

PARENTS' RATIONALE FOR HOMESCHOOLING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science in Education

in the

Master Teacher--Secondary Education

Human Ecology

Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

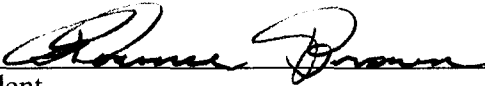
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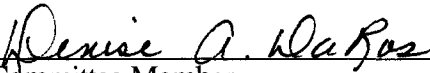
PARENTS' RATIONALE FOR HOME SCHOOLING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

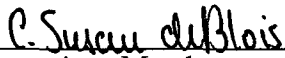
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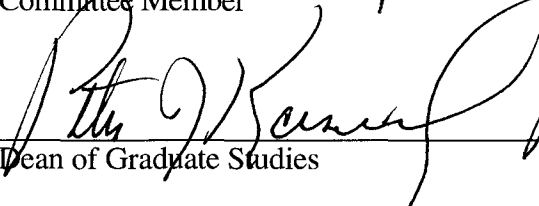
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## ABSTRACT

Following an introduction of the historical background of homeschooling, including categories of homeschoolers and issues related to homeschooling, this qualitative study focused on reasons parents chose to homeschool. Rationale for homeschooling varied widely, but frequent responses among homeschooling parents that emerged pertained to such categories as: family related issues--with family togetherness as the most frequently mentioned reason to homeschool; parental rights--including religious reasons; traditional school environment which cited school violence as a major concern; curricula, varied child-led learning experiences with an emphasis on child-centered learning, and socialization of the child.

The methodology chosen to conduct this study was a one-page, self-administered survey instrument. Questionnaires were distributed through three mediums: on-line e-mail, support group meetings, and as an addendum to a mailed newsletter. Responses to a group of survey questions established current demographic profiles of homeschoolers, while replies to open-ended questions provided information related to homeschooling rationale. Consistent with previous research on homeschoolers, the themes that emerged were love and concern for the well-being of the homeschooled child. This study revealed that homeschooling parents were committed to the education of their children and viewed schooling as a priority of parenting.

A major contribution to this study was the use of computer technology as a means of data collection. On-line e-mail capabilities offered the possibility of world-wide participation, rapidity of data collection, and convenience while maintaining minimal expense to the researcher. In addition, communication was established with a segment of the homeschooling community which would have otherwise been out of the realm of this study.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother and father, John and Rose Toth, who were ahead of their time in supporting formal education for women. They viewed higher education as a way out of poverty and a woman's door to independence. This thesis and degree represent the fulfillment of a promise I made to them in 1964. Mom and Dad were two of the most learned people that I have had the privilege of knowing, and I will always be grateful to them for their love, support, and encouragement which was ever present in my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to my thesis committee members, Denise DaRos, Susan deBlois, and Donna McNierney, for their wonderful guidance and support. Their suggestions and comments kept me focused throughout my writing. To my advisor, Louise Pavia, I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. She was always present to meet my needs, offering assistance throughout each step of the writing process. Louise was a constant source of encouragement, gently directing me towards my final goal.

A special thanks to all the members of my family who supported me throughout my years of academia and thesis writing. They continually displayed their confidence in my abilities, cheered me on, did laundry, and cooked meals while I was engaged in writing and data processing. In addition, I am appreciative of my husband, Jim, who made my academic life a reality.

Without Sharyn Fees, my editor/typist, I would not have been able to meet the thesis timeline. Her organizational skills were invaluable and a definite asset to the writing procedure.

Finally, it is inadequate to just say “thank you” to my beloved sister, Kay, and dear friend, Merrill. If it were not for their constant, loving support and prayers, I would not have realized this life-long ambition. Their unconditional faith in and love for me throughout the past years have been a constant source of inspiration. I will be eternally grateful. Thank you.

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# PARENTS' RATIONALE FOR HOMESCHOOLING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the rationale of homeschooling as an alternative method of education. One definition of education is the passing down of a culture (Jeub, 1994). The methods of achieving this goal have been diverse and have varied from culture to culture. Founded on the belief that human beings are natural learners as well as teachers, historically it has been the role of parents to educate their children (Gorder, 1990). Learning and teaching have naturally been an intergenerational and cross-cultural occurrence with parents, family, and community participating actively in the education of the child. Traditionally, prior to and throughout early Judeo-Christian life, the home was the primary center of learning. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the upper class educated their children at home, frequently with the assistance of tutors, while the lower classes of citizenry viewed education as being inseparable from day-to-day living experiences (Knowles, Muchmore, & Spaulding, 1994). With the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, compulsory public schooling was established (Gatto, 1992). The first goal of formal, compulsory public schooling was to Americanize the vast numbers of immigrants while de-emphasizing ethnic heritage. A second goal was to prepare the children to perform and conform to the rigors of industrial labor, allowing them little opportunity for independent thought or expression while working long hours (Knowles et al.; Llewellyn, 1991). According to Knowles et al., the role of parents as teachers was discouraged by public school administrators and boards of education, which left the educational responsibilities to “trained personnel.”

Within the past thirty years parents have become increasingly dissatisfied with conventional forms of education and have turned to alternative methods of schooling for their children (Colfax & Colfax, 1988; Dunleavy, 1995; Hahn & Hasson, 1996; Holt, 1981). Homeschooling has become one of these optional forms of education. Guterson

(1992) described a homeschooler as “one who did not go to school” (p. 5). The method of education for the homeschooled varied. Holt (1970), Colfax and Colfax (1988) pointed out that the spectrum ranged from the “orthodox” who used formal curricula and essentially had miniature schools at home to the “unschoolers” who advocated an unstructured learning environment with the child initiating and dictating the learning experience. The majority of homeschoolers fell somewhere between the two extremes (Guterson). Within the orthodox structure the parent(s) acted as teacher or supervisor with one or more of the children participating in grade K-12 work, and in an unschooling setting the child was the “teacher” with the parent as guide or facilitator (VanGalen & Pitman, 1991).

In 1978, the recorded number of homeschoolers was 12,500 (Ray, 1992). Homeschooling is on the increase with an estimated number ranging from 500,000 to 1,000,000 (Dunleavy, 1995; Robertson, 1994). Although this is a dramatic increase from the 1991 figures of 350,000 to 375,000 (Lines, 1991), homeschooled children comprise only 1-2% (Knowles et al., 1994) of the school-age population. It is difficult to obtain accurate figures of the homeschooling population due to the segment of homeschoolers who avoid responding to traditional inquiries. Citing legal disputes and harassment, some parents have chosen not to provide information in reference to school-age children to local boards of education (Ray, 1992; F. & T. Edwards, personal communication, April 8, 1996). Homeschoolers, both the “orthodox” with their formal curricula, and “unschoolers” with their unstructured learning environment, join a distinguished group of people who were homeschooled for a portion or all of their years: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Edison, Margaret Mead, Andrew Carnegie, Mark Twain, Charlie Chaplin, Andrew Wyeth, Pearl Buck, George Washington Carver, Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, Claude Monet, Florence Nightingale, Agatha Christi, and the Wright Brothers (Farenga, 1991; Guterson, 1992). This movement cannot be ignored. Although it represents a small percentage of the students

nationwide, teachers, administrators, and the government can no longer avoid the publicity homeschooling has been given.

Parents who homeschool are very diverse. This group included every religion and non-religion; a wide range of political views; families with children of all ages and numbers; lower, middle, and upper classes; married, single, divorced, blended families, and a representation of all races (Ray, 1992). Some parents had Ph.D.'s, while others had a high school diploma. Demographics described the homeschooling family as white and middle class with the male providing the major source of income (Kuznik, 1994). Both parents were involved in schooling the child(ren), with the mother as primary educator. Parents homeschooling were often college graduates or had attended college. Formal instruction of the homeschooled child began at age 5-1/2, and the children studied at home for at least four years (Kuznik). Despite their diversity, homeschoolers shared one common belief—the education of children was the primary right and responsibility of parents (Hahn & Hasson, 1996; Moore & Moore, 1990; Ray, 1992).

VanGalen distinguished two groups of homeschoolers (VanGalen & Pitman, 1991). One group was categorized as the “ideologues” who homeschooled for religious reasons and to strengthen their relationships with their children. They tended to transfer the activities of the public school to the home with the focal point enhanced by a fundamentalist, religious doctrine. The second group, the “pedagogues,” believed that the schools were teaching ineptly, and the teaching/learning environment took on a less structured appearance. It is believed this method of teaching/learning fostered independence and encouraged critical thinking. Specifically, this paper will address and investigate the reasons parents chose to educate their children at home.

Research has demonstrated a direct correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement of the student (Burns, 1993; Riley, 1994). Considering the number of students within a classroom in both public and private schools, teachers are only able to devote about three minutes per day in one-on-one involvement with students (R. Hamann,

personal communication, April 8, 1996). This observation is significant to parents, teachers, administrators, and the government since they all are concerned with educating the child. Homeschooling offers the benefit of one-on-one involvement with the child. Through studying the reasons for homeschooling, valuable information can be added to the educational field in terms of efficacy, achievement, styles of learning, and socialization.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to investigate why parents chose to homeschool their children. Throughout history children have been offered a wide variety of educational settings. One of these settings has been public schooling. Public schooling is the choice of the majority of parents with private, parochial, boarding, military, trade, and technical schools as alternatives. However, a small percentage have elected to school their children at home with varying degrees of parental, extended family, and community involvement in the teaching process. Homeschooling is an alternative method of education as compared to traditional schools.

#### Value of the Study

Through this qualitative research into parental rationale for homeschooling and parental involvement in homeschooling, valuable information can be added to the growing body of literature on homeschooling and the education of the child. It is of value to know that traditional teaching methods and forms of evaluation are not the only avenue of education for students meeting with success. By examining parental perspectives of why they elect to homeschool, the American education system may be encouraged to recognize further reforms within the present process that could be beneficial to its students. Educators would benefit from this research since one of the objectives of public school education is to meet the needs of all of its students. In addition, through the emerging technology of accessing information and gathering data via the computer, a distinct approach to research has been proposed.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

Parents are their children's first teachers. When men were taken from the home to work in factories, women were left to accept the full responsibilities of housekeeping and child rearing. This was not only exhausting, but left them doubting their abilities to teach their children the necessary skills for living in an industrial nation. Thus, by accepting the common school as the primary educator of their children, parents no longer had control over the content and manner of their child's learning environment (Guterson, 1992). Traditionally, public schools taught the majority of students vocational and life skills, which by current standards represent an eighth-grade academic education (Toch, 1996). By the 20th century, public schooling became an institution. World Wars I and II, the Depression, and McCarthyism strengthened public schools into being a vital component of a strong democracy (Gorder, 1990).

The social movements of the 1960s and 1970s brought about an awareness of the problems within the public school system. As advocates of educational reform, Illich, Kozol, and Kohl proposed a variety of educational alternatives for those who were displeased with the current educational process. Their concepts of community control, free schools, and deschooling demonstrated to parents that they were better equipped to teach their children than the conventional public schools (Knowles et al., 1994). Other authorities in the field of education, psychology, and early childhood determined that conventional schooling was failing in its primary goals of educating and nurturing the child. Urie Bronfenbrenner, William Rohwer, Sheldon White, Robert Hess, and Raymond Moore, all scholars in their fields, agreed that caution should be used in institutionalizing children early and subjecting unready minds and nervous systems to the rigors of mandatory schooling (Holt, 1981; Moore & Moore, 1990). According to Moore and Moore's research (1990), children should not be subjected to a form of formal schooling until the age of twelve. In conjunction with this line of thought, Bronfenbrenner (Moore & Moore,

1990) warned of the dangers of peer association prior to the fifth or sixth grade. Furthermore, Merrick found that children having the advantage of family life during their early years reached cognitive maturity between eight and ten years of age (Moore & Moore, 1990). In Sweden, seven is the beginning age for children to enter school, and their entire schooling sequence is nine years (F. & T. Edwards, personal communication, April 8, 1996). Moore and Moore's research pointed to the fact that early academics or out-of-home care led to academic failures and discipline problems. This is often due to the fact that the child's integrated maturity levels have not reached an appropriate thoughtful learning level (Moore & Moore, 1989). It is generally believed that boys trail girls in general maturity in the early years, but they enter school at the same age. This may explain why there are three to thirteen boys to every girl in learning disabled classes. Children entering school at these early ages normally cannot handle cause-and-effect reasoning. Citing these findings and observations, the researchers concluded that the natural curiosity of children to learn was suppressed by teachers and institutions.

Further, Holt, a humanist and promoter of homeschooling, "contended that much of what occurs in school was boring, frightening, humiliating, confusing, and therefore oppressive for children" frequently leading them to be poor students (Moritz, 1981, p. 212). Holt pointed out that, children often "play the game" of giving the answer that the teacher wants in order for the student to win rewards or avoid punishment (Moritz). Holt also found the natural process of learning which involved inquisitiveness and challenged established views was crushed in this type of teacher/student "game playing" environment. This reversal of the learning process from a self-directed to teacher-directed, from the student questioning to the teacher questioning, resulted in an unnatural atmosphere for learning (Kohn, 1988). According to Gardner (1991), true learning did not involve a repetition of information learned or performance of practices mastered, but the application of concepts and principles to questions or problems newly posed. Brunner's studies suggested that it is not the job of the school to present information systematically,

prepackaged, but to have students organize it themselves and to nurture their efforts to organize it (Guterson, 1992). Ford further suggested that parents were disillusioned with a system that rewarded conformity, penalized innovation, and had a foundation that did little to inspire confidence and respect for one's self and others (F. & T. Edwards, personal communication, April 8, 1996). These same parents expressed feeling that the public school classroom was an unnatural learning environment for children. Wanagel (1995) described this unnatural learning environment in the following manner:

Taxpayers spend between six and seven thousand dollars per year per pupil on public schools. For that amount twenty or thirty students are crammed into a room that would be considered inadequate living space for four. There is no access to good food or fresh air, no chance to get normal exercise, and each bathroom is shared by hundreds. There's one adult for every twenty or thirty students (and we worry about single mothers with one or two?) There are fewer than thirty books for each student, access to them is difficult, and time to read them is nonexistent.

There's one computer for hundreds, one piano for thousands. (p. 65).

Parents believed that they could provide a better education and a more productive learning environment for their children than the public schools in existence. (Churback, 1993; Gorder, 1990; Hahn & Hasson, 1996). Homeschooling parents cited this belief as one of the primary reasons they have chosen to return schooling to the home.

Homeschooling parents wanted a level of involvement in their children's lives and education that would be relinquished if they were to enroll their children in any type of traditional school—public or private (Guterson, 1992; Hahn & Hasson, 1996; Holt, 1981; Moore & Moore, 1990). Guterson emphasized that homeschoolers “pay attention to the child's unique intelligence as it evolves and changes and adapt instruction and curriculum to it” (p.180). In supporting the findings of the Coleman Report of 1966 which stated that a student's academic success correlated with family background, Guterson (1992) and homeschoolers recognized that education began at home. Although parents agreed on the

importance of schooling in the home, they sometimes differed in their motives to homeschool.

Included among homeschoolers were many professional educators who taught in the public schools but chose to homeschool their own children (Guterson, 1992). Guterson explained that by learning alone or in small groups, real academic success was possible. This was one of the goals of the educator/parent. There has been a resurgence of interest in homeschooling with reports of homeschooled children's outstanding achievement on standardized tests (Calvery, Bell, & Vaupel, 1992; Koklanaris, 1994). While national averages were in the 50th percentile, the average homeschooled student registered between the 65th and 80th percentile (Gibbs, 1994). The National Institute of Salem Oregon's survey on standardized tests showed that homeschoolers ranked as high as the 84th percentile in reading and 81st percentile in math (Churbuck, 1993). The demographics of homeschoolers may be indicative of test results. It is worth noting that standardized tests are geared toward the middle class and have been reportedly culturally biased (Guterson). As previously cited, homeschoolers were predominately middle class and white, with parents who were committed to the education of their children. As Guterson explained, parental commitment to education was the most essential factor in academic performance, and homeschooling parents had this commitment. Prestigious universities have accepted and graduated homeschooled students, some with honors (Colfax & Colfax, 1988; Ray, 1990).

#### Categories of Homeschoolers

Mayberry (1989) categorized homeschooling parents into four groups based upon their purpose for homeschooling. The first group was parents who integrated religion and content with the goal of instilling religious beliefs and values into their children. The second group comprised those who homeschool for academic success by individualizing instruction to meet their child's particular needs. Parents who were concerned about the negative social aspect of the public schools upon their children comprised the third group.



Mayberry's fourth group was the "New Age" parents who homeschooled toward the changing American culture.

### Religious Motivation

Some parents who chose to homeschool were prompted by religious motivation. Those parents who homeschooled for religious reasons appeared to be the largest documented group comprising about 65% of the homeschoolers (Wade, 1995). However, a percentage of homeschoolers were not "counted" since they chose to remain underground or silent when it came to documentation. Further, it should be noted that since not all states require homeschoolers to register, it was difficult for all states to provide an accurate count of homeschoolers and reasons for homeschooling (Questions and Answers, 1995). Therefore, the actual numbers may vary. Promoting a balance of study, work, and service with a child's developmental needs began with a fundamentalist Christian following, but since has spread widely to encompass other non-Christian groups (Lyman, 1993). Conservative, traditionally orthodox, religious beliefs dictated parents to homeschool, keeping their children from the influence of secular humanism, Darwin's theory, and consumerism (Gorder, 1990; Hahn & Hasson, 1996; Mayberry, 1991). Certain parents firmly believed that they were divinely dictated by God to be their children's first and foremost teachers. They further believed that it is also their Christian duty to educate their children and raise them to be mature, responsible Christian adults (Hahn & Hasson; McCulley, 1994). This group of homeschoolers built their curricula on the ethical and moral values of the Christian Bible, incorporating scripture and Christian teachings in many, if not all, subject areas. A growing segment of religious homeschoolers is the Catholic community. Only 6% of Catholic parents in the United States enroll their children in Catholic schools, and the other 94% are looking for other schooling options (Homeschooling Discussed, 1996). Families seeing the substitution of time-bound, current ideologies for traditional Catholic values viewed current Catholic education as a watered-down representation of their faith (Hahn & Hasson). Homeschooling incorporated the

fullness of their Catholic faith with care given to spiritual, moral, and intellectual growth within the confines of the Catholic Church (Aquilina, 1996; Hahn & Hasson). Christians, groups of non-Christians, and atheists had a desire to teach their children their own ideals and values. They opposed state imposition of a regulated value system upon their offspring (Gorder, 1990). This group of homeschoolers strongly believed that it was their right and responsibility to teach their children, not that of the government.

### Academic Motivation

Growing discontent and criticism of American public education was being fueled by our diminishing international status. Due to the focus on education, a further complication was the achievements of the Asian boat children in the American school systems. These non-English speaking children were learning and succeeding in the American schools (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore, 1992) while numbers of American students encountered difficulties, experienced failure, and displayed apathy (Belck & Jinks, 1993). Family values concerning education played a significant role in the varied achievement levels of children (Belck & Jinks).

Schools not only filled students' days with busy work, but nearly 70% of the day was devoted to teachers lecturing or "talking" to students (Armstrong, 1987). Goodlad's survey of 1,000 classrooms showed that "children weren't given the opportunity to exercise the vast proportion of their brain devoted to new learning" (Armstrong, p. 13). Children have different, personal learning styles and abilities. By individualizing instruction in homeschooling, a child's particular needs can be met. In a traditional setting, children are tested and labeled as average, gifted, or learning disabled. Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences identifies seven different kinds of intelligence: (a) logical-mathematical, (b) musical, (c) bodily-kinesthetic, (d) linguistic, (e) spatial, (f) interpersonal, and (g) intrapersonal. According to Gardner's theories, the conventional school system did not respond to individual differences and was biased toward linguistic and logical mathematical abilities (Guterson, 1992). Students with poor verbal or logical

skills were often retained or labeled with a diagnosis of learning disabled, attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, or as an underachiever (Armstrong). These students may be very talented in other intelligence areas, but schools required them to answer questions orally, by way of fill in the blanks or with other paper-and-pencil tasks. Assessments of this sort limited the observer's perception of a child's capability. These same students were expected to sit quietly at a desk for designated periods of time, speak only when spoken to, were told what to learn, when to learn, how to learn, with what materials, and when learning would begin and end (Holt, 1970). Since competition through test taking and grades was encouraged, one student's success would be another student's ill fate. Real learning varied from community to community, culture to culture, and within class distinctions. This fact rendered a standardized curricula meaningless and irrelevant to the lives of many children (Colfax & Colfax, 1988). Students categorized as gifted or learning disabled with abilities differing from the standard classroom curricula frequently encountered difficulties or challenges.

Gifted students have a natural ability, talent or aptitude that is superior to that of their peers, and they need work geared to their own skills, talents and aptitudes (Guralnik, 1986; Krantowitz, 1994). The gifted often have difficulty in the traditional classroom because they are self-motivators, and class work is not adapted to their abilities. Frequently they were not academically challenged and became bored or often labeled as "troublemakers" when they sought additional learning experiences. The size of the classes and the teacher's commitment to meet the needs of so many forced the gifted students to adapt to a classroom setting of "feedback with correction" (Guterson, 1992, p. 12). Much of the work was busywork with little connection to the core of subject matter (Krantowitz, 1994; Llewellyn, 1991). Their creativity was limited to art class. The gifted were frequently disciplined for their demonstrations of independence and were often compelled to conform to a prescribed curriculum that was often inconsistent and caused confusion and/or frustration (Wieder, 1992). Schools tend to cater to mediocrity without

meeting the needs of these students who wish to exceed the norm (Knowles et al., 1994). According to Knowles et al. (1994), the home is the least stressful environment with a superior climate for the development of the "gifted and educationally handicapped" child, addressing special needs, learning styles and abilities of the individual student. Often a learning handicap disappeared or was minimized when a child was placed in a homeschooled setting with the "one-on-one and work-at-your-own-pace" atmosphere (Farenga, 1994). The curricula-imposed schooling limits a teacher's freedom to deal with individual differences. Some children were late readers, according to Farenga (1994), not learning to read until age 10 or later and were treated as having a learning disability. They were often held back from other learning opportunities until they catch up with their reading level (Farenga 1994). According to LePage (Pederson & O'Mara, 1990, p. 3) adults are led to believe that only they can teach children and that the more "knowledge they put across, the better teachers they will be." However, children learn in different styles by immersing themselves in their world and experiencing life, not through someone "talking" to them in front of a classroom (Pederson & O'Mara).

### Negative Socialization

A well-represented group of parents were concerned with the negative social aspect of the public schools and chose to homeschool. According to a poll of the public's attitudes toward America's public schools, the two most serious problems facing schools today are the growth of violence and poor discipline (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994). A government study reported that hundreds of students were attacked within a month, millions had something stolen, and one in four students were afraid that another student might harm them (Gorder, 1990). Given these conditions it was difficult, if not impossible, for a child to learn (F. & T. Edwards, personal communication, April 8, 1996). Combine these situations with a child who was labeled "gifted or learning handicapped," place them in a classroom of 24 or more students, and it was understandable why learning is at a minimum or occurred at all (R. Hamann, personal communication, April 8, 1996). Peer pressure,

drugs, vulgar language, humiliation by peers and teachers, bullying, rape, crime, alcohol, guns, competitive behavior, and sexually transmitted diseases represented a portion of the negative socialization that parents preferred their children be spared (Jeub, 1994; Knowles et al., 1994; Kohn, 1988). Aggressive behavior in schools rarely have consequences, and discipline is infrequent or ineffective leaving the victim in a submissive state (R. Hamann, personal communication, April 8, 1996). Parents feared that the hours spent with peers in such a negative atmosphere would erode the values and work ethic they had attempted to instill within their children. Families viewed this negative social behavior as a form of abuse, and some parents elected to remove their children from this type of environment. Wade (1995) pointed out that the most important elements for social development were: love, security, discipline, interdependence, and responsibility. These were all provided through the family unit, and although friends outside the family are important they do not have to be present on a daily basis to form a socially well-developed individual. Homeschooling helped children avoid the negative social life by promoting a strong family bond (Lyman, 1993).

#### Changing American Culture

According to Mayberry (1989), a new breed of homeschoolers became frustrated with public schools that were underfunded, overburdened and overcrowded. They found academic standards were too low and peer pressure too high (Jetter, 1996). They objected to a system that rewarded conformity and penalized innovation (F. & T. Edwards, personal communication, April 8, 1996). For some of these parents schools represented coercion, repression of individuality, and conformity to the whims of the majority. They often based their contentions on their own devastating school experiences and desired better for their children (Knowles, 1988; 1991).

New Age parents viewed public school students as lacking the imaginative individualism and inventiveness that should be the thread of American economic life and substituted a brand of social competition that is a potential danger to communities and the

economy. According to Guterson (1992), the failure of state-controlled, compulsory schooling resulted from two facts: parents are natural educators, and family life is crucial to educational success. Many New Age parents homeschooled because they enjoyed being with their children. They were delighted watching and helping their children learn (Farenga, 1996). One of the primary goals of the New Age homeschoolers was to restore family unity, a goal shared by homeschooling parents (Mirochnik & McIntire, 1991).

The common goal of all homeschooling parents, whatever category they fell into, was to provide the best education possible for their children. Furthermore, this education was offered in a loving, nurturing environment which catered to each child's needs.

#### Issues Related to Homeschooling

There is a growing body of literature and research that reports on the following five issues related to homeschooling.

##### Academic success

There is an increasing number of inferences that indicate homeschooled students are experiencing success in the job market and on university campuses, while conventional school dropout numbers continue to rise (Gibbs, 1994; Jetter, 1996).

Studies showed that homeschoolers perform as well or better than their peers academically. Eighty-four percent of high school seniors could not meet the suggested standards in mathematics (Schrof, 1996). In contrast, homeschooled children nationwide scored at or above the 80th percentile in eight basic categories of the top three standard achievement tests: California Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and Stanford Achievement Test (Gibbs, 1994; McCulley, 1994; Ray, 1992). The national average in conventional schools is the 50th percentile. A study of several hundred homeschooled students taking the Stanford Achievement Test in the state of Washington found that these students consistently scored above the national average in reading, language, math, and science with the median score at about the 67th percentile on national norms (Wartes, 1990). Similarly, students in a state-managed form of homeschooling in Alaska

scored higher than conventional school students nationwide, including Alaska, on the California Achievement Test in math, reading, language and science (Greene, 1985). In the Arkansas study of the difference in achievement between the homeschooled and public schooled students, the homeschooled students scored higher in all areas in fourth and seventh grades. In 10th-grade testing, the homeschoolers scored significantly higher than the average public school students with the exception of language where homeschoolers scored lower (Calvery et al., 1992). Reportedly, a 12-year-old girl tested college level in most subject areas, and her 10-year-old brother tested 10th- and 11th-grade levels in all subject areas (M. Williams, personal communication, January 7, 1996). In this same state, the Lansing State Journal reported that 72% of students in their public school district tested below grade level (M. Williams, personal communication, January 7, 1996). In comparison, private school test scores were higher than public school scores, but not as high on average as homeschoolers. This was due in part to the fact that parents tended to demonstrate a more active role in their child's education if they attended a private school (Trevas, 1996). It appeared that the time parents spent with their children, regardless of how tightly or loosely structured the homeschooling experience is, has a direct correlation with academic performance (Farenga, 1994).

### Socialization

Another major issue surrounding homeschooling was the problem of socialization of the homeschooled child. Critics of homeschooling stated that the children were not learning to live in the real world because of the amount of time spent in a home atmosphere which they felt rendered the child isolated. Public schools classify and segregate students by age and ability reinforcing class, gender and racial prejudice (C. Webb, personal communication, July, 1996). This leaves little opportunity for children to be exposed to the workplace, family, or community and to have enriching experiences outside of the classroom. In this setting, individual expression is almost nonexistent, and major interaction is limited to peers. However, according to Wanagel (1995), homeschooling

parents believed that if children were not put into schools at an early age and abandoned to peer pressure, they would not become hostile and alienated adolescents. Homeschoolers meet and socialize with people of various ages and backgrounds through their neighborhoods, churches, 4-H, scouts, libraries, community sports and theater; in karate, dance, and music lessons. They visit nursing homes, volunteer at soup kitchens and hospitals. Some children participate in school activities, and others socialize through support groups (Farenga, 1996). Many parents tended to regard the socialization that takes place in the conventional schools as a negative socialization, which often left the students with a poor self-image and anti-social behavior (Wanagel).

In an attempt to delve into this issue, Shyer's study on social development of homeschooled children as compared to their counterparts showed 8- to 10-year-olds at play. Shyer concluded that there was no significant difference between the two groups in self-confidence or assertiveness, but the homeschooled children had consistently fewer behavioral problems (Farenga, 1996; Lyman, 1993). Using the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale, homeschooled and public schooled students were tested forming a composite of behavioral skills measuring maturity. Public school children scored in the 27th percentile; the homeschooled scored in the 84th percentile (Ray, 1996). These results indicated that the homeschooled child's exposure to a variety of age groups and settings promoted advanced maturity.

Other studies have shown evidence that homeschooled children were more likely to have friends of varied ages and be free of cliquish, exclusive behavior common in schools (Churbuck, 1993; Farenga, 1996). Some professionals believe that extensive peer contact during childhood can be the cause of peer dependency rather than a cross-generational socialized child (Welch & Short, 1995). It has been suggested that socialization has been over-rated, and in order to thrive children should be given time alone in which to think and dream (Carroll, 1996).



### Teacher Qualifications

A third issue of concern related to homeschooling was the qualification of parents as teachers. Parents do not need to be certified teachers in order to homeschool. In Ohio a "home teacher" must have a high school diploma or GED or test scores that show equivalence. If none of these are satisfied, the parent must work under a person holding a baccalaureate degree until the homeschooled child's test results demonstrate reasonable proficiency (Ohio Compulsory Attendance, 1996). Nine other states have similar requirements, while the remaining states have no specific qualifications for parents teaching their children (R. Hamann, personal communication, April 8, 1996). Although parents in a homeschooling situation tend to be more educated than the average American parent, the homeschooled children of parents who have a diploma or GED continue to score higher than the national norms as compared to their public schooled peers (Hahn & Hasson, 1996; Kuznik, 1994; Ray, 1992). In the findings of the 1990 study of Home Education Family Characteristics, Legal Matters, and Student Achievement, it was found that there was no relationship between student achievement and teacher certification of parents (Ray, 1990).

Once the basic skills of reading, writing, and math are acquired, homeschoolers can learn anything they want to learn (Llewellyn, 1991). Parents' educational background has little to do with the student's learning agenda. Computer usage is a prime example of child-led learning. Few parents are as adept with computers as their self-taught children (Llewellyn, 1991). Children are naturally inquisitive and are born achievers. Their motivation and interest are instinctive. When homeschooling parents face an educational weakness, they turn to support groups and others who have expertise in that area or learn along with their children (Guterson, 1992; Hahn & Hasson, 1996). The availability of computers for interactive distance learning, computer-based education, and on-line interactions have expanded resource possibilities. Students can access educational resources produced and distributed anywhere in the world. Homeschoolers are motivated enough to be the leading users of educational technology in the country (Now You Can

Stay, 1996; Snider, 1996). Although some homeschoolers feel that technology is critical to their children's future, others continue to utilize libraries, art galleries, museums, or knowledgeable people to teach their children.

### University Acceptance

A fourth area of concern was that of university acceptance and compliance to application procedures. Children who have been homeschooled have no special difficulty in being accepted into colleges and universities. There are over 250 colleges and universities that have accepted homeschoolers (Ray, 1995). As of 1996, Ray cited that 369 colleges or universities will accept applications for admission from homeschoolers (Ray, 1996).

Meeting admissions requirements varies according to the style of homeschooling used.

Three methods of homeschooling are common within the homeschooling community: the fixed curriculum, unit approach, and "unschooling" (Farenga, 1994). The fixed curriculum closely follows the public school's curricula, but is done at home. The unit approach takes the basic concepts of the fixed curriculum but breaks it into smaller groups or units for study. Farenga (1994) explained that the student did not advance to the next unit until the preceding unit was mastered. The unschooling approach leaves the child free to access the "real" world; learning through doing. There is no structured curricula, time tables, subjects to be studied, or testing. Students pursue their interests while expanding a base of knowledge through a variety of academic skills and levels. The "unschooled" child determines what and how an area will be learned with the parent as a guide. The world is their classroom (Farenga, 1994; Guterson, 1992; Holt, 1970; Llewellyn, 1991).

Traditionally, colleges want their incoming students to have a broad, varied educational background. Homeschooled students may need to provide a GED, standardized test scores, recommendations from adults, an application essay, lists of interests, extracurricular activities and achievements (Murphy, 1994). The students who are homeschooled using a fixed curricula or the unit approach are able to provide documentation of courses studied and in some cases even grades. The unschooler is

challenged with furnishing evidence of knowledge mastered in specific areas. College credits take precedent over high school transcripts; therefore, it is common for homeschoolers and unschoolers to attend a local university or community college, receiving credit for classes. Course credit illustrates success at the college level, as well as a form of structured course work (Farenga, 1994; Guterson, 1992; Llewellyn, 1991). The lack of traditional schooling does not show a lack of education, and many universities are willing to make exceptions (Colfax & Colfax, 1988). Since homeschoolers have demonstrated success at the university level, applicants are having less difficulty in being admitted to colleges of their choice than in the past. Several students were willing to be accepted conditionally, and once having proven their academic talents were admitted without the traditional admission requirements. College officials have stated that they enjoy the maturity, enthusiasm, and diversification that the homeschooled student brings into the classroom (Farenga, 1994; Wanagel, 1995).

### Employment

Lastly, whether or not homeschooled students chose to continue with formal schooling, they experienced little difficulty in finding employment outside the home. According to Wanagel (1995), 80% of the working adults in America have a high school diploma, with only 20% of the workforce having a college degree. Of this 20%, only one-fifth have a job or profession in the field of their degree. For some homeschoolers, college would be a step backwards. A homeschooler's resume contains actual skills and accomplishments rather than a course listing. They need little supervision and instruction on the job since many of them have been teaching themselves during their homeschooling years (Wanagel). Through their own initiative, pre-teens have inaugurated their own businesses. They assumed the responsibilities of banking, accounting, advertising, production, and distribution of their products and services (Kavanaugh, 1996). Their accomplishments ranged from making and selling muffins to tutoring, construction, and dog walking. They had undertaken apprenticeships and internships on farms, veterinary

hospitals, automotive shops; learned through travel, volunteered in positions that led to full-time paying positions. Because of their flexible schedules, they acquired jobs that required year-round employment in parks, hatcheries, and resorts (Kavanaugh, 1996; Llewellyn, 1991). Because the homeschooling atmosphere is not longitudinal, their growth and development is significant to employers who are looking for employees who are self-confident, self-motivated, inventive, and creative in the work place (Sheffler, 1995; Wanagel, 1995). It is not the exception in the homeschooling community to find a 19-year-old as an office manager in a technical company; a 17-year-old in an established computer career; or a 20-year-old who has developed a plastics division at a testing lab (Wanagel).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The purpose of this research was to report on variables within the homeschooling community, to discover possible reasons for homeschooling, and the role parental involvement played in homeschooling. The responses that were quantifiable consisted of demographic information supplied by the respondents relating to themselves and their spouse or significant other. The purpose of this data documentation was to provide current demographic information on homeschoolers. The qualitative data from the open-ended questions were compiled and presented in a comparative manner. All data were downloaded on a disc for storage and for further reference.

### Participants

The target population for this study was people who are presently homeschooling or have homeschooled in the past. Homeschooling was defined as one or more children being educated by a parent(s) or other significant person and who reside within that household. This was the sole criteria for questionnaire response eligibility. There were no geographic or demographic limitations or restrictions placed upon subject participants. Participation was purely voluntary, and return of the questionnaire gave automatic consent of the participant to take part in the study. The questionnaire was distributed through three mediums: e-mail, homeschooling support group meetings, and as an addendum to a mailed newsletter. A cover letter also accompanied the questionnaire introducing the study and its rationale (Appendix A).

The questionnaire used for the study consisted of a one-page, self-administered survey instrument (Appendix B). The questions assumed two forms. The first group of questions required the respondent to check the appropriate response most closely pertaining to their individual demographics. These responses were utilized to establish a profile of characteristics of the homeschoolers surveyed. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions that asked the respondent to supply reasons and/or

opinions related to their homeschooling experiences (Appendix B). Participants were given the opportunity to provide as much information as they felt was necessary to fully answer these questions to their satisfaction.

### E-mail Respondents

On-line postings were made by way of the Internet through various files on the homeschooling and unschooling network by way of The Family Education Member Connection on America Online. Requests for participants were placed on the message boards of: Homeschooling Forum, Talk about Homeschooling, and the Home Education Magazine message center. Anyone with questions concerning the study or those wishing to participate was asked to reply to the message sender by e-mail. It was impossible to estimate the number of subjects receiving the initial request for participation in the survey. Worldwide Internet users remained anonymous until they chose to reply by way of revealing their e-mail address. Through the suggestion of a participant, further requests for participation in the study were placed on three informal "chat" loops of homeschoolers. These loops were accessed by mothers who discussed various areas and topics of homeschooling/unschooling.

A cover letter introducing the rationale for the research and a questionnaire were sent to those responding to e-mail requests to participate in the survey. The subjects were asked to respond to the questionnaire through on-line capabilities and forward their responses to the sender by way of e-mail. If a participant's response was not received within ten days of the e-mailed questionnaire, a reminder was e-mailed to them at that time. The purpose of the research was then restated, and another questionnaire was forwarded asking the subject to e-mail their responses as soon as possible. Only one reminder was e-mailed. If there was no response to the reminder, it was assumed that the subject had voluntarily withdrawn from the research. Through the use of e-mail, snowballing occurred resulting in an undetermined number of subjects becoming involved in the survey online; however, 63 returned completed questionnaires. Conversations with homeschooling

participants continued by way of the network for as long as the subjects wished to contribute information concerning their alternative method of education. Confidentiality was assured by using e-mail address only. Returning the survey automatically gave consent of the participant to take part in the study.

#### Support Group Respondents

Support group contacts were made by the researcher at a variety of social, church, school, and community functions by way of inquiries and statements directed toward alternative methods of education. This was done in casual conversation and not as the primary reason for attendance at any of the functions. When a participant was identified, a request was made to distribute questionnaires to support group members at a regularly scheduled meeting. Four support groups agreed to participate in the study: two in Ohio, one in Illinois, and one in Georgia. One Ohio support group was identified through an article appearing in a local newspaper. The writer of the article was contacted and agreed to distribute the questionnaire during a homeschooling support group meeting. The second Ohio support group contact was made via a mutual friend at a church-related gathering. An e-mail respondent offered to distribute the questionnaire to her Illinois support group. A homeschooling couple in Georgia suggested their support group's participation in answering the questionnaire since it was located in a different region of the country. The contact person for each support group was mailed the requested number of cover letters, questionnaires, and self-addressed, stamped envelopes to be distributed to participants during their support meeting. A university address was provided for all written correspondence. Support groups were comprised of both homeschoolers and unschoolers. The support groups were of varied religious and socio-economic backgrounds and ranged in sizes from 12 to 85 members.

A total of 98 cover letters, questionnaires, and self-addressed, stamped envelopes were sent to the support groups. Eight unused questionnaires were returned reducing the total number to 90. Questionnaires were distributed to members of the groups. If members

wished to participate, they took a copy of the cover letter and questionnaire, filled it out and returned it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope that was provided. It was understood by the members that only one questionnaire was to be filled out per family. The anonymity of the respondents in no way diminished the quality and validity of the survey results. Forty-two completed questionnaires were returned. By returning the questionnaire, consent was given to participate in the study.

#### Newsletter Respondents

Newsletter unschoolers were contacted through the instigation of an editor of a newsletter. The cover letter and questionnaire were included as an addendum to a newsletter mailing. Subscribers of the newsletter were unschoolers of varied religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Eighty cover letters and questionnaires were mailed. The university return address was added to the questionnaire. Anyone wishing to participate returned the survey at their own postage expense. The membership subscribing to the newsletter encompassed areas throughout Ohio. Out of the 80 questionnaires included in the mailing, 13 were completed and returned. Returning the survey automatically gave consent of the participant to take part in the study.

#### Data Collection Techniques

Upon receipt of the questionnaires, by mail and via e-mail, the responses were tabulated by hand using a color-coded system. Traditional homeschooling responses were recorded in black, and unschooler responses were recorded in red. The questionnaires were marked on the top indicating an unschooler or traditional homeschooler's response. Demographic information was documented upon receipt on a roll of oversized paper. This paper was divided into three columns. Each demographic survey question was cut apart from an unused questionnaire and affixed individually in the far left-hand column. Adequate spacing was given in the left-hand column between each question to allow for recording replies. The middle column contained response information pertaining to the individual filling out the questionnaire, and the third column on the far right of the paper



contained information concerning spouse or significant other supplied by the respondent. Using the designated color assigned to traditional homeschoolers and unschoolers, each question's response was systematically tabulated by means of a tally mark. These tallies were placed next to the inquiry under consideration and totaled upon completion of data collection. This method yielded an instant overview of demographic information.

After re-reading the responses, it became evident that words and phrases in the open-ended responses were frequently repeated by respondents. These words and phrases formulated themes representing reasons relating to why parents choose to homeschool and what parents wanted to tell the general public about homeschooling. The phrases and words were typed by way of the computer using a category code. Words/phrases were coded in the following manner: at the beginning of each word/phrase two letters and one number appeared. A computer e-mail response was coded with a "c," and a mail-in return with an "m." A traditional homeschooler or unschooler was coded "h" or "u," and the number 11 or 12 was entered to identify which qualitative question the words/phrases referred to. Adequate spacing was given to permit separation upon printing of the key words/phrases. The specific words/phrases were sorted and utilized by placing them into piles containing similar responses. These similar responses were combined with other correlated response piles and grouped according to themes. The combined piles were placed in an envelope and labeled with a theme heading pertinent to homeschooling rationale. The contents of each envelope were re-read and resorted if necessary.

#### Analysis of Data

This section provides an analysis of data relating to the demographic questions and the question of why parents choose to homeschool their children. The data from this study were generated from two sources. The first source was tally marks totaled for each question of the questionnaire. The totals for each demographic question were entered into a computer spreadsheet program, and a topic/text label was assigned to each of the questions. The data series from the spreadsheet were converted to bar graphs and pie charts. Bar

graphs depicted relationships between spreadsheet data and a general overview of questionnaire responses. The pie charts compared portions of data to a whole. Compiled data were compared to formerly documented demographic data on homeschoolers.

The open-ended responses to the question of why parents chose to homeschool were unitized, that is, units of information were acquired through scanning the words/phrases gathered from the participants' replies. Through examination of these units, common themes emerged which evolved into categories related to homeschooling rationale. Themes were generated from patterned regularities within each category. When examination of all data units, categories, and themes were completed, notations were made, compiled, and documented. A structure of data emerged that generated the findings of the qualitative study.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

Homeschooling parents have selected a unique educational path for their children. This chapter will reveal the demographic findings of the homeschoolers surveyed and present the reasons participants supplied for homeschooling their children. The reasons parents choose to homeschool their children are as diverse as the parents who have chosen to homeschool.

#### Demographics of Homeschoolers

A total of 118 surveys represented the sum returned, with females completing 114 of the returned surveys. Ninety-seven percent of the homeschooling population were married with the vast majority (94%) being Caucasian. The ages of 60% of the homeschooling parents in the study were between 31 to 40 years of age as illustrated in Figure 1. A comparison of the educational levels of homeschooling parents (Figure 2) revealed that 60% of those surveyed either graduated from college or had attended college one or more years. Over half of the survey respondents earned a four year degree. One hundred and eleven homeschoolers responded to the question concerning annual, combined income. Forty-two percent of the respondents documented income levels between \$35,000 and \$54,999 (Figure 3). Males in the households surveyed continued to provide the major source of financial support in 95% of the homeschooling families. Thirty-seven percent of the mothers surveyed supplemented family income with part-time jobs in the home as well as outside of the home. The average number of children in the surveyed families was 2.5 children with typically two children being homeschooled in 40% of the families. One-third of the respondents' children being homeschooled were between the ages of six and eight years in age, and 68% were 11 years old and younger. The religious affiliations of the homeschoolers surveyed can be seen in Figure 4. Catholic and mainstream Protestants encompassed 53% of the respondents, while 25% represented the fundamentalist doctrine, and 20% professed no organized religion. Of the surveyed homeschoolers, mothers

continued to be the primary teacher of the children with both parents actively participating in the child's overall education.

### Rationale for homeschooling

Parents chose to educate their children at home for a variety of reasons. The following data emerged from responses to question 11 on the survey concerning parental rationale for homeschooling as seen in Appendix B. It is to be noted that through data findings, traditional homeschoolers and unschoolers displayed similarities in their rationale for schooling at home. A dominant underlying theme provided by the respondents to the open-ended questions on the questionnaire was love and concern for the well-being of their children. Moreover, respondents indicated anxiety for their children's physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. The surveyed homeschoolers believed "it was their right as a parent, an American citizen and/or God-given right to educate their children at home."

A total of 232 units concerning homeschooling rationale were extracted from the data. Each unit corresponded to a significant statement which provided the reasons why parents homeschooled. The significant statements that emerged were: aspects of family-related issues, parental rights, school environment, curricula, learner-led education, and socialization. These statements were further subcategorized to further define homeschooling rationale.

### Family-related Issues

Issues associated with family were reasons most frequently given by the respondents to homeschool. The more definitive factors in their decision to homeschool included family togetherness, homeschooling as a natural progression in a life style, love of children, and stability.

Family Togetherness. Issues related to family togetherness were the most important to the respondents. Homeschooling was seen by many of the participants in the study as one way of bringing the family closer together as a cohesive, functioning unit of society. Homeschoolers surveyed stated they believed that "it was important for the growth

and development of their children to spend as much time together as a family as possible.” It was pointed out by those surveyed that children who attended traditional schools during the day spent hours on homework, participated in extracurricular activities after school and on week-ends, and had little time to spend with the family having fun and enjoying each other’s company.

Participants responded that the extra family time provided by homeschooling created a bond between child and parents, siblings, and extended family that would not have been possible if the child had been in an institutional setting. This bond brought the family closer together. As a result, “children were not strangers to the parents,” and it created stronger relationships within the family and extended family. Family togetherness created a closeness between siblings and extended family that developed a “normal dependence on one another.” “They can’t afford to be snobbish with one another as they are daily companions” recounted one parent of pre-teens. Parents surveyed preferred to have active participation in the education of their children while strengthening family ties through spending time together. They stressed the whole family was able to participate in family activities all day, everyday, or “whenever the spirit moved them,” further strengthening family closeness. Respondents made it quite evident that it was very important to them to have a closely knit family unit and spend as much time as possible together as a family. Homeschoolers stated they were able to spend a substantial quantity of time with their children and also have quality time with them.

Natural Progression/Lifestyle. One theme of homeschooling rationale and its relationship to the family was the “natural progression” and “way of life” philosophy described by some of the surveyed parents.

Our family has developed a natural rhythm since both children were born.

From walking, eating, learning-playing-laughing-exploring, to sleeping.

Through these daily experiences, this rhythm has grown and evolved.

School interrupts this rhythm—and so, in an “unschooling, following-the-child’s-interests manner, we’ve opted to homeschool.

Homeschooling has become a life-style choice—an extension of parenting according to the respondents. Watching children grow and learn in the family setting was viewed as a continuum of natural childbirth, breastfeeding, and the “family bed.” “It just seemed like the natural thing to do while I was home with babies and other pre-schoolers,” related one teacher/mother. Others surveyed contended that it is a way of life that promoted family unity and mutual respect. For some homeschooling parents who responded, their faith commitment was a way of life, and by educating their children at home they were able to “pass on the Faith in a full time manner.” The family was a natural place to learn, and it gave the parents an opportunity to get to know their children on a very personal level. In return, the children got to know their parents. Repeatedly, parents responded that homeschooling was such a “natural thing,” and to them it was a natural progression of life. They had already been teaching their children since birth and “why not keep doing what comes naturally.”

Love of Children. Homeschoolers surveyed contended that it is impossible for teachers to love a classroom full of children or provide the individual attention in the same manner as the child’s parent. Participants in this study stated they not only “love their children, they like their children, and love being with their children.” They enjoyed their children throughout the day while working and learning together and did not want to separate daily living and learning. In addition, they got to know each other better. These parents responded they did not want to miss any of their children’s developmental stages by placing them in traditional schools. Respondents explained that although homeschooling was not a prerequisite for loving your children, in some parents’ eyes, having the children around encouraged a more loving, caring relationship between family members. One of several heartfelt, in-depth explanations of why parents homeschool was captured in the following:

We love our children very much and we want to be with them.

We don't view our children as interfering with our lives, but enhancing them. We're not really happy unless we're all together—working and playing as a family.

Stability. One rationale presented for homeschooling by a number of responding parents was family stability. Parents stated that due to certain circumstances, family stability was occasionally threatened. Relocation was one of these situations. Family relocation was often due to employment opportunities and/or job descriptions. A segment of the respondents who cited stability as a rationale for homeschooling were military families. They indicated that their family life was somewhat complicated because of military life styles. Frequent moves meant changes in base schools, different teachers, different friends and a different home—possibly in a foreign country. In addition, the academic standards of base schools deviated greatly from place to place and country to country. They were not afforded the privilege of school choice. Time allotted to institutional schooling on base diminished the time spent with the military parent. “Homeschooling offered a form of stability to our mobile military life along with added family togetherness.” Parents surveyed generally stated that homeschooling offered stability to the family unit in an “often unstable world.”

#### Parental Rights

Participants in the survey believed they were bestowed with certain rights by way of parenthood. A group of surveyed parents homeschooled for religious reasons while others surveyed wanted to have control over their children's education. Some surveyed parents cited both categories as reasons to homeschool.

Religious Reasons. Religious reasons to homeschool were stated in several of the survey results. These parents viewed the institutional schools as failing the students morally and spiritually as well as academically. Those homeschooling for religious reasons agreed that they wanted to be the main moral influence in their child's life. They did not

want someone else imposing a value system on their children that was contrary to parental beliefs. By teaching their own children at home, parents were able to promote a Christ-centered education while passing on their own beliefs and values. Many of the parents who stated they homeschooled for religious reasons acknowledged that it was their "God-given right and responsibility to educate their children." Some indicated that they were "directed by God" to teach their children, and others simply believed they could do a better job. One mother responded that she was "tired of the constant battle to instill values in her children" who were continually being "thwarted by the schools by forcing the children to participate in activities that were anathema to their philosophies."

Fundamentalist Christians frequently viewed the institutional schools as being immoral in teachings and refused to have their children subjected to curricula emersed in worldly interpretations. One respondent stated, "The government schools are entrenched in a secular human-based world view and as such this is what is taught to our children. Secular humanism and Christianity are totally at odds ideologically." Often public school attempts at "social engineering and philosophies are diametrically opposed, for the most part, to Biblical standards," and a Christian world view doesn't exist.

A few parents responding to the survey indicated a desire for their children to be "firmly grounded in their faith commitment and have a strong sense of moral and ethical issues before the child was thrust into the world." By having a strong intellectual foundation of their religious beliefs, surveyed parents believed that the child was better able to make mature judgments and choices while away from the home environment.

Private religious schools did not always meet the religious expectations of homeschooling respondents. They were also expensive and many times not a financial option. Some parents in the study found the schools did not teach the "basic fundamental truths" of their religion while others stated they were "too scholastic." Some Catholic schools tended to advocate an ecumenical course of religious study in order to embrace the growing numbers of non-Catholic students. A portion of Catholics found this offensive



and chose to school at home. They were able to provide in-depth study of theology, dogma, and church tradition, which was not a viable option in public school settings. Homeschooling was viewed as allowing time for prayer, “ministering to others and spreading the good news.”

Religious and moral training was incorporated into all subject areas by some homeschooling participants, while others chose to limit the religious and moral education to a “religion class.”

Parental Control. A number of parents surveyed wanted to be the major influence in their child’s life and believed it was their right to teach their child. This belief was illustrated by statements from the respondents declaring that they did not “believe strangers should raise their children” and that “institutions did not have the same vested interest in their child that the parent had.” Parents surveyed believed they were their children’s first teachers; consequently, they took their parental duties seriously. Parents responding wanted more control over their children’s education. Being in control of what was being taught, the respondents could “expose the child to a more diverse set of thoughts than the public schools can.” As the primary educator, homeschooling respondents assumed an active role in academics by directing the intellectual formation of their child. They viewed this not only as fulfilling a responsibility toward the child but their right. The surveyed parents took their parenting role very seriously and looked upon it as a vocation. They did not believe it was the job or right of day care centers or schools to raise their children. One mother said:

We are responsible for bringing up intelligent, law-abiding, productive members of society. I don’t think that the schools should be held accountable for what is the parents’ responsibility. Parents need to take a more active role in the upbringing of their child.

### School Environment

The following issues related to school environment emerged frequently during examination of data supplied by surveyed homeschoolers: adaptable schedule, paternal involvement, student-teacher ratio, the issue of age-appropriate schooling, process of schooling, the quality of schools, competition in the classroom, safety issues, and peer interaction.

Adaptable Schedule. The school year for homeschooled children has no bells that signal the start or dismissal of a learning session. "Students find it very frustrating to be in the middle of a project and have the bell ring, signaling the end of the class session," shared a respondent. Homeschoolers surveyed stated they could devote all day or week or month to a project seeing it to completion without interruption. Since schooling occurred year round with no beginning or ending, one surveyed unschooler's child "devoted a year to the study of astronomy." Within the institutional school setting, "learning is dictated by the bell and season," and this learning experience would not have been possible.

Adaptable schedules afforded the surveyed families numerous benefits. One advantage was flexibility; these families were able to travel at will. An example of this flexibility was noted by one mother: "My husband is a pilot. We get excellent flight benefits and can travel anywhere in the world. Would you rather read about the Sistine Chapel in a history book, or go see it?" With the availability of off season travel, respondents were provided with an opportunity to vacation when it may not have been otherwise financially feasible. Other families surveyed found that it was enjoyable to be able to interact spontaneously, engaging in such things such as a "day of skiing, visiting the zoo, helping out at the soup kitchen, or just walking in the park and enjoying nature." This flexibility offered families freedom to do as they liked, adapting activities to correspond with their time frame and life style. The families surveyed viewed "everyday living as a learning experience" and perceived "a walk in the park is ( as) a teachable moment;" therefore, to the home educator, it's school. To quote one mother: "Any day can

be a snow day for us, and we can do what we want when we want.” Parents surveyed often viewed adaptability of schedules as one of the primary reasons to homeschool.

Paternal Involvement. One theme that emerged from the study centered around paternal involvement. Participants stated that in a homeschooling setting, paternal involvement was not dictated by employment or by a traditional school schedule. Parents responding to the survey stated that children attending traditional schools did not always have the opportunity to spend as much time with their fathers as they would have liked. “Fathers often miss out on many of their children’s life experiences because of their work schedules,” declared a respondent. Through the homeschooling experience, both parents had the opportunity to share in the nurturing and educating of their children. Homeschoolers surveyed perceived that children needed to see more of their fathers, and fathers needed to be more active participants in the lives of their children. A mother of four witnessed:

Originally it (homeschooling) was to keep us together as a family. My husband works odd hours. Sending my daughter to school would have basically cut this wonderful father out of her life (this was when my oldest was only 5). Our family life was rich and fun. It felt like she was being ripped away.

Respondents viewed parenting as a dual responsibility with both parents actively participating in the education and rearing of the child. Homeschooling provided that opportunity.

Student-Teacher Ratio. Most homeschoolers and educators believed that the one-on-one or tutorial method of teaching was the most effective means of providing a quality education. “It is impossible for a teacher to give the kind of personal attention needed to 20 or more students in a day,” noted one parent. Another added, “One-on-one teaching is the most effective. Each student’s learning style can be indulged. One uses ear plugs, the other listens to tapes.” Individualized instruction met the needs of each child while providing

personal attention. Homeschoolers surveyed agreed that one-on-one or at most even one-on-three or four was much more effective than even the best of institutional schools. One homeschooler claimed that “one hour of private tutoring a day gave as much as a full day at school,” which left the rest of the day for the child to pursue his/her own interests. Private tutoring as a form of education used to meet the needs of the individual child and as a teaching/learning technique is undisputed in its success.

Grouping by Age. The following questions were asked by a representative number of respondents: “Why must children begin school at the age of five? Why must children learn to read at age six? What if they are not ready?” According to participants, “because children and the sexes mature at different ages, placing them in a gradation scenario was unnatural.” A concerned mother recounted that her daughter “was not ready to go to school all day at age five.” This mother felt that “she just wasn’t ready to be away from home and the family.” Some parents surveyed declared classrooms to be an artificial setting which segregated children by age from the real world. “It is abnormal to be confined to a classroom in cramped desks for long periods of time,” stated one respondent. Many homeschoolers surveyed replied that children should not be “cooped up in the unnatural setting of a classroom with a large group of people all the same age.” This interrupted the natural rhythm to explore, play, and daydream. Participants believed that children performed much better academically and socially in multi-age settings. According to a respondent, parents have been conditioned to think “children should be taken from the home at an early age, sent to school, given text books, and they soon will be able to read.” Parents surveyed did not believe this to be the case. An overwhelming number of homeschoolers surveyed agreed that it was important for children to “work at their own pace, moving on to another stage of learning only when the child was ready” and not be dictated by age. This readiness was determined by the parent or child depending upon the method of homeschooling experienced, with the focus on the individual child. Respondents reasoned that people matured at different ages, learned at different ages, and socially

adapted at different ages; therefore, children should not be placed in a room with other children to learn just because they are the same age. "It makes no sense," declared participants. A mother of three summed up the feelings of several homeschoolers on grouping by age: "If one child learns to read at 3 years of age and another at 10, that's OK with me. I see nothing magical about the age of 6 for learning to read."

Schooling Process. Homeschooling parents surveyed were quite vocal on the matter of the classroom process and structure. Many stated that schooling at home required one to three hours as compared to six hours in traditional schools. They attributed this fact to several reasons, most of which supported their conviction to homeschool. Valuable time is devoted to establishing "order in the classroom, collecting lunch money, listening to announcements, getting in line for lunch, recess, changing classes, going to the bathroom, listening to instructions, attending pep rallies/assemblies, study halls, and lunch periods." They explained this time "wasted" was an attempt to have students "conform to a factory model of social engineering, which has proven to be a failed experiment." Respondents questioned why there was a need to continue "industrial" methods of education when we are in an age of technology. A college graduate, mother of four responded:

I do not believe the current factory model of education to be the best way for children to become educated. I do not believe institutions to be nurturing places, and for young people to spend the better part of their lives cooped up in one seems ludicrous.

Discipline. According to a number of respondents, discipline problems in both public and private school systems encouraged them to seek an alternative method of education for their children. Surveyed parents claimed that a great amount of time in the classroom was devoted to disciplining students, subtracting valuable learning and instruction time from the day. "The public schools are struggling with even teaching the basics because of the lack of discipline and order," reported a metropolitan mother. Poor supervision, inadequate discipline techniques, and lack of parental involvement were issues

of concern for parent-educators as well as homeschoolers. Respondents felt that it was the responsibility of the parents to discipline and saw the discipline problem in the classroom as a lack of parental control, not a deficit in teachers. The home is a nurturing, relaxed atmosphere free from the tensions of the classroom. Some parents surveyed saw the classroom with its discipline problems and wasted time as an “unwholesome environment” which was “coercive and disrespectful towards students.” These homeschoolers saw their children as being the victim of a situation. The children were made to suffer by having valuable teaching/learning time used to discipline other students. Respondents viewed this as penalization of their children. Some parents surveyed expressed that they did not desire their children to be in such a negative environment because “negative behavior breeds negative behavior.”

School Quality. Repeatedly, parents surveyed focused on the poor academic and environmental quality of the public and private schools, indicating these as reasons to homeschool. Respondents were explicit in their concerns about the quality of education: “When I began to homeschool, it was for the purpose of removing our children from the terrible conditions in the school district—overcrowding, inadequate funding, poor school facilities.”

We decided to homeschool for a variety of reasons. Number one is because the school systems are rapidly going downhill. The classrooms are overcrowded, there isn't enough funding, and no matter how hard the teachers try, kids are slipping through the cracks.

“We live in a county (in a southern state) that ranks 90th of 91 in indicators of public school quality (classroom teacher, student ratio, expenditures per student). It has decaying physical facilities...” “Public schools were not an option to us due to their poor educational achievement record.” Homeschoolers surveyed repeated numerous times that the public and private schools were not doing their job of educating children. “If they were, there would be no need to homeschool,” stated a parent. Given the conditions of the present

classroom situation, homeschoolers believed that they could do a better job of educating their children. Lower national test scores, increased drop-out rates, increased illiteracy, and the necessity to add basic math and writing courses for college students were reasons given by respondents to homeschool.

Competition. Several responses to the survey concerning the classroom focused on “unhealthy competition in the classroom.” By expecting students to “perform well on tests with little incentive to learn, the student’s natural motivation is destroyed and replaced with artificial motivation.” This promotes a “learn-for-the-test, regurgitate-the-information, forget-what-you-learned” mentality. According to one mother surveyed, “competition does not necessarily motivate children to learn.” Parents responding to the survey stated that too much emphasis was placed on competition among students and not enough on “learning for learning sake.” Learning for grades or stickers should not be the focal point of a learning environment. In this type of competitive arena, someone loses. Respondents emphasized that if children are always given a sticker for their efforts, it diminishes the significance of “a job well done and decreases internal motivation.”

Safety Issues. Drugs, violence, and gangs were cited by parents surveyed as valid reasons to homeschool. These criminal conditions were found to exist in all types of school environments. Respondents claimed that public, private, city, and suburban institutions were faced with the same challenging situations. According to documentation, drugs and violence are on the rise. Homeschoolers surveyed were convinced that their children were in “physical danger due to the lack of proper supervision and discipline.” Parents were concerned for their children’s safety. One parent declared, “I homeschool to protect my children from the violence in our public school system.” Parents provided examples of school bombings, shootings and knifings, locker searches for drugs and weapons, as well as police patrolling the hallways within their school systems. Another disclosed: “We want to shelter our children from drugs and violence.” Parents responding to the survey confided that they were “frightened for their child’s safety and well-being because shootings and

physical attacks on the teachers as well as the students are on the rise.” It was not the intention of homeschooling parents surveyed to isolate their children, but to protect them, physically, mentally, and emotionally until they were sufficiently mature enough to make rational, responsible choices. A responding parent explained that this issue should be of “concern for all parents not just those who homeschool.”

Peer Interaction. Although parents surveyed agreed that not all peer interaction was negative, there were not enough positive influences to consider institutional schooling. It is to be noted that several respondents stated their children had friends from the institutional schools who were not negative influences on their lives, but this was not a significant enough reason to permit their child to remain in school. Friendships could be maintained outside of school in more neutral, nonevasive surroundings. Parents surveyed agreed that negative peer interaction was not the sole criteria for electing to homeschool; however, this appeared as a contributing factor in a great number of responses.

In most instances, respondents viewed peer interaction as having a possible negative influence on their children. They cited such things as: “harassment, ridicule, belittling, demeaning attitudes, physical abuse, and peer pressure.” This type of interaction was viewed by the respondents as having a negative affect on their child’s self-image while attacking their child’s self-worth. Parents responding stated that institutional schools were not a suitable “place to learn appropriate behavior.” These parents did not want their children to be dependent upon peer approval which they believed would override parental affirmation. Since the greater portion of a day was spent with peers in school, homeschooling parents surveyed saw “even the best of kids being hurt by other kids,” and they wanted to protect their children from those cruelties. Respondents stated that in many instances, young children and teens did not have the skills required to combat peer attacks. A mother of five summarized the feelings of several homeschoolers when she said: “Peer pressure is sometimes the biggest risk children are subject to—you can’t escape it in a school system, and children just aren’t strong enough to stand up under all that pressure.”



## Curricula

Public and private school curricula influenced a number of parents in their decision to school at home. The parents surveyed believed that the current curricula offered in the school systems were not always in the “best interest of their children and did not always meet with their expectations of schooling.” The following quote encompassed several parents' viewpoint on school curricula:

The reason we have decided to homeschool is because we are very dissatisfied with the curricula in the...school district and although it is considered one of the top school districts in the state, we feel that too much time is spent in the school day with politically correct agendas and psychosocial activities... We believe that this has no place in the curriculum, and we also feel that the school administration has lost a sense of academic focus in catering to social agendas.

Other parents surveyed did not see the value of a curricula focusing on “pop culture, cartoons, family life issues, sex, and violence.” Participants explained that sex education and family value issues should be the teaching “responsibility of the parents and not that of the schools.” They countered, if sex education were a legitimate curriculum, “why are the (United States) single parent birth rates one of the highest in the world?” Still others responded that generally the curricula in schools was geared to the “middle of the road student, often ‘dumbing students down’ while supporting mediocrity and apathy in the classroom.”

A few respondents supported a more “classical education” concentrating on the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. By providing a firm foundation in the basics, homeschoolers believed a student was better prepared for further academics. “Having technologically advanced equipment and expensively outfitted labs were irrelevant to a student unable to read or do basic math,” a parent explained. “Poor and outdated text books, watered down, or negative curricula,” further encouraged parents to homeschool.

Drills and worksheets were viewed as “busy work, time fillers, crowd control methods, or even punishment.” Other respondents favored a more holistic approach to curricula. By focusing on one topic, the child was able to incorporate all subject areas into one study while working at his/her own pace, not as dictated by lesson plans.

Another reason we homeschool is for the integration of subjects...

We don't have math time or reading time or art time on a daily basis.

Over the weeks and months things balance out. Art becomes reading and math as we read about Escher. Reading is history and geography and math as we read about the Oregon Trail.

Some homeschooling families in this study, were outraged by outcome-based education, whole language, and educational experimentation. They stated they did not “want their children being used as guinea pigs in the name of education.” These parents further recounted that whole language used within their school systems was “found to be a disaster... Middle school children's writing and spelling skills are so poor—it's terrible.”

A few respondents questioned the value of a standardized curricula as proposed by some states. It perplexed some of these participants as to “why a number of states required a proficiency test of standardized curricula in order to be awarded a diploma, yet the same schools provided courses that taught the child how to pass the proficiency test!”

### Learner-led Education

According to participants, in an attempt to serve the common good, schools have neglected the needs of the individual child. Parents surveyed believed child-centered education addressed the diversity of learning styles of their children. Respondents further declared the importance of play as being developmentally and educationally significant to children in the learning process. An additional theme involved categorizing children by labeling them.

Child-Centered Education. According to parents surveyed, the child and their individual learning style should dictate the educational setting. An unschooling mother recounts:

The main reason we have chosen to homeschool is that we believe children need the freedom to learn in their own way and time. We don't believe that being told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it is the best way for anyone to learn. I know without hesitation that it works, because I've been through it myself.

The method of educating was determined by the parent or child depending upon the method of homeschooling experienced, with the focus remaining on the individual child.

Respondents acknowledged that children learn differently, and in homeschooling parents are able to address each child's learning style. In most situations, child-led education occurred in the unschooled home which stressed self-direction and independent learning. According to the unschoolers' responses, "children learn better by teaching themselves." "It encouraged curiosity and a love of learning." In the homeschooling environment, where the parent determined the readiness of the child to move on, the child still remained the center of the learning experience. Homeschoolers surveyed declared that the child always remained the focal point of the teaching/learning experience by way of their individualized learning agenda.

Respondents specified that through the child-centered experience of a "hands-on learning approach to education, children have the freedom to know the world first-hand rather than from the confines of school walls or just from books." Children learn best when they are interested in something, are able to pursue their interests, and can utilize a variety of resources. In this study, homeschoolers subscribed to the idea that hands-on learning was learning about real life by "doing it." Reading about baking a cake or building a house is only one facet of education; the doing it completes the learning experience. One mother writes: "We believe in hands-on learning. We take lots of field trips which include

watching repairmen fix things...” This type of learner has an inner desire to learn and know things, not to be “spoon fed facts to memorize and then forget.” Hands-on learners view “being a traditional folk guitarist, earning a brown belt, producing hand crafts, raising and working with animals, employment and reading voraciously” as educational/learning experiences.

Importance of Play. The importance of play in a child’s educational and social development was cited by many homeschoolers surveyed. Children’s curiosity often leads to creative play. Respondents consider games and play to be real learning. Children need “freedom to daydream, play, use their imaginations, pretend, and be children.” “Kids have to have time to be kids,” recalled one parent. It was important for the respondents to have their children enjoy their childhood and not be forced to grow up too quickly. By filling the days of a child with numerous organized activities outside of the home, it leaves little time for the child to be creative and to develop critical thinking skills. Parents responded that they viewed the importance of play as a “natural progression in learning—just as a child crawls before walking.”

Categorization of children. A group of parents participating in the survey believed categorizing children by assigning labels to them created a negative learning environment for the child. In the relaxed homeschooling atmosphere, children did not demonstrate characteristics associated with labels such as of learning disabled, hyperactive, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disfunction, or special needs. According to the respondents, children who were labeled in the institutional setting, once home educated, “diagnosed symptoms significantly diminished or disappeared.” A portion of these parents indicated medication used in behavioral modification of children with these labeled conditions were often decreased or discontinued. They further contended that once their child was categorized and “pigeon-holed, the label was never discontinued, even if the child displayed signs of improvement.” A few respondents explained that what may be “normal behavior for a particular child might be misinterpreted as a behavioral disorder.”

Parents repeatedly stated that “sitting still at a desk in a classroom is not normal behavior for a child.”

Although the “gifted” student did not have the negative connotation of the previously mentioned categorized student, some participants’ gifted children encountered challenges within the institutional setting. A responding mother spoke about her young son:

I cannot place my child in a classroom 20 hours a week to learn the alphabet when he is reading at the fourth-grade level and doing second-grade math. I cannot expect him to succeed socially in a group of 8-year-olds when he is still a little kid.

Frequently, according to the surveyed parents, schools were not academically meeting the needs of these students. Even in the schools offering gifted programs, the student was not always given the freedom to move at his/her own pace or interests. Many school districts did not offer gifted programs, and that was why responding parents and children turned to homeschooling. Complaints of boredom in the classroom were most often cited by the parents of the gifted children. In some schools, the gifted were “given additional work or drill sheets while the teacher worked with other students.” In the home setting, the gifted were challenged to move as quickly as they wanted or to spend as much time as they chose on an area of interest.

### Socialization

Homeschoolers in this study were least concerned about socialization. Parents in the study relayed that they “could hardly keep up with their children’s social calendars,” while emphasizing family togetherness continued to be a central theme in their lives. Homeschoolers surveyed agreed that it was important for children to be exposed to people of all ages and backgrounds in the “real” world, not solely with peers in a classroom. Through cross-socialization, children experienced interaction with diverse age groups in a variety of settings. The homeschoolers surveyed explained that children learned best by being in the world. “Grouping by age and doing the same things is not natural nor does it

prepare children for society,” stated a participant. Interaction between homeschooled children with a variety of people in diverse settings created young people who were able to communicate and socialize effectively with all age groups. Participants pointed out that “communities and places of employment are populated with varied age groups, and it is important to be able to relate to each of them.” Homeschooled children’s opportunities for socialization included the typical scouts, baseball, 4-H, dance and music lessons, church and community groups. Respondents reinforced the fact that their children are not “isolated from the world” but are comfortable in a variety of cross-socialization settings. Participants firmly stated that “homeschooled children’s socialization was a misunderstood issue by those outside of the homeschooling community.”

In conclusion, homeschoolers surveyed believed they best met the individual academic, social, and moral needs of their children through their choice of homeschooling. The survey findings represented numerous factors that influenced parents’ decisions to homeschool. Respondents openly stated they homeschooled for a variety of reasons including, issues related to the family, environmental issues pertaining to the institutional school, and curricula. Family togetherness was the most prominent rationale for homeschooling. Parents surveyed believed that all of the reasons given to remove a child from the institutional school could be counteracted within the family setting. They strongly declared that they were exercising their right to educate their child. Parents surveyed further stated their decision to school at home may have been influenced by the desire to accommodate their child’s learning style by way of encouraging the learner to dictate the educational path. Additionally, respondents desired to provide their children with a cross-socialization experience in the belief that it would create a diverse, well-adjusted individual, who would be better prepared to function successfully in the adult world. All surveyed parents agreed meeting this criteria would be “a difficult, if not impossible task to accomplish in the institutional setting.” One of the strongest messages the parents surveyed gave was that they “knew their child the best and knew what was best for their child.”

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the rationale of homeschooling as an alternative form of education. This study revealed some unexpected findings about why parents homeschool and about the parents themselves. For example, former data suggested that parents homeschooled for religious or “pedagogical” reasons. The results from this study indicated the primary reason to homeschool, as supplied by both traditional homeschoolers and unschoolers, was for family-related reasons. They wanted to experience “family togetherness.” Although participants explained homeschooling was a way of life for them, they emphasized they were not “commune, back woods people” but average parents doing what they believed was best for their children. They further believed homeschooling was not wrong, but merely an alternative method of education.

Demographic findings of this study closely resembled those previously documented by Knowles (1988), Mayberry (1991), and Ray (1992). Demographics that have fluctuated are indicative of contemporary economic and cultural deviations. The findings revealed smaller families with larger incomes, and an increase in non-religious affiliation. Formerly, a major percentage of the homeschoolers were fundamentalists. Although a portion of participants in the survey homeschool for religious reasons, a number of respondents were eager to point out that homeschoolers were not religious extremists or fanatics, but merely parents who sought an alternative form of education for their children.

Acquiring demographic information from the questionnaire in this qualitative study provided up-to-date information for educators and researchers as to the variety and diversity of homeschooling parents. It also served to characterize some of the similarities and differences between homeschoolers and mainstream Americana. Overall, the demographic findings of homeschoolers who participated in the survey appeared to resemble those of typical American families.

This research may be beneficial to present homeschoolers by way of validating and supporting their decision to homeschool. Since many of the issues revealed in the survey results are consequential to most parents and educators, findings in this study may be useful to educators outside of the homeschooling community. Student-teacher ratio, readiness, discipline in the classroom, and safety of the students are areas deserving future examination by those committed to children and/or their education. What works in homeschooling might be transferable to the conventional classroom. By addressing diversity of students and focusing education on a child-centered curricula, innovative policy makers and administrators may be encouraged to consider alternative approaches to education. Creative computer utilization, self-directed study programs, independent study, and research applications were techniques employed by homeschoolers and worthy of exploration by those in the field of education. Since homeschooled students are growing in number, meeting with success in universities and on the job, and are generally scoring above average on national, standardized tests, future analysis of this form of alternative education may be beneficial to traditional schoolers. Homeschoolers believed that their children's achievements were due to parental involvement, judicious use of time, and dedication to their children and their child's education. Parental involvement was a key rationale for homeschooling. Parents believed their involvement with their child's education resulted in improved achievement, motivation, and self-esteem.

One of the values of this study was the technology used to collect a segment of the survey data. Use of the Internet and e-mail capabilities afforded the possibility of world-wide participation in the study. A minimal amount of time and effort were involved in the distribution of the survey to participants. There were no geographic, racial, ethnic, or educational boundaries. Anyone requesting a survey via e-mail was considered a potential participant. Response to survey requests was virtually instantaneous, and if needed clarification of data information could be accomplished with a minimum amount of time. Furthermore, with unlimited on-line capabilities, the cost was negligent as compared to



mailed surveys. The convenience of working within the home was limitless. Not bound by environmental constraints, data gathering was accomplished at any hour on any given day.

This method of research could prove beneficial to both qualitative and quantitative researchers. Use of on-line capabilities enables qualitative researchers to target participant audiences by directing inquiries to specific Internet users world wide. Quantitative researchers have the availability of an endless number of global participants with a minimum of effort. Conservation of time proved to be the major contribution with this method of data gathering. However, one limitation to be noted with application of computer technology for research and data gathering was the user constituency. The population is frequently delineated by economic and financial boundaries thereby, conceivably contributing somewhat skewed and/or biased findings. Compensation for this limitation was accomplished in this study by utilization of additional mediums for survey distribution. It is to be noted that homeschoolers frequently viewed computer technology as one of the primary tools utilized in educating their child.

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APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

## Letter to Respondents

Youngstown State University  
Youngstown, OH 44555

Dear Homeschooler:

In an effort to understand the reasons parents choose to homeschool their children, I am gathering information from parents who are currently homeschooling or have homeschooled in the past. This study is in no way associated with any business or commercial organization. This research has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Research Committee at Youngstown State University. The questionnaire that follows requests information regarding reasons for homeschooling. It will take about 10 to 15 minutes of your time to complete.

Your response to this survey is very important to me, and I am grateful that you are taking the time to answer it. Please return the completed questionnaire as soon as possible. Responses will be separated from your envelope upon receipt, further insuring confidentiality of your responses to the questions. Be assured that there are no risks to you, and no one will be able to identify you when the results are recorded.

Taking part in this research project is completely voluntary. If you begin a questionnaire, you may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you would like more information on the purpose of this study or would like a copy of the final report, please feel free to contact me through my research advisor, Dr. Louise Pavia, at the Department of Human Ecology, Youngstown State University, (330) 742-3344. When calling the Department, please leave your name, how you can be reached, and state that your call relates to the homeschooling study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joanne Brown  
Secondary Education Graduate Student  
Youngstown State University

## Appendix B

## Homeschooling Rationale

1. Marital Status: You are: Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_  
Married: \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced: \_\_\_\_\_ Single: \_\_\_\_\_ Separated: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age:  
Under 25 years: \_\_\_\_\_ 26-30: \_\_\_\_\_ 31-35: \_\_\_\_\_ 36-40: \_\_\_\_\_  
41-45: \_\_\_\_\_ 46 & over: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spouse: Specify: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Race:  
Caucasian: \_\_\_\_\_ Afro-American: \_\_\_\_\_ Asian: \_\_\_\_\_  
Hispanic: \_\_\_\_\_ Native American: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spouse: Specify: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Last grade completed:  
You: Grade 8: \_\_\_\_\_ High school: \_\_\_\_\_ College: \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate school: \_\_\_\_\_  
Post-graduate: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: Specify: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Total income:  
Under \$10,000: \_\_\_\_\_ 10,000-19,999: \_\_\_\_\_ 20,000-34,999: \_\_\_\_\_  
35,000-44,999: \_\_\_\_\_ 45,000-54,999: \_\_\_\_\_ 55,000-64,999: \_\_\_\_\_  
65,000-74,999: \_\_\_\_\_ 75,000 & above: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Employment:  
Employed: You: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_ Unemployed: You: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_  
If employed: Full Time: You: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_ Part Time: You: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_  
If employed: Outside home: You: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_ In home: You: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Number of children in household:  
1: \_\_\_\_\_ 2: \_\_\_\_\_ 3: \_\_\_\_\_ 4: \_\_\_\_\_ 5: \_\_\_\_\_ 6: \_\_\_\_\_ more than 6: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Number of children in household being homeschooled:  
1: \_\_\_\_\_ 2: \_\_\_\_\_ 3: \_\_\_\_\_ 4: \_\_\_\_\_ 5: \_\_\_\_\_ 6: \_\_\_\_\_ more than 6: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Ages of children in household being homeschooled:  
Under 5 years: \_\_\_\_\_ 6-8: \_\_\_\_\_ 9-11: \_\_\_\_\_ 12-14: \_\_\_\_\_ 15-17: \_\_\_\_\_ Over 18: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Please state religious preference:  
Mother: \_\_\_\_\_ Father: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Why do you homeschool? Please be as specific as possible. Use the other side of this paper to respond.
12. What would you like to tell the general public about homeschooling? Please be as specific as possible. Use the other side of this paper to answer.
13. Who is the primary educator/teacher of the homeschooled child(ren)?  
Specify: \_\_\_\_\_

## FIGURE CAPTIONS

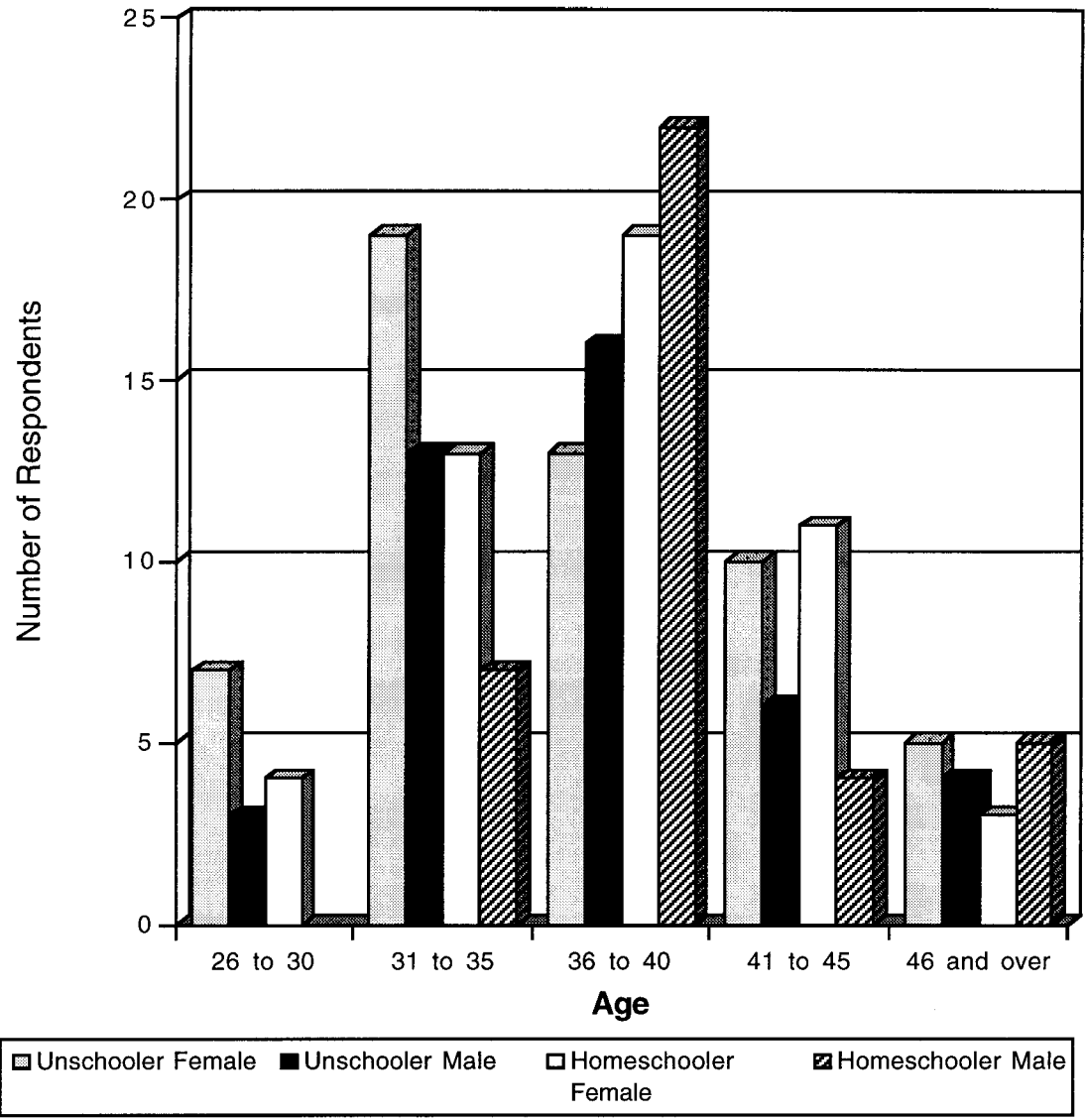
Figure 1. Ages of homeschooler and unschooler respondents and spouses participating in this study.

Figure 2. Education: last grade completed by respondents and spouses participating in this study.

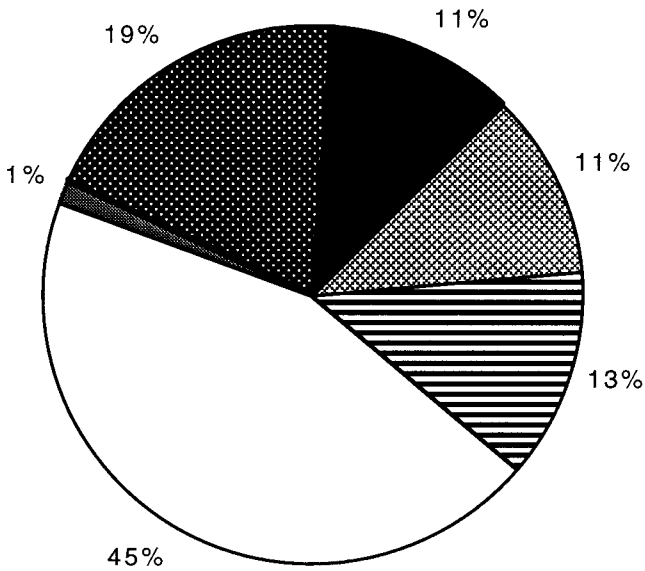
Figure 3. Total combined annual income reported by participating respondents in this study.

Figure 4. Religious preference of homeschooler and unschooler respondents and spouses participating in this study.

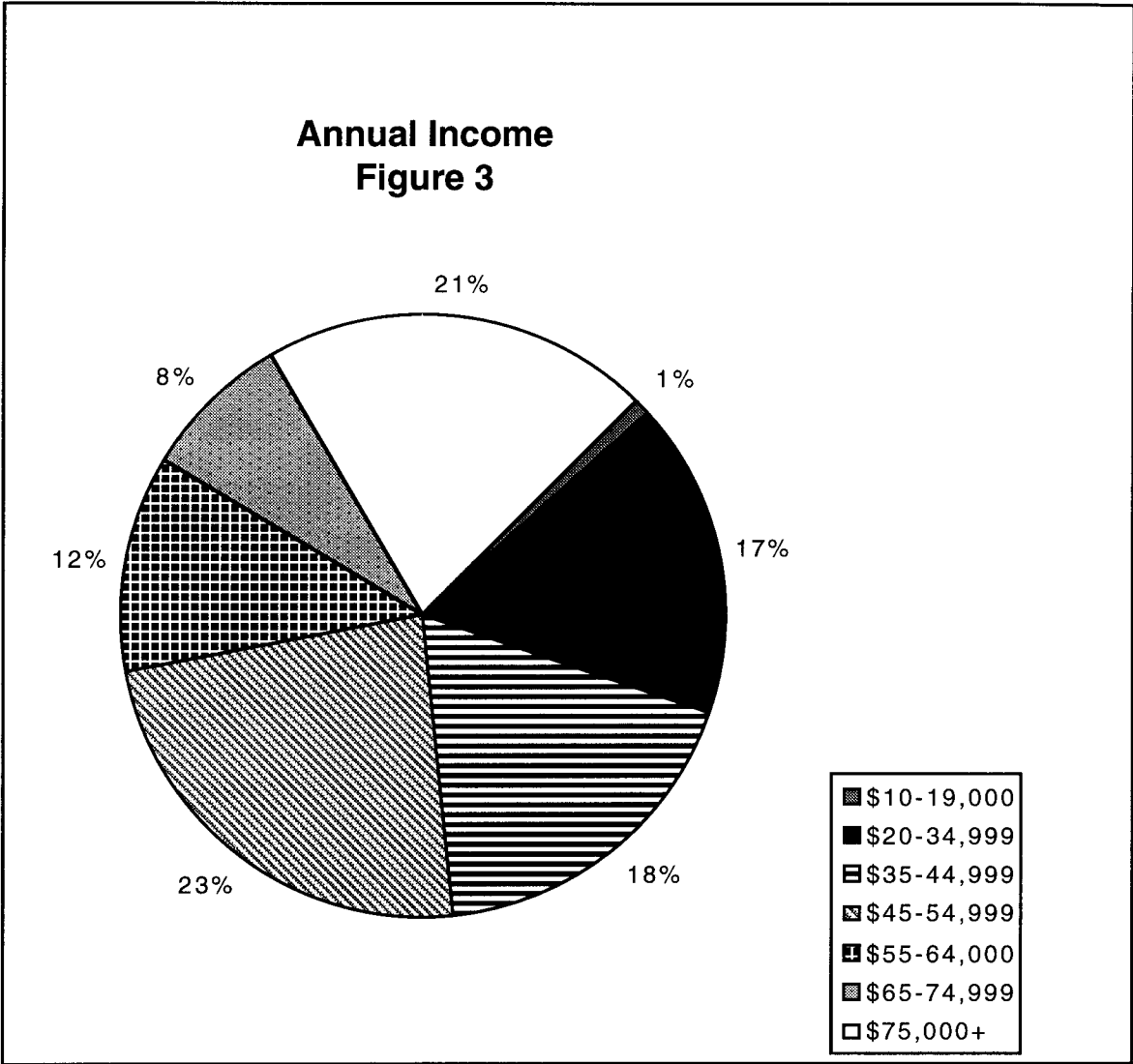
**Age of Respondents and Spouses**  
**Figure 1**



**Education: Last Grade Completed**  
**Figure 2**



High School	Some College	College Graduate
Some Graduate School	Graduate Degree	Post Graduate Degree



**Religious Preference  
Figure 4**

