perspectives have included examining homeschooling as a social movement (Collom, 2005), examining homeschooling as an exit strategy that undermines the common good (Luiensky, 2010), and examining homeschooling as a way of supporting core fundamentalist principles (Kunzman, 2010). However, many studies on homeschooling have included very few personal experiences of homeschooling parents or their rationale for choosing to educate their children within a home environment as told in their own words.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to explore reasons why parents chose to homeschool their children when commonly children and young adults are schooled in local, institutional schools. For the past 150 years, Americans have sent their children to local schools to be educated by professional teachers. This design of public schooling in the United States arose from homeschooling and was considered to be preferable to the educational options of the majority of Americans in the early years of this nation to the point that compulsory education laws were adopted in every state of the Union.

This exploration was designed to discover more deeply what motivates parents who homeschool their children to take on the enormous responsibility of educating their children academically when public and private schools have historically provided academic as well as character education for more than 150 years in the U.S.A. Some insights that emerged from this study include parents’ motivation (at its deepest level) for choosing homeschooling as a primary educational option.
A second purpose of this research study was to further the ongoing investigation into the reasons why homeschooling has become a growing trend over the past three decades. Homeschooling is a current educational trend that has continued to grow consistently. Parents have reclaimed an educational practice that was undertaken out of necessity when it was first practiced in the early United States (Knowles, 1991), meaning that no institutional schools were available to early settlers. However, reasons for homeschooling have changed across time, and this study explored some of the reasons for those changes.

**Summary of the Participants**

The participants in this study were four married couples who were current, active homeschooling parents, homeschooling their own biological children. All of the couples expressed that they were practicing a religion (3 Catholic and 1 Islamic) in their family. Three of the couples were Caucasians, and one couple was African American. All participants have multiple children with the least number of children in one family being 5. The largest family had 7 children in it. The names of the participants were purposefully altered in order to protect the identities of the participants.

**Review of the Methods**

Altering the names of the participants selected was intentionally done to protect the identities of the participants and also to make the reading easier to follow by way of identifying themes and characters within the reading. Participants were selected by convenience sample, and it is noteworthy that other methods of finding participants for this study were attempted. Data regarding homeschoolers in the area (addresses and names) were solicited from a local educational service center. Conflicting messages
were reportedly given to the Superintendent of the educational service center by legal
council, and the State Department of Education as to the release of the information
requested. One entity advised the Superintendent that releasing the information
requested as a matter of public record would be fine to do; however, the other entity
advised her not to release the information. This was reportedly a cause for concern with
the Superintendent, and no information requested was released.

It was a certain level of relative comfort that was hoped for by using the
convenience sample, and it seemed to work as the responses from the participants
seemed candid. The public school observer did not seem to inhibit the in person
interviews. Interviews were done in the participants homes with the exception of one
which was done over the telephone. Once the interviews were conducted and recorded,
the researcher and the observer briefly discussed the interviews, looked at the notes of
the observer and discussed them. Once the interviews were transcribed and printed, brief
comparisons of the observers notes were conducted looking for support of similarities.
All transcripts were coded with footnotes by the researcher during cycle-one coding
phase.

Once first-cycle coding was completed, second-cycle coding was started,
looking for themes or pattern codes within the footnotes. Once pattern codes were
established/found, the third cycle thematic similarities were revealed through the
process. Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 became the division for
responses.

RQ1: How do parents who homeschool their children perceive the benefits
and values of homeschooling?
RQ2: What perceived deficits do parents who homeschool their children attribute to other educational choices (e.g., public/private schooling)?

The direct insight to the thinking of active homeschoolers is seen in this study through reading direct quotes from homeschoolers. This study is an assembly of insights from active, practicing homeschoolers and the synthesis of their thematically similar responses.

**Research Findings**

The following themes emerged as findings from this study:

1. Lost or eroded values in American families equates to a lack of values in private and public schools. The diversity of values held by so many Americans makes it impossible for institutional schools to teach values or moral absolutes to the standards of the participants in this study. Even religious private schools are held wanting by the standards of the participants in this study. In fact, religious schools almost seem to be held in contempt by the participants of this study as they openly compare the private religious schools to public schools and appear to find little to no difference between the two. It was evident in the responses from some participants that they struggled as they answered questions regarding private religious schools; as it seemed they wanted to support their religious schools, or at least not be negative about them. Participants seemed to express that private religious schools should be more authentic in their religion and express the authenticity of their religion through the behaviors within the religious schools. It seemed that participants understood why public schools would not be able to teach moral absolutes, and it was with a sense of heartfelt difficulty that some of the participants expressed genuine criticism that their religious institutional schools
were not all that different from public schools. Participants in this study seemed to better understand that public schools must facilitate learning environments that allow the diversity of values across the entire bandwidth of Americans to be tolerated appropriately according to the law. In order to do this, public schools must create and maintain a fine balance in their learning community that allows freedom of expression to all participants while maintaining a healthy tolerance and respect for differing beliefs. Because so many Americans have such vastly differing views regarding moral values, moral absolutes that meet the standards of the participants in this study do not exist in public schools. Because public schools cannot teach moral absolutes, and private religious schools do not have learning environments all that different from public schools according to the participants in this study, the participants in this study seek an educational option that allows the teaching of moral absolutes through homeschooling. As Lubienski (2000) asserted, the absence of homeschoolers in the public arena may cause the institutional schools to decline even further due to the removal of social capital (the homeschooling students) who are usually articulate and could be beneficial for other students to be around. The public schools also become less responsive as democratic institutions as the homeschoolers are not there to respond to. (Lubienski, 2000) The main theme was about institutional schools, both public and private, having an inability to teach values, and not about academic performance.

2. Family-centric. Participants viewed family as the center of life, and attendance of institutional schools challenged this desired lifestyle. Embedded in this family-centric perspective was the idea that as parents, they have appropriate control of their children’s learning through homeschooling. The participants expressed that this
parental autonomy is legitimately theirs and that they have the highest calling to live up to the responsibility of educating their own children through homeschooling; to the point that it would be seen as relegating this responsibility to others if they were to send their children to regular school. Participants expressed the main value in their parental autonomy was the ability to teach their children the values and moral absolutes they believed in as parents. A strong belief was expressed by the participants that no one else could or should be as responsible for teaching these values to their children, and that no one else knew their children or loved their children as much as the participants did. These beliefs were coupled strongly with the family-centric world view that the participants expressed.

3. Participants expressed that flexibility was another benefit of homeschooling. Being able to spend time on things their children were interested in as well as being able to move ahead when their children mastered something was valued by the participants. The ability to go places and make a schedule based upon their family verses an institutional school schedule was a contributing factor to the flexibility factor expressed by the participants. Mrs. Utah perhaps said it best when she talked about how nice it was for her family to be able to follow their interests and not have to spend time doing the same thing.

4. Testing was seen as either less important or as a negative thing by the participants in this study. Participants expressed that academic testing was not a good tool with which to assess a person and their academic ability. Testing was seen as detracting from the learning process as participants said they could memorize things they needed to know to get an A on a test and forget about what they memorized immediately.
afterward. Testing was also expressed as a forced learning on students, and so participants did not put a lot of merit in standardized testing. It seemed that there may have been a certain amount of fear associated with testing by the participants with the exception of one participant who agreed with standardized testing as he expressed it helped to better understand the academic ability of the student.

5. The willingness to have their children take classes of their choosing in institutional schools was expressed by the participants in this study. From a public school perspective, this raises a question about participants being willing to overlook their own expressed values for their children to attend some public school classes. From the public school perspective, the idea of selecting one or two classes seems to be in conflict with the concept of parental autonomy and or values education expressed by the participants in this study. In other words, if the participants in this study want to homeschool in order to teach the values they desire, why would the participants want to send their children into the public school for a science class? Would sending their child to one or two classes not compromise the reasons for homeschooling?

6. Homeschoolers do not want to change public schools through participation in public schools. They are not willing to place their children in what they perceive to be a fight, especially when they perceive the fight to be something that their children really won’t understand. Homeschoolers do not seem to see any value in changing the public schools for the better if it means the risk of their own children’s formation and what they perceive to be the best educational choice for their own children.
From a public school perspective, this can be seen as homeschoolers not being willing to do the work required to maintain their points of view in a public school arena. The question arises why parents refuse to engage in an exchange of values?

7. Public schools could engage with homeschoolers by carefully planning and providing some educational options for homeschoolers. This would involve outreach on the part of the schools, and informing homeschoolers through homeschooling networks of the opportunities homeschooling families could utilize. This could facilitate dialogue with homeschoolers and promote better understanding by both groups (institutional schools and homeschoolers).

Discussion

The interviews revealed that the reasons many parents have chosen to homeschool their children represent not so much an indictment against public or traditional school but rather an indictment against eroding family values. Homeschooling parents in this study thematically responded to interview questions in a similar way, revealing their perceptions of institutional schools as well as reasons for homeschooling. Religious schools, however, were somewhat indicted as homeschoolers compared religious schools to public schools and asked, what’s the difference? Homeschoolers’ perceptions of religious schools seemed consistently wanting. Homeschooling parents in this study revealed deeply held convictions in moral absolutes and for their religious beliefs. Through their responses to questions regarding motivations to homeschool, homeschoolers in this study revealed their perceptions about the benefits of homeschooling and the deficits of institutional schooling.
All the families interviewed suggested that the primary reasons they chose to homeschool are to make their family the center of what they do. This is confirmed in the literature: “Homeschooling offers religious fundamentalists a potent means to resist the encroachment of secular culture on their families. The philosophical and pedagogical flexibility of homeschooling provides an educational environment especially suitable for parents to cultivate a particular set of values and commitments in their children” (Kunzman, 2010, p. 24). It is noteworthy that at no time did homeschoolers in this study refer to themselves as religious fundamentalists. They appeared as people who placed their highest value on their morals and their family and had high regard for the family-centric life. They expressed the desire for order and moral absolutes in the education of their children while discussing past experiences that helped them to form a discernment for homeschooling.

Some of the families interviewed have also reported that flexibility is a primary reason they chose to homeschool their children. This also has been confirmed in the literature:

The structural flexibility of homeschooling, and the space it provides both literally and ideologically, lends itself to counter cultural movements of all kinds. For instance, it also supports a socially progressive critique, which is where the modern homeschooling movement gained early inspiration, in the writings of John Holt. (Kunzman, 2010, p. 18)

This flexibility and space just to be with their children was a perception that was expressed thematically by the participants in this study. Participants reported that they
liked being with their children and that they felt free to do things with them without the
time constraints that are inherent with attending an institutional school.

The fact that institutional schools are places where large numbers of young
people and their teachers gather on a daily basis, and are places where children do not
check their Constitutional rights at the schoolhouse door, means the institutional school
is forced to accept everyone’s beliefs as long as no one is physically hurting themselves
or others, or is bullying, intimidating, or otherwise doing something that would violate
the school’s code of conduct. People influence one another regardless of intent. Young
people are especially vulnerable to influence by their very nature as they seek
acceptance, especially in an institutional peer group. Participants in this study see
institutional school as a place of moral, cultural, and religious relativism that requires a
certain level of sophistication to navigate; a level of sophistication that young persons
may lack; or, as argued by the participants in this study, a level of sophistication that no
one, especially their young students, should be subjected to at all.

Illegitimate sophistication, or pseudo-sophistication, is widely celebrated in
popular media, and it becomes legitimized by its popularity alone, regardless of a lack
meaningful content. Participants in this study echoed this kind of perception of
institutional schooling with thematic similarity, and it lends itself to the idea that
“coercion and resistance go hand in hand” (Jackson 2005). Although Jackson referred
to compulsory attendance laws in his statement above, the idea that young people are
coerced in other more subtle, insidious ways seems to be a major component in the
participants’ motivation to homeschool their children.
The overarching thematic response as to what motivates the participants of this study ties in to RQ2 as the deficits participants perceive in institutional schools do not meet the standards of their family values: “In public school they cannot teach any morals or values. You can’t agree on what is right and wrong. There is this huge spectrum of values out there. There is no cohesiveness to it and so particularly the public school cannot offer that at all” (Mr. Walton).

Again, the parental autonomy practiced in order to secure and define personal values within the family rang clearly in the responses (Burkhart & Randall, 2009). Participants expressed that if their family values would be supported by the school, they would be more apt to participate in the school. As the school is forced to respect the differences of anyone who may object to supporting the family values of the participants, participants know that the institutional school can be morally neutral at best, and “morally neutral” appears to be the coercion the participants resist by homeschooling their children.

**Implications**

If the number of homeschoolers continues to increase/multiply, it may be that overall, homeschoolers’ standardized test results will decrease due to the breadth of the statistical spectrum increasing. It would be interesting to see, however, as pedagogically, the student-to-teacher ratio would go down, and possibly the standardized test scores would remain higher than institutional counterparts.

If the number of homeschoolers continues to increase/multiply, schools may be more amenable to assist homeschoolers (allow homeschoolers to take one or two classes, be on the sports teams, in the band, as long as the traditional school is receiving
some funding for the attendance of the homeschoolers) to increase their funding. This hybridization of schooling is already taking place.

Institutional schools may handle or address moral issues differently in the future, e.g., have a standard that would possibly be more acceptable to homeschoolers. Because morally neutral appears not to be a high enough standard for homeschoolers, as Lubienski (2008) asserts, the absence of homeschoolers in public schools leaves a social capital vaccum. Without the participation of homeschool-minded people in public schools, public schools are apt to continue in a direction that is unacceptable to homeschoolers. In other words, if homeschoolers are not in school to influence the school culture and learning environment, the school will become less appealing to the standards of the people who homeschool. While there is some logic and validity to this thinking, homeschoolers in this study seem to perceive that there is no possible way for them to reform schools whether they are present or not. Why is difference a fight? Why isn’t difference in beliefs seen as an educational opportunity by homeschoolers? At the deepest levels the reasons for this, as expressed by the participants in this study, are that public schools must acknowledge and accept a very broad band of morals because they are public entities. Public schools look at this as pluralism, and see it as an opportunity for learning. The homeschoolers in this study perceive institutional schools as morally and/or culturally relative institutions. The homeschoolers in this study revealed that they perceive and believe in moral absolutes. In the participants eyes the cultural relativity they percieve in institutional schools verses moral absolutes does not make as good a training ground for their children compared to their family. The homeschoolers in this study expressed perceptions of moral absolutes that lead them to believe that
homeschooling is the best educational practice or preference for them at this time. The only possible way a public school would or could have a moral standard that would be consistent with the expressed standards of the participants is if the people in the school, meaning the parents and students, all agreed to it. That is not likely in this day and age. Imagine a health class in a public school teaching that abortion is wrong and that it should be made illegal. Imagine an entire high school’s student body rallying for the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman. These ideas seem unrealistic at best. In fact these ideas seem counter-cultural. Yet those seem to be the standards of the participants interviewed in this study.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Some ideas for future research include the following: Compare/contrast focus-group research with large random-sample research asking the same questions of homeschoolers to assess accuracy of what has been learned from this study. While expanding the number of participants, a survey could be developed to establish a quantitative component regarding responses to questions on the topic of homeschooling. Another research study that could be done would involve asking public education professionals the same or similar questions to compare/contrast their responses with those of the home schoolers. Such a study could assess what public school professionals perceptions are of home schooling and how those perceptions are supported or debunked by the research.

Further study could include a more religiously, racially and ethnically diverse set of participants. Especially to gain a better understanding of the demographics of the active homeschooling population in the U.S.A. It is also recommended researching the
way homeschoolers engage with online schools and what percent of active homeschoolers employ online schooling and what the perceptions are of online homeschoolers regarding similar topics as discussed in this study. Research the topic of perceptions of moral absolutes and cultural relativism in homeschooling families and institutional school employees using a larger demographic. An in-depth, qualitative research of whether bad experiences in institutional schools prompted parents to homeschool would make an interesting addition to the findings of this study.

Finally, research homeschooled student’s perceptions of homeschooling compared to institutional student’s perceptions of homeschooling.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study contributes to the knowledge of homeschooling by focusing on the perceptions, perspectives, and comments of homeschoolers which gives insight to the reasons they homeschool. This study helps to answer important questions regarding the topic of homeschooling. Specifically, how do parents who homeschool their children perceive the benefits and values of homeschooling? And what perceived deficits do parents who homeschool their children attribute to other educational choices (e.g., public/private schooling)? While one may imagine that homeschoolers may have much to say in way of devaluing institutional schools, it is significant that what was revealed was more an indictment on the state of the American family than the American public or institutional schools, as institutional schools are reflections of the American family and culture. In other words, institutional schools are places that are bound to uphold the laws of America as they pertain to education and citizens (students, parents, professional educators) Constitutional rights.
This study points us to look more closely at concepts like pluralism, difference, and moral diversity in our country. Especially how these concepts contrast with ideas like relativism, and moral absolutes. This study leads us to look very closely at how institutional schools could help homeschoolers in the education of their children as well as how homeschoolers may help institutional schools improve education for all the students attending them. The two groups, homeschoolers and institutional schools, share a common passion, education that is meaningful, and towards the best possible outcome for the students involved. Results from this study indicate that possible misunderstandings exist regarding homeschoolers’ perceptions of institutional schools. The results are not intended to make any generalizations.
References


Appendix A

Letter to Homeschooling Parents

Dear Homeschooling Parent:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Toledo studying homeschooling in NW Ohio. I am writing to invite you to participate in a study on perceptions of homeschooling. My wife and I homeschool our own children, and I have 20 years experience as a professional educator. My experience includes serving as an elementary classroom teacher as well as a high school principle.

As you may know, homeschooling is a current educational trend that has continued to grow consistently. In order to investigate this growing practice, the purpose of this study is threefold: One purpose is to explore the reasons why parents choose to homeschool their children and to do so by seeking information directly from active homeschooling parents. A second purpose of this study is to discover more specifically the motivations of parents who homeschool their children. A third purpose of this study is to explore some the contextual factors that have influenced more and more parents to consider homeschooling as an alternative to compulsory education.

This study will hopefully help members of the public education community become more aware of issues that are of interest in the educational community. It will also help educators make more informed decisions about policy matters related to education. Your responses and identity will remain confidential and anonymous, and you may choose to participate or stop at any time.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an interview process with two researchers, i.e., myself and one other colleague.
The interview process will require approximately an hour of your time and will be held at a location of your choosing. You may receive a follow-up phone call or email after the interview to seek clarification. The interviews will be audio-taped, and transcripts will be made of your comments. These transcripts will be held for a period of three years in a secure location to which only the researcher has access. After that time, the transcripts will be be destroyed.

If you would like to participate, please email me at humason@ambt.net, and I will provide you with additional information. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeff Humason

Doctoral Candidate

The University of Toledo
Appendix B

Interview Questions for Case Study

**Demographic**

1. What is your age, gender, religion, occupation, and race/ethnicity? How many children do you have, and what are their ages?

**Reasons for Homeschooling**

2. What do you think motivates you to home-school your child (or children)?
3. What, if anything, would cause you not to home-school your own children?
4. Are there any reasons public or private schooling is unacceptable to you in the education of young people?
5. What, if anything, would have you send your own children to public or private schools?
6. What is your opinion of public and private schooling in general?
7. What role does your religious belief play in your thoughts about home-schooling, if any? And why don't you send your children to a religious private school of your choosing, if you are religious?
8. Are you aware of your rights as a homeschooler (e.g., reporting requirements)?
9. Does your awareness of your rights or political views have anything to do with your decision to homeschool?

**View of Institutional Schools**

10. Do you have children of your own enrolled in private schools or in public schools? If so, please explain the reasons for this.
11. Should homeschooled students be mandated to pass the Ohio Achievement Tests?
12. Would you ever send your own children to a local school? If so, at what point do you think you would?

**Perceptions of Homeschooling**

13. What makes you believe you are qualified to educate your students as well as or better than public or private school professional educators?

14. What is your opinion of homeschooling families that you may know or have encountered?

15. How satisfied are you with the homeschooling process?

16. What do you think the limitations to homeschooling are, if any?

**Costs and Benefits of Homeschooling**

17. Is there anything (activities or advantages) that you think student(s) would benefit from by participating in traditional schooling?

18. Do you think that children that are home-schooled should be allowed to participate in their local school’s programming/activities? For example, should a home-schooled student be allowed to be on the football team, track team, marching band, chess club, or even take a class (or classes) of their own choosing, like science, math or shop?

19. Is there any way the local public schools could help you in your endeavor to educate your children?