

## **Qualitative Perspectives of Homeschool Parents Regarding Perceived Educational Success**

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*A qualitative study of 15 homeschooling parents reported children's educational success due to tailoring education to the specific needs of their children. Second, the parents indicated that significant parent-child bonding was an important outcome of the overall homeschool experience. Third, they were both keenly aware of homeschool-kid-stereotypes for lacking apt socialization—and the parents reportedly took deliberate steps in order to help foster this aspect of the children's lives. We interpret the findings in light of active role construction for involvement and ecological systems theory, finding the parents' high involvement in their children's education to contribute to their academic success.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The population of homeschooled students in the U.S. has grown significantly, from 13,000 students in the 1970s, to 2.3 million in 2016 (Ray, 2018), and homeschoolers now comprise approximately 4% of the school-aged population (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Most published homeschooling research pertains to parents' identified reasons for selecting this form of education (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Ray, 2015; Schafer & Khan, 2017), academic comparisons of homeschooled versus public-schooled students (Ray, 2000; Wilkens, Wade, Sonnert, & Sadler, 2015), and various legal implications of homeschooling

(Reich, 2002; Waddell, 2010). To date, relatively little published research has focused on how parents self-report their respective homeschooling experiences.

Both home and private education trace their histories to earliest days of American history. Because education was considered to be a private matter in the U.S., it was not mentioned in the United States founding constitution (Wilhem& Firmin, 2009). Massachusetts was the first state to establish a compulsory attendance law in 1850, with the Mississippi being the final state to enact such a law in 1917. Throughout this time period, some limited homeschooling continued in various pockets of America, but not in any large-scale or organized fashion. In the 1960s, homeschooling gained some renewed attention and interest by parents who reportedly desired to have greater control over their children's educational experience, desired to help protect their children from some of the extreme cultural experiences of the day, and who felt that it was their civic responsibility to educate their children (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007; Jolly, Matthews, Nester, 2012).

In more recent decades, homeschooling also has developed a foothold among a subset of families who report religious reasons for adopting this form of education. Some report a perceived secular encroachment on their children, with homeschooling being one means of helping to instill desired family values in their children's lives (Kunzman, 2010). Also in recent decades, some parents have identified motivations such as public school bullying and/or safety concerns (Hannah, 2012), educating gifted students (Olmstead, 2015), servicing specific learning disabilities and/or other special education needs (Smith, Burdette, Cheatham, Gregory, & Harvey, 2016), and generic dissatisfaction with the local public school (Neuman & Guterman, 2017). By 1993, all states made legal provisions for parents who desired to homeschool their respective children, irrespective of rationale, so long as acceptable measures are instituted by parents (Bhatt, 2014).

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, homeschool families were almost exclusively White, Non-Hispanic; now, however, 32% report as being Black, Asian, and other ethnicities (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). For African Americans, the rate of parents homeschooling their children has nearly doubled from 1999 to 2012 (Ray, 2015). Most homeschool parents have attended or graduated from college—with around half having earned a bachelor's degree or higher (CRHE, 2017). Other data from the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) shows that 49% of homeschool families have three or more children, compared to 40% of non-homeschool families having three or more children. Homeschool families are more likely to be led by two-parent household, in which one is in the labor force, compared to other families (43% vs 22%). Thirty-five percent of homeschool families are led by dual-earner couples, compared to 44% of non-homeschool families (CRHE, 2017).

A range of structure exists within homeschooling families; some purchase complete curriculum packages and others use a lesser amount of structure, which is sometimes called "*lifestyle of learning*" or "*unschooling*" (Ray, 2004). Other protocols that parents use for homeschooling include the trivium classical education, quadrivium classical education, Charlotte Mason, school-at-home, Thomas Jefferson education, multiple intelligences, constructivism, and Montessori (Davis, 2011).

Two predominate theories relate to parent's level of involvement in their children's education: Active Role Construction for Involvement and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. According to active role construction, parents have various levels of involvement in their children's education that is determined by how much they feel responsible for their children's education and their sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school. How much parents feel that they are responsible for their respective children's education is influenced by parents' beliefs pertaining to child development, effectively parenting practices, and what parents should do at home in order to help their children succeed in school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Self-efficacy is a person's belief that his/her abilities will produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Parent self-efficacy is positively correlated with parental involvement and monitoring, which predicts students' academic success and school behavior (Shumow & Lomax, 2002).

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) advocated that school and family are the two innermost influences on a child's life. Within the Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (whereby the environment is viewed as a set of nested influences), the way these two influences interact affects the way that they influence the

child (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Further research suggests that parental involvement in education in any form (e.g., helping with homework, attending school events, talking with the teachers about homework, and the like) is positively correlated with student achievement (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Hill & Craft, 2003). In Bronfenbrenner's model, school engagement is related to school success and continuance (Holt et al., 2008), and certain parenting practices promote school engagement such as family routines, parenting practices, and family connectedness.

The purpose of the present study was to better understand the self-reported experiences of parents as they homeschool their children. Since relatively little research has previously been published regarding such parental experiences, we adopted a qualitative research design. Willis (2007) notes that such methodology often is useful when exploring constructs where relatively little previous research has been published. Greater freedom is afforded in probing various facets of the dynamic being investigated so that researchers can best obtain the perspectives of the research participants being studied. Additionally, the qualitative method allows for obtaining thick-descriptions (Kvale, 2007) of home school parents' perspectives. As such, using this protocol allowed us to provide more detail and enriched portraits of these individuals than we otherwise could obtain through surveys or other quantitatively-oriented methods.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

We identified participants for this study through the method of snowball sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In total, we contacted 15 families via email or phone call in order to schedule interviews for the present study. The parents reportedly had home schooled their children for an average of 19.7 years and mean-averaged 3.4 children per family household. All of the participating parents were Caucasian. All the parents graduated from high school, 15% of the participants were college graduates, and 54% of the parents possessed graduate degrees. The participants' ages ranged from 46 to 63 ( $M=57.3$ ), with 7 being men and 8 being women.

We achieved saturation (Bowen, 2008) from our sample of homeschooling parents, meaning that adding new individuals to the sample no longer resulted in new codes being applied to the data, indicating no new themes likely were to emerge from the study. In this perspective, we believe that sufficient evidence existed to conclude that our sample size was ample for the study's intended purpose and design. This conclusion is compatible with other expert qualitative researchers such as Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) and Neuman (2006) regarding the nature of sample saturation.

### **Procedure**

Our present study applies a phenomenological research perspective, since we intended to understand our participants' personal experiences regarding how they came to frame and understand the homeschooling process. The objective of the study was to relate the perspectives of the respective parents who participated in the study (Creswell, 2012). In order to obtain the study's data, we conducted semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006), which allowed the parents to better control the conversation and divulge to us their personal constructs, feelings, and opinions regarding their respective homeschooling experiences. The semi-structured nature of the interviews yielded thorough and vibrant information (Gibbs, 2007). We conducted all of the interviews face-to-face and names used in the present article in order to enhance the article's readability are pseudonyms.

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis and coding. The procedure we employed was open coding, which involved an inductive method (Maxwell, 2005); this means that, when we began coding, we did not have pre-set constructs but, rather, assessed the transcripts for reoccurring words, phrases, and ideas—organizing the similarities into constructs. After conducting additional interviews, we contrasted each subsequent transcript with the previous ones, following a constant-comparison protocol (Silverman, 2006). During the constant-comparison process, we eliminated some codes, which originally had been generated at the study's outset, because they were not descriptive of

most participants in the study (Bereska, 2003). In other occasions, we reorganized our codes into more broad categories due to overlap, which helped to simplify and better manage the assessment process. Our team often utilized asking key questions, conducting organizational review, visually displaying the findings, and concept mapping, in accordance with Gay, Mills, and Airasian's suggested (2009) methodology. The findings that we report in the present article are descriptive of most participants in the study.

Throughout each of the study's analytic steps, we were diligent in order to help ensure that the process maintained expected qualitative research high standards with respect to qualitative research methodology (Cope, 2004; Erasmus & De Wet, 2005). With that goal in mind, we architected the research study in order to strengthen its internal validity and to provide validity checks in the following ways: strategic meetings, data auditing, member checking, using low inference descriptors, and consulting an independent researcher. First, during the research team's periodic meetings, we discussed design, potential codes, analysis, and potential themes. While sole researchers obviously also produce quality research, we believe that collaboration involving discussions, examinations of potential biases, and considering alternative explanations has the potential for generating more reliable results than research generated by only one viewpoint (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

Second, we implemented a data audit (Rodgers, 2008) in order to enhance the internal validity of the study. From a qualitative research perspective, this procedure grounds the findings in the transcript data and, as such, it helps to ensure that both breadth and depth of transcript data exists to support what researchers report as the study's results. Data audits have the potential to benefit qualitative research projects by reducing the possibility of fraud, clearly demonstrating how the researchers' findings represent the viewpoints of the participants, and by assisting future researchers to further the research on the topic.

Third, we implemented member checking (Mero-Jaffe, 2011) in order to further strengthen the internal validity of the study. This process entailed emailing our study's findings to the participants, asking them to provide their respective reactions. Member checking is a positive contribution to reporting results adequately and to aptly demonstrate what the participants communicated during their respective interviews. The feedback received from the parents unanimously supported the findings that we report in the present article.

Fourth, we used low inference descriptors (Chenail, 2012) as yet another means of strengthening the study's internal validity. When writing a qualitative article, using low inference descriptors involves inserting periodic accounts of the participants in their own respective words, instead of only rephrasing their thoughts and opinions. Including this element helps readers to better grasp what participants related during their respective interviews, without changing quality or meaning. In the present article, we periodically cite quotations given by various parents in order to better demonstrate the connections between the words used by the participants and the results we report.

Finally, we also enriched the study's internal validity by obtaining the expertise of an independent researcher (Flick, 2006). This qualitative step involves eliciting the services of a researcher who did not participate in data collection or initially analyze various transcripts. The outside expert assessed the study's design, procedure, and quality-of-data-analysis, including tracing the results back to the data used in order to adequately support the reported findings. We found the independent researcher's assessment to be helpful and it was reassuring that the study applied expected rigor for a solid qualitative research study journal article.

## **RESULTS**

### **The Secret to their Perceived Success**

Each of the 15 families who we interviewed perceived their homeschooling experience to overall have been a "success." The parents noted a variety of differing successful benchmarks such as strong ACT/SAT scores, college admission to selective universities, various achievement awards, perceptions that their children generally avoided various consequences that other peer-high-schoolers experience due

to untoward peer-pressure, and the like. While this was a generic finding—with no real commonality regarding how “success” was defined by the parents, we were more interested to drill-down deeper and discover the parents’ understanding of *why* they felt homeschooling was successful for their respective children.

The common theme among most of the research participants was that they attributed “success” (diversely described) to tailoring-education. That is, the parents indicated that they were able to shape their children’s education to the specific needs of each child. As Martha summarized: “Success you would define as children who are academically capable, at the very least, who have opportunity to study in the environment that is universally supportive—and give them freedom to move at their own pace. So, from that perspective, I think it’s been very successful.” The participants related that, in public or private schools, education is a relatively stable entity into which all children must fit. As such, it is not readily practical to adapt the educational process to each child. Even systems such as Montessori or open classrooms must standardize various elements of the educational process in order to make it feasible for including more than a dozen children in a single classroom.

In contrast, however, the parents we interviewed in the present study indicated that they were able to mold each year’s, quarter’s, and week’s education plan so that it best fit what the parents perceived to be their own children’s needs. As parents, the research participants felt that they knew their “pupils” in a way—and to a depth—that no normal school teacher ever realistically could know. Possessing that individualized knowledge reportedly enabled them to assess their children’s academic strengths and weakness—then tailor the educational experience to help capitalize on those strengths and hopefully minimize as many weaknesses as possible. Carla illustrated this principle when she described how she was able to use different protocols with her two children—based on their respective abilities and skill sets:

I think it’s absolutely critical, looking back, and realizing every child is different. We have one of our children and we just couldn’t figure out how he learned stuff. It was like “Oh my goodness! He just learned it all!” If he was our only child, we’d be the most obnoxious homeschool parents in the world. With our second child we asked: “Is he ever going to learn this?” You know what I mean? So it allowed us to let the older go on faster and do more advanced classes, and the younger one just keep going over, keep going over, keep going over. The one son that was just a slow, slow developer, he ended up graduating from college cum laude, got his master’s degree, and ended up with a 3.9 or something—and now is getting started on his doctorate. And we wondered if he would even be able to go to college. He was that slow coming along, you know, developing. So, it allowed us to bring him along.

The research participants indicated that they approached the educational process with this construct (individual accommodation) explicitly in mind and described themselves as having been both thoughtful and intentional regarding it. From this standpoint, the parents did not view success as a phenomenon about which they happened to “luck out.” Rather, they described themselves as entering the homeschooling endeavor with a view toward understanding their respective children even better and, as this occurred, to continue fitting the education to the respective children’s needs. Jim related the sentiment in the following manner: “As parents, we feel we are people who understand the child the best, understand their needs, their learning styles, their abilities, and so forth—and to best be able to tailor-make an education to meet the needs of each specific child.” The parents in the present study reportedly never felt as though their educational protocol was ever “set” but, rather, that it was continually being adapted—as the personalities, preferences, styles, and abilities of their children matured and developed. Terry related the following account that exemplifies the sentiments of the study’s participants:

It allowed them to progress at their own rate so, for them, it depended on the child. Like I had one son, who was extremely gifted in math, so it gave me the freedom to go at a

faster pace for him, and then when he really needed to be even more challenged, he could take college classes in math. Then for other ones, maybe they had some little bit of social anxiety, so homeschooling allowed them to ease into social situations, ease into part-time in the classroom, part-time at home. So, it just depended on the child. I could personalize their education in whatever was best for them.

### **A Paramount Value of Family Bonding**

A second finding that was common among the parents in our present research study was the perceived paramount value that they placed on family connections. None of the parents spoke as if their familial closeness could only have occurred in the context of homeschooling. Obviously that can occur—and does occur—among families whose children are in public, private, charter, and all other types of educational settings. Nonetheless, the present study's research participants believe that the homeschooling-experience resulted in a bonding-experience with their respective children that was deeper, stronger, and more extensive than it humanly otherwise would have been.

Obviously, the children spent considerably more time with their parents, in a homeschool milieu, than do children who attend daily school classes. That factor alone likely results in some of the noted close connections, as was explicitly recognized by Mark: “You know, I think there's a closeness that comes in teaching your children at home, as opposed to sending them to a public or a private school. So, there's a lot more time spent, in this case, with my wife who provided the primary education, closeness, bonding, further developing the relationship with an additional eight hours of close proximity throughout the day.” At the same time, however, the parents described feeling as though the dynamic resulted from *more* than just the sheer number of clock-hours spent with their children. Rather, the phenomenon involved being with their children when they were problem-solving, learning new concepts about life, exploring ideas from literature, history, and creative writing, and being challenged to consider alternative hypotheses that drew a parent-child-connection together which otherwise would not exist. Most parents are able to explore these types of existential-experiences with their children—when their children come home from school, after having engaged in the learning process. As such, parents of school-children debrief with their respective children and help them process learning. In contrast, however, the parents in the present study believe that being present with their children *during the learning process*—and actively engaging with them at the time of discovery—helped them to connect with their children at deeper levels. They saw their children when learning was easy—and challenging—when they succeeded and when they did not always succeed at various academic tasks. Karen related her sentiments regarding this point as follows: “So more specific, classes are opportunities. It happened more on a, you know, ‘learning moment’ type thing.... When your child needs help or needs certain things, when the teacher is doing it, you may or may not even know about it. But as the mom or dad who's teaching, you see every one of those moments, good, bad, or ugly, or difficult, or whatever.” Clint related a similar sentiment in the following way:

Well, for one thing, we saw huge benefits in our family—in personal time in our relationship with our kids—it improved. Social pressures dropped way down. We saw that we had our children for the best hours of the days, instead of the worst hours of the day. And we could build into their lives and deal with, well, even sibling problems or relationship problems. You could help the child work through them because you were the one who was there.

A well-known adage states that familiarity breeds contempt. This general truism does not hold true, however, from the perspective of the parents in our study—relative to homeschooling their respective children. Quite the opposite is true, from their vantage points; having spent the extra time with their children helped the parents to better know and appreciate their children. The parents described feeling as though they could be there for their kids during key developmental periods and to help them think through complicated and sometimes challenging elements regarding life. The parents did not speak in “idealized” terms; they acknowledged much of the challenging daily grind that is involved with

education. In the overall picture, however, they believed that homeschooling afforded being present at various key, teachable moments when special bonding, connection, and affiliation occurred. Carl remarked:

The benefit is like I said just having time with your children is invaluable. I mean being able to pour into their lives and being the major influence in their lives is so important in our opinion. Our oldest son just had his first baby and he also is planning to homeschool them. Once you experience it as a child, being able to be with your family unit so much, I think it makes you want to do it. And so I think that's the biggest benefit, just the amount of time we've been able to spend with our children.

While the universal consensus among the parents in our study was that they bonded more deeply and meaningfully with their children than they humanly would have otherwise, some in the sample also noted benefits pertaining to their spousal-relationship and also the relationship among the respective siblings. The participants who mentioned these perspectives described themselves as being a “team” with their spouse and the husband/wife depended on one another and supported one another in the challenging homeschooling endeavor. Amy related her sentiments regarding this matter in the following way:

Well one of the things that helped is—I wasn't in it by myself. First of all, my husband was right there. He maybe didn't do a lot of the teaching, but sometimes he'd do some, and he'd pick up the slack in other areas, because he really felt like it was the thing that we needed to do for our family. So having a supportive husband—the two of us—mom and dad—being on the same page and in it together, that really helped. We were part of the support group or, still are, actually.

Expressing similar sentiments, Brian shared the following perspective:

I think it brought our family closer together, got us a lot more involved in their academics. When I was growing up, my parents kept an eye on us, but really it was the school that was going to educate us, so they didn't really worry about it. But, here, we had this figuring out how they should do at certain situations—like what are their personalities—so we had to get closer to them to figure out how to best educate them. So I think it brought us a lot closer as parents.

Likewise, various parents also reported that the siblings grew closer to one another than they likely would have been—if they had not been homeschooled. While none of the parents described this objective as an explicitly intended outcome of homeschooling, they did indicate feeling very pleased with the serendipitous result. Kris summed: “A positive impact would be that our kids have spent a lot of time together so, in many cases, their best friends are their siblings; we have five children in all.”

### **Deliberate Efforts toward Normal Socialization**

At some level, all identifiable groups possess stereotypes—and homeschooled children are no exception. For better or worse, one of the most common homeschool stereotypes involves homeschooled children being people who have few social contacts outside of their own families, they prefer adult conversations over those with peers, and they are generally socially awkward. The parents we interviewed in the present study indicated being keenly aware of these [and other] stereotypes. Aaron communicated the sentiment in the following way:

Homeschooling can really be a pejorative among other people. There could be a stigma about it that, “You're odd you don't know how to interact with people.” But it's such a

mosaic of different kinds of people. Homeschooling is a choice that has some social consequences, judged by some others—maybe thought more favorably by some others.

In this context, each of the parents—in various ways—indicated taking explicit steps toward helping their children to develop normal socialization skills. None of the parents overlooked the matter or otherwise failed to explicitly address the issue in some deliberate manner.

A common thread to the present finding is that the research participants indicated socialization to have been an “intentional” part of the homeschool educational objectives. Taylor, for example, noted:

We had to work hard to make social times for the kids. So that might have been, you could say, a stressor, but it was a different kind of stressing. It wasn't stressing like, “Oh I don't want the kids to be with those kids.” It was more we had to organize among other homeschooling families, in particular, to make that happen. So we looked for opportunities and everybody that was homeschooling tended to realize that this was an added challenge and we would make an effort to get the kids together with other kids more or less their age.

From the perspectives of the parents (which, obviously, is never totally objective), the homeschooled children were relatively normal in their social development. None of the parents described having significantly introverted children or kids who were socially maladaptive. As researchers, we did not have occasion to meet the children or otherwise form our own independent appraisals relating to the present finding; in expected qualitative research protocol, we here report the parents' self-reported perceptions.

The study's participants indicated that not all groups warmly welcomed homeschooled children into their social circles. Public school teachers were not always excited about homeschool participation, even though legally, of course, homeschooled children of tax-paying parents have the right to participate in all local public school activities. Shirley illustrated some of the sentiments: “I was surprised by how educators did not respect or appreciate homeschool parents. They would say, ‘Your kids aren't socialized.’” Similarly, due to alleged stereotyping by other children, the parents in our study related that sometimes other kids would not be very welcoming to the homeschool children. Ted, for example, noted:

There were tensions and they were so strange to me; why were these tensions, like “How much do you let homeschool kids be a part of what we're doing?” And then you have the thing: “Well, you're just a homeschool kid.” There was really a bad attitudes on the part of kids in the school when we had our kids jump in with music, or sports, or something like that.... It was just a weird dynamic.

Reportedly, in part due to these types of dynamics, the parents in our study often sought-out other homeschooled families in order to participate in social activities. Naomi shared the sentiments of most other parents when she indicated: “Well, we found that much of their social life did revolve around, for many years that we were homeschooling, the homeschooling activities with other families other homeschooling families—because we did want them involved in other activities and we wanted to make sure they had opportunity.”

Apart from formal, organized social activities, the study's participants also indicated that their children routinely “played” with other kids—in a normal human development manner. Jim, for instance, stated: “Well our neighborhood was so diverse: We had a child with Down Syndrome, one family was Spanish speaking only, we had African Americans across the street from us—and they all used our driveway to play basketball, you know, those kids flocked to our house. So we were very socialized.” In a similar vein, Charlotte also reported the following: “Wherever we lived in the neighbor that we lived in, they usually made friends very easily. And we would try to get to know families when we moved and to develop those relationships as well. So they played with the neighborhood children, just like other kids do.” Additionally, the parents indicated that their children routinely participated in a relatively wide cross-section of organized youth activities. Following is a composite list of social activities noted from the



study's transcripts: Local soccer teams, basketball teams, band, choir, debate, organized field trips, church, 4H, drama club, bowling team, dances, softball team, summer camps, orchestra, homeschool co-op, and working various part-time jobs.

In addition to each of the above-noted findings, the parents in our study also indicated believing that their children had an affinity to be around adults—which was different than many of their same-aged-peers (i.e., who typically prefer to be around people their own age). Obviously, the home schooled children spent more time around adults than did most other children who were their cohorts. MaryAnn stated the point in the following manner:

We did make an effort to make sure they interacted with their peers. We also did make an effort to make sure that they gradually entered a classroom setting before they graduated from high school. But they also had the opportunity to interact with adults a lot more just because of the situations we were in—and not so much with peers—they weren't with peers eight hours a day, five days a week.

As parents were aware of their children's affinity for adults, they did not view this dynamic necessarily as being a negative tendency. To the contrary, the parents recognized that this quality can be positive and help their children to adapt successfully in present and future environments. John communicated the sentiment when having made the following statement:

To some extent, you are trading off who the socialization is going to happen with. Spending more time with adults can develop, in my opinion—I'm not a psychologist—in my opinion can build confidence and has lots of role models to be aspiring to and base behavior to be imitating. So in some ways, I would expect my kids to be able to act a bit older. In other ways, maybe there is a common denominator effect, if you go down to the level of your younger siblings, instead of calling them up to your level of maturity.

## DISCUSSION

The theory of active role construction for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) evaluates the extent to which parents are involved in their children's education. According to the theory, the parents' level of involvement is determined by how responsible they feel for their children's education and how much they believe that their parenting abilities will produce desired outcomes/parental self-efficacy. Parents in our study described themselves as being highly involved in their respective children's education and they saw this dynamic as being an important [proverbial] secret-to-their-children's-academic-success. In this context, the parents described themselves as having felt that their homeschool experiences increased their parental self-efficacy. We believe it noteworthy that the parents reportedly did not always feel confident/did not always have high self-efficacy in their ability to homeschool or of the outcome of success in their children's academic performance. However, because the parents viewed their children as having performed well academically, even when their children developed at different rates and in different ways, they reportedly felt that homeschooling was an overall success. Our results show that parents started out with a high level of involvement in their children's education, not necessarily because they felt that they would be successful but, as they went forward with homeschooling and saw some "success," then they gained confidence and knew that they wanted to continue. Ultimately, they believed that the success of their children depended on their [i.e., the parent's] involvement, because they were able to tailor their children's education as a result.

Additionally, we believe that Ecological System's Theory, which shows the environment as a set of nested influences in which school and family are the two innermost influences (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), adds useful insight when interpreting the findings of the present study. Interpreting the findings from this perspective is meaningful since parenting practices such as family routines, parenting practices, and family connectedness promote school engagement (Bartle-Haring, Lotspeich-Younkin, & Day, 2012;

Holt et al., 2008). Family practices reported by the parents in our study included tailoring education, knowing children's academic successes and challenges, maintaining family connections, and being intentional about socialization. Evidence of school engagement included academic success and avoiding consequences of negative peer pressure.

The present study's results indicate that there is less of an interaction between home and school than in the general population, potentially because parents of homeschool families serve as both parents and educators for their children. This dynamic differentiates homeschool families from those who send their children to school. The parents we interviewed indicated that they desired to integrate their children into other layers of social environments, such as organized youth activities and part-time jobs. A significant difference between parents who homeschool and those who send their children to school is that homeschool parents see home as the center of their child's development during the school years rather than the school. When homeschool parents in our present study tried to interact with the school system, they reported feeling unwelcome and experienced tension. Therefore, interactions outside of the home tended to be more with other homeschooling families than with the school system. Therefore, although ecological systems theory separates the influences of home and school, homeschool parents serve as both types of influence, and their parenting practices produced what they considered success.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

When conducting good research, it is essential to recognize and report the limitations of a study (Price & Murnan, 2004). In the present study, our participants were Caucasians; nonetheless, the perspectives of all parents are very important and future research should consider giving dedicated attention to the views of homeschool parents from minority cultures.

Generalizability is a vital consideration for all qualitative research studies (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Consequently, future researchers should replicate the present study in different parts of the country, using samples with demographics that are different from the present sample, and conduct interviews such as the ones in the present study across time. As noted by Miller (2008), external validity in qualitative research is never achieved through a single study; rather generalizability is achieved through replicating a qualitative study across various domains just noted. Doing so allows researchers to see potential patterns, how findings fit into various contexts, and possible transferability of a single study's findings.

Since the qualitative paradigm's strength involves inductively exploring a construct with small sample sizes that allow for thick descriptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), quantitative research should subsequently be conducted with larger homeschool parent sample sizes. In particular, survey research will help add breadth to the present study's findings. While qualitative research better allows researchers to obtain in-depth understandings, quantitative research is necessary to follow in order to add scope to a larger-research perspective (Creswell, 2012). By publishing the present study, we provide quantitative researchers with important foundational research on which they can build a more comprehensive understanding of homeschool parents—and also meaningful data on which quantitative surveys meaningfully can be built.

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