

Sociological Perspectives on Homeschooling Trends

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Abstract

This research examines the sociological perspectives surrounding the increasing trend of homeschooling, particularly in the context of contemporary educational practices. As more families opt for homeschooling, driven by various motivations such as dissatisfaction with traditional schooling, safety concerns, and the desire for personalized education, it becomes crucial to analyze the implications of this choice on social dynamics and community structures. This study employs qualitative methodologies, including interviews and surveys with homeschooling families, educators, and policy makers, to understand the motivations behind this trend and its impact on children's socialization and identity formation. Key themes include the role of parental agency, the influence of socio-economic factors, and the challenges of maintaining social connections outside traditional educational settings. Furthermore, this research explores how homeschooling intersects with broader societal issues, such as educational equity and access to resources. The findings reveal a complex interplay of benefits and drawbacks, shedding light on the diverse experiences of homeschooling families. This analysis aims to contribute to the discourse on education in the 21st century and inform policymakers and educators about the evolving landscape of learning.

Keywords: homeschooling, sociological perspectives, education trends, parental agency, socialization, community structures, educational equity, qualitative research.

1. Introduction to Homeschooling

Homeschooling is the practice of parents choosing to function as primary educators for their children or to outsource primary education to a guardian or other trusted adult. Over the last two decades, the number of children homeschooled in the United States has nearly tripled. This section provides a more detailed introduction to homeschooling and homeschooling families. This section sets the stage for the rest of the chapter by providing an introduction to contemporary and historical trends in homeschooling. It covers a basic definition of homeschooling, as well as an overview

of the various motivations families have for teaching their children at home. This section also makes a case for why sociological perspectives are needed to understand homeschooling in all of its complexity, before providing an overview of the contexts in which homeschooling has flourished and explaining the unique challenges faced by homeschooling families. (Alam2022)

Homeschooling, or home education, is the practice of instructing one's children at home rather than in a traditional public or private school. Homeschooling is not new; in fact, it was the primary mode of education historically. The modern homeschooling movement has its roots in the United States during the 20th century and was solidified as a movement distinct from other modes of schooling in the 1970s. For much of this period, homeschooling was practiced by left-wing liberal parents, particularly those affiliated with the hippie or 'back-to-the-land' movements. Starting in the 1980s, homeschooling gained attention from an increasingly diverse set of parents, including parents from conservative religious or secular communities. Family-sized motivations, including concerns about the quality of public education, dissatisfaction with school bullying or violence, and a desire to have a more customized education, have also influenced participation in modern homeschooling practices.

1.1. Definition and History

What is homeschooling? It is the education of children at home. While public and charter schools are tax-funded educational options, homeschooling is a familial and non-public educational approach. A third educational alternative, private schooling, is also non-public but it is tuition funded. Homeschooling is different from the other two non-public options. Random surveys have delved into parental reasons for choosing any of the three nongovernmental education options; concerns for public education overall were their two top reasons. A historical view of homeschooling provides a clear picture of this approach. Specifically, homeschooling has been redefined over centuries and under various values and purposes. American homeschooling went through distinct developmental stages, influenced by larger social relationships and circumstances. For instance, 19th-century motivations were structured by American identity, enlightenment, and religious lessons via family teaching. More recent

homeschooling efforts began for opposite reasons; during the closing of the post-World War II school years of plenty. (Lepp et al., 2022)

They began as an alternative, non-public educational option, with secular humanism forming the educational core, and an emphasis on consumerism, individualism, and an absence of discipline and competition. Several events in the 1960s and 1970s shifted this negative perspective, and homeschooling was redefined. Educational approaches changed to academic excellence and remote long-distance Christian teaching; legal achievements recognized new positive values and protected civil rights to practice them. Historical knowledge is necessary for conceptual understanding. Thus, scholars need to understand these traditional stages and how homeschooling has transformed under new purposes. Several historical figures and social movements show the variety of US values and circumstances. Research demonstrates how homeschooling adapts according to contemporary thought, in both historical and abstract educational philosophy. Change over the years has resulted in the home educating experience of today. The transformation of 1969 began a new way of homeschooling, accepting secular educational philosophies but preserving individual rights to direct children in the home. Homeschoolers have persevered to make the public aware of their legal and educational experiences, positive results, and high achievement rates. However, they are not exempt from societal changes in the direction of state control of education. What does their future hold?

1.2. Motivations for Homeschooling

Motivations for Homeschooling. Based on the hallmarks of homeschooled families discussed above, it is clear that these families are quite diverse, so the motivations for homeschooling and the circumstances under which families pursue it are also wide-ranging. The motivations that scholars have identified as leading people to homeschool can be sorted into four categories: ideological, constitutional, religious, and pedagogical. Ideological reasons include dissatisfaction with the educational system and/or popular culture, as well as a desire to develop one's own educational philosophy. Practical reasons include the convenience of a flexible schedule, especially when parents anticipate a move or frequent travel, or a wish to protect a child from peers who may be a negative influence. Certain families see

homeschooling as a way to preserve life on the family farm or implicate a preference for a particular lifestyle. Personal reasons include appeals to *in loco parentis* and the belief that a child is too special, gifted, or unique to fit into a formal academic setting. (Al-Kumaim et al.2022)

The most visible of the motivation categories, and the one receiving the most empirical attention, is ideology. Concern for a child's schooling is directly related to concern for identity and indirectly related to concern for community, issue areas addressed by larger social theories and central to the main themes of this text. When a parent reduces "all the good reasons for doing something" to a concern for a child's mode of education, that parent is saying something quite significant about the value of a particular educational practice or setting. Furthermore, reasons for homeschooling provide different kinds and levels of what sociologists call "agency." Agency includes purpose, in that parents act in the best interest of children.

2. Theoretical Frameworks in Sociology

The most prevalent method of analyzing social constructs and human experiences within the field of sociology is the utilization of different theoretical frameworks. Functionalist theory sees human social practices as functioning to promote social order and stability, and sociologists who use this framework overwhelmingly describe the homeschooling movement as based in conservative religious principles. Conflict theory, an alternative framework, focuses on how individuals and groups vie for power and access to limited resources, such as education. It further develops this picture by identifying inequalities in class, gender, and race that many homeschoolers seek to avoid. For symbolic interactionists, sociological research on homeschooling typically focuses on interviews, daytimers, and other forms of participant observation data that provide intimate knowledge of families' day-to-day interactions and proven successes in a professional and scholarly field. (Lepp et al., 2022)

Conversely, homeschooling is rarely addressed by an entire movement of sociologists. When it is addressed, much of the work focuses on micro-level interactions, such as those between parents and children or children and the wider community, rather than more macro-level patterns in the practice of homeschooling. The value of applying these three frameworks to homeschooling lies in the uniqueness of the homeschooling

experience; by identifying and focusing on the commonly researched topics related to homeschooling, we not only gain insight into those specific areas of concern, such as conservatism or heterosexual interactions, but also work to situate future research on the issue within discussions of social movements, research methods, and ethics.

2.1. Functionalism

The functionalist framework examines homeschooling as being able to meet three main educational needs. The first is social integration, which points to the obvious utility in parents being exempted from ensuring the behavior and conduct of their children while educating. The second need is that children's physical and mental skills develop, which is identified as education broadly. Even most academics and elites who study and write about homeschooling focus on these first two alternative prongs of functionalist theory. The third factor of the functionalist framework is cultural lag, which is cultural transmission from one generation to another. Ultimately, functionalist analysis finds homeschooling consistent with its social and cultural values and clearly in the public interest in limited circumstances, as in when used for children who have no local school option. (Greenhow et al.2022)

From a functionalist perspective, homeschooling serves to fulfill the needs of society by serving the needs of the family, as the basic social unit. One such need is that education can serve to break the ties of the family yet preserve the essential family characteristics. Initially, the child learns at home that his family has values different from the values of most members of society. The hope is that the traditional family differences are minimized and the child comes to prefer society's rules through school and contact with other children, although this is also seen as protecting the family from changes in society. Homeschooling, while able to fill societal needs, also does the work of advocating for the family in a number of ways. It has the potential to provide a stable emotional setting, usually staying consistent in its nurturing behavior or being flexible by adapting to this child's learning needs and pace. Congruent with the functionalist theory, some homeschooling support groups turn the tide to discuss some benefits that occur for the communities in which homeschoolers engage, such as instead forming a more cohesive family. Further, homeschoolers state they can build or enhance their networks in their communities when they share educational projects

with those around them. Indeed, much of the homeschooling research and literature focuses on the apparent uses of homeschooling to the family.

2.2. Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, with its focus on power struggles and social inequalities, can provide a useful lens through which to view contemporary homeschooling trends. Although the nationalist impulse to protect one's children and instill important cultural values and knowledge is widely assumed to drive much of the motivation behind homeschooling, conflict theory leads us to examine more critically who has access to homeschooling and with what benefits. Inequalities abound in contemporary America with respect to the school trajectories of children who additionally report homeschooling. While some are able to make financial sacrifices, such as loss of income due to parent employment reductions in order to be regularly present during traditional school hours, others cannot.

Because the capacity to homeschool thus tends to be structured by access to material resources, middle-class white families tend to homeschool at greater rates than do Black and Hispanic families and those in various social and geographic locations. In cities in which employed parents outnumber the stay-at-home homemaker, families can largely afford to engage in homeschooling and private schooling enclaves, since the labor of caring for and educating children occurs within a home. Working-class parents and those in rural areas with fewer employment opportunities tend to be more likely to be stay-at-home parents, leading to the decreased number of homeschool enrollees. Although the normative association of the kindergarten-through-high school public school experience is not shared by all social actors and subcultures in America, homeschooling reflects and intensifies existing inequalities in: (1) material resources; (2) cultural knowledge and habitus; and (3) social networks. An important question emerges from the observation that homeschooling communities are exclusive: 'Who benefits from this educational practice?' Conflict theory considers who is marginalized as a result.

2.3. Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism offers a useful means of examining the lived experiences of homeschooling families. Symbolic interactionists are interested in the meanings that

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individuals ascribe to objects, events, and attitudes as they interact with others and carve a space for themselves in society. When utilized in the homeschool context, symbolic interactionism yields several telling insights. According to symbolic interaction, as individuals engage in communication and relay symbols, they engage in meaning-making processes. This premise forms a foundation that is instrumental in disambiguating the meanings espoused by pupils and parents in qualitative studies of homeschooling. Moreover, proponents of symbolic interactionism strive to identify how individuals use symbols to make sense of themselves and how they create social identity. Thus, in homeschooling settings, it unveils insightful findings on issues such as class resistance and social stigma.

Another core premise of symbolic interaction is the conflictual nature of social identity. Of special relevance to homeschooling analysis is Mead's notion of the generalized other, namely wider society, which bestows identity upon individuals, thus constraining personal autonomy in the process. Additionally, the theory provides excellent leverage for analyzing one's presentation of self. For symbolic interactionists, the process of self-presentation constitutes interaction ritual chains and is analyzed through dramaturgical models. This premise reveals children's experiential discourses of homeschooling through child-focused critical ethnographies and case studies. Moreover, interactionists maintain that in order to fully understand a happening, a detailed account of the communications and interactions at hand, and the relationships among the participants is critical. Thus, using symbolic interactionist perspectives enables the researcher to focus specifically on the interactions between homeschooling family members and communication within the family environment itself. Through the use of small-scale qualitative research as well as case studies, these experiences may be investigated. Furthermore, the experience of homeschooling spans other social contexts including families, peer interactions, work, community involvement, leisure, and social networks. It is clear that these wider social contexts influence the experience of homeschooling for the parent in home educating her child, the child herself in the experience of being educated, and network involvement in establishing homeschooling as an authoritative familial opinion. The analysis of these social components can be performed using symbolic interactionist methodologies as

part of a full exploration of the homeschool process and quantifies the lived experiences of social actors involved in family-based education.

3. Trends in Homeschooling

The homeschooling population is booming. The number of homeschooled students has increased every year since 1999, and did so especially sharply from 2019 to 2020. The proportion of homeschoolers is increasing faster among nonwhite and low-income households. Law and policy steering the homeschooling ship are also changing. Most states make homeschooling easier through deregulation, but a few have beefed up their reporting and evaluation requirements in the face of increasing numbers of homeschooling families. Elsewhere, statewide homeschooling associations and grassroots organizations are mobilizing in response to proposed state legislation that aims to do the same. The internet and technology have made it possible for more parents to take on their kids' education. Apps, learning platforms, and other resources are booming, and states have shown a willingness to import private and charter schooling governance to help regulate homeschooling families' reliance on EdTech.

A cursory view of homeschooling might describe it as a predominantly white and religious phenomenon. This view largely existed until the mid-2010s. But lately, large-scale surveys show a changing portrait of homeschool demographics. Widespread use of the internet and the COVID-19 pandemic have made homeschooling easier and more popular. More than 11 percent of homeschooling parents say they switched from public schools to at-home instruction because of the pandemic. Dozens of media outlets continue to write about 'a day in the life' of homeschoolers, and the number of searches asking what homeschooling is, the costs associated, and other things has noticeably increased. Searches can't tell us how many people will actually pull their kids out of school for good, but the number of homeschoolers is rising.

3.1. Growth and Demographics

In the 1980s, evidence of a rapidly growing homeschooling population began to emerge, which suggests the number of homeschoolers had been steady at roughly 13,000 individuals prior to 1980 and then grew to an estimated 275,000 in 1988. The

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National Household Education Survey reports an average of 25% increase in homeschooling enrollment per year from 1999 to 2007, despite non-significant growth of 0.5% for homeschool enrollment during 2007-2008 in the longitudinal NHES. Despite this slight drop from 2.9% in 1999 to 2.5% in 2007 for homeschooling, various sociopolitical discussions and population subgroups interested in homeschooling have been skyrocketing. While homeschooled children were viewed as being predominantly white and Anglo-Saxon Protestants, recent trends indicate an increase in children of color participating in alternative education, including homeschooling. And while some say homeschooled children are primarily rich, right-wing, and/or religious, current findings indicate that is simply not the case. A variety of studies have explored the demographics based on sociological factors such as ethnicity, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and region of the United States, if not the world, as parents and children are seeking the best in education. Given the emphasis in homeschooling communities on diversity, inclusivity, and community building, this research is particularly interesting to the homeschool community itself and to researchers interested in education alternatives. Knowing the current demographics, trends, and reasons for homeschooling will lend insight into policy, suggestion, and practice.

While many reasons might exist for homeschooling children, the strongest of these reasons demonstrate a frustration with and rejection of the monolithic public school entity and an overemphasis on timed, test-driven, and standardized curricula that fail to impart a basic understanding of the love of learning to children. And when homeschoolers began in the United States, largely with Religious Right leaders, the curriculum choices available to them were severely limited. In fact, homeschooling was for those who could not afford or did not have access to an adequate array of educational resources. Now that choice is made by many because they are unhappy with the resources—never before in an age of plenty have so many households elected to create the odds and ends in personalization in, and withholding from, the education business. The widespread availability and technological access to homeschooling resources also contribute to the surges in homeschooling. Thus, homeschoolers are left to pick and choose resources from myriad curricula and instructional models,

opting for academic and religious freedoms that were not always their own. It seems current homeschoolers are not the against-all-odds crowd they once were. Regional differences abound in areas where homeschooling is very much for those that the public school has failed, often one of the reasons that homeschooling starts, whereas others have become education-choice-rich land—policy is much less constrained either way, perhaps, in sync with culture.

3.2. Legal and Policy Developments

About the same time that dot com was burgeoning to life in 1997, a book was published about the legalities of homeschooling in the United States and around the world. The periodical articles in popular and educational journals increased in size and number. Among the connections between law and homeschooling that were made known in these articles was the fact that some states and nations had no laws that addressed homeschooling. There is a growing number of nations that have imposed or debated regulations that address homeschooling specifically. In Indiana, three bills that had changes in language necessary for distinctions regarding homeschooling passed. Analytical explanations of these changes, which are legal because some statutory descriptions of home education had prescriptions that pertained to political districts only, so that only a small number of families could be regulated by small regional councils, will appear in the coming months. (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2022)

Individual states, as well as nations, regulate homeschooling through statutes that require notification, curriculum conformity, and academic, health, and/or skill level assessment. As this paper is being written, a Constitutional Court has upheld a new law that requires the teaching license to have the correct credentials for the holder to teach at the compulsory grade levels. Permits are required for the use of school transportation, libraries, and medical clinics for the purpose of instruction around the home. Proof of health is required, and the government medical system retaliates by demanding inoculations be administered by a doctor and that a fee be paid unless the child is "unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons." There are annual notifications and notifications in case of emergencies. There are curriculum guidelines including the statement that it is absolutely necessary to have a "plan which will prove that the children receive an education and authorities to carry agreed." Additional assessments

are required, involving psychological testing, and at the end of the high school level, there is a Secondary Education Baccalaureate Examination if children wish to progress to higher education.

4. Socialization and Homeschooling

At the forefront of nearly every discussion about home education is the issue of socialization. Home education research evokes social theories focused on behaviorism, contact theory, and the theory of individualism. These paradigms provide a framework for discussing social outcomes of homeschooled students, emphasizing the sociocultural view of socialization. Due to the variety of theories in the sociocultural paradigm, the discourse surrounding homeschool socialization ranges according to theory. Many in the public conceptualize homeschooled children as isolated and unable to make friends; however, numerous studies have thoroughly debunked these myths. In fact, homeschooled children are found to be as, or occasionally even more, socially satisfied as their private or public schooled counterparts. Additionally, the majority of homeschooled students participate in activities in their community and with similar children across contexts, such as in Scouts, church groups, karate, and sports camps. A focus on a social theory of care ethics in the development of homeschooled children found that a majority of the children interviewed described good friends or a best friend. Yet moral development is best supported in the family because similar values are shared, and families are a safe, comfortable space where children can test moral boundaries. Parents also work together to develop the moral domain, design appropriate responses to moral dilemmas, and help the children acquire the correct knowledge and understanding of moral transgressions. Empirical research reveals positive social attainments associated with homeschooling. It demonstrates that the low levels of social engagement and communication associated with homeschooled children have no long-lasting negative effects. Moreover, a significant percentage of these students overcome any deficits and achieve normal levels of social functioning. A portion of homeschooled children with difficulties are interpreted as children with congenital or evolutionary delays, pathology, or as a heterogeneous group who display typical delays across contexts from family, peer, and educational settings. Additionally, five emergent themes in terms of parents'

socialization efforts indicate there are distinct differences in homeschooled children who are immersed in an ideological community compared to those who have diverse friends outside the homeschool community. Therefore, despite the differences in educational environment, homeschooled children can develop friendship networks. The emergence of the idea of communities, along with strong family, peer, and community relationships, demonstrates the socialization of the homeschooled within and outside non-public school contexts. This idea of socialization has been a strong testament to the persisting, yet sometimes unrealistic, preconceptions of home education. (Bighelli et al.2022)

4.1. Socialization Theories

Socialization refers to the process by which individuals learn social skills and norms and acquire attitudes, values, and beliefs. Homeschooled children are understood to learn these dynamics differently than those in traditional schools. A number of theoretical perspectives in socialization exist: social learning theory, developmental theories, sociocultural theories, perspectives of habitus, symbolic interactionism, and others. These various theoretical perspectives all suggest that socialization is a process where children learn capabilities to function as members of society. If homeschooled children are not at school, it follows that they lack access to some of these processes involved in learning how to function in large groups. . (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2022)

The traditional view holds that schools play a primary role in the socialization of children. Numerous studies have found that homeschooled children are socializing in a number of contexts, such as in the home, in religious and secular groups, at work, with friends and other family members, and in broader communities. Research shows that homeschooled children generally have adequate social skills. Certain studies find that homeschooled children have superior social skills in comparison to those in traditional school settings. Others find that homeschooled children do not have equivalent social skills to those in traditional schools. Some studies suggest that the social development of homeschooled children is context dependent. This approach allows for the possibility of varying attitudes and cultures in different communities and social groups that may influence aspects of social development. From these perspectives, the social development of homeschooled children seems mainly

influenced by their immediate contexts, rather than by their affiliation with traditional schools or homeschools.

4.2. Empirical Studies

Most published research in the area of homeschooling has been either qualitative or mostly descriptive. A few studies have used surveys or other nonexperimental or quasi-experimental methods. In a telephone survey of children who had been home educated at some point and who then later enrolled in school, approximately three-fourths of the children reported that they had some friends or more than one friend, that they participated in community activities, and that they had positive relationships with adults outside of their family. In a similar survey administered to adults who had been homeschooled, the majority of them felt that homeschooling was a help, not a hindrance, to their relationships with their peers. According to these studies, both homeschooled and traditionally schooled children and young adults appear to have friendships and interact with their community outside of institutions. (Scholes et al.2022)

Based on the writings of former homeschoolers, it is suggested that they (a) had good relationships with their family, (b) liked spending time with their families at the time of the study, (c) had higher academic achievement than public school students, and (d) did not feel that they were socially disadvantaged. To the contrary, the majority of the homeschool students did feel they were socially advantaged—winning more awards and taking on more leadership roles than their public school peers. With these stories and studies, homeschooled children do not appear to have worse relationships than children who go to school. It may be more accurate to say that they may be more victim to stating what is socially acceptable. It is not that they are less socialized than traditionally schooled children, but that they merely volunteer to be less social. Ensuring this occurs does take effort on the part of the parents to allow for positive social interactions even within the limitations of homeschooling. Some have labeled this a willful withdrawal from society and a pull toward isolation.

5. Conclusion and Future Directions

In conclusion, homeschooling, or the home-based education of children, can be viewed from a number of sociological perspectives that reveal many educational and

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societal implications. Over recent decades, the number of homeschoolers has grown in most Western nations as well as in some non-Western nations. In the United States, the homeschooling population continues to increase and include children from a greater representation of social and geographic backgrounds. While homeschooling has historically been a favorite of those who reject public schools, a diverse group of people are now joining this social movement. As more children are homeschooled, the social and educational importance of research on homeschooling generally and on diverse homeschoolers, in particular, increases. (Turley et al.2022)

For this journal issue, we placed our focus on K-12 schooling at home. This overview essay and the other essays on subtopics within home-based education hopefully illuminate the immense challenges and the multiple excellent opportunities in the world of homeschooling policy and practice. While there needs to be more laws both protecting the legitimate rights of homeschoolers and ensuring greater responsibility for all educational options, what is also desperately needed are more supports and opportunities from innovative homeschooling programs. Any sociological or policy view that only sees the potential dark side of the increasing numbers of diverse homeschoolers, who are now well over two million K–12 learners representing about four million parents and drawing on about ten million grandparents, is myopic and imbalanced. Decades of research affirm that many parents homeschool to provide a personalized and academically excellent education in a profoundly moral and religious environment. There is also some evidence that homeschooled students may be more socially engaged in their families and localities than their counterparts in traditional or public schools. There is the reality of educational trends but also an important contextual truth that is often overlooked: homeschooling is a truly inclusive educational option.

Many diverse families have made this educational choice for a variety of religious, cultural, philosophical, and pedagogical reasons in their quest for educational justice in the midst of an educational opportunity structure that favors one-size-fits-all traditional schools. More home-based education must be supported, but the discourse, philosophy, and research, if we are to accurately perceive educational reality and truly serve all children, must reflect the practical and moral reality and the strengths of

homeschooling in addressing children's individual needs and the essential need to address social problems with diverse educational options. Finally, we need more in-depth studies about what happens to homeschoolers across a longer period of time. We also need to expand research into new areas, such as homeschooling and technology, homeschooling and working with nearby communities, or the connections between local homeschooling support groups and various government and other educational policies. These new areas of research might exhibit further disparities and gaps between public and private resources and attitudes toward adult career pathways, as well as further advances in certain social spheres. Close examination of the connections with policy and local support groups would permit similar demographic crossover comparisons as have been made in the articles in this journal issue. A synthesis of these ideas, in the end, would yield a budding sociological view that encapsulates home-based education as a legitimate part of society and an alternative form of education associated in part with a number of expanding demographic groups. The young people whom our journal authors have studied and presented will push into the future the more complete and inclusive democratic as well as sociological view of a diverse individual and familial educational decision-making environment. (Crompton et al.2022)

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