



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

# Restoring Value:

## Homeschooling in the Context of the Devaluation of Reproductive Labor

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Master thesis, 15 hp

Gender, Justice & Society / Magister Thesis in Gender Studies 2KC021  
Spring 2022

**Abstract**

Homeschooling is becoming an increasingly popular education alternative in much of the developed world and the desire by parents to homeschool is slowly changing the perception of homeschooling and the laws that regulate and/or prohibit the practice. This paper examines the practice of homeschooling via a gendered lens and with clear recognition of the devaluation of reproductive labor within the modern, capitalist social context.

**Keywords:** Homeschool, Gender, Reproductive Labor, Paid Work.

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper examines the practice of homeschooling in the US and considers it from a gendered perspective in the context of the devaluation of reproductive labor. From the viewpoint that the practice of homeschooling is a profound rejection of modern, capitalist social norms which devalue reproductive labor, community and family and which focus instead only on activities and behaviors which aid in increasing either consumer consumption or worker productivity, the foundational argument of this paper is that homeschooling is an attempt to reclaim cultural space for the family and restore dignity to parenthood and especially motherhood.

While many homeschooling mothers would probably be reluctant to classify themselves as feminists, this thesis argues that the choice to homeschool is a profoundly feminist act in response to modern capitalist pressures to focus on money, consumption, and productivity. In short, deciding to stay home and to focus on the underpaid and undervalued tasks of caring for and educating children, is a deeply radical act which rejects social pressures to define oneself via financial status, earning power and expensive consumer items.

Beginning with the current state of the art regarding homeschooling practices, motivations and trends, this paper continues with a brief history of homeschooling, a discussion of homeschooling motivations and an exploration of the scant research into the gendered aspects of the homeschooling movement. After this introductory section, section 2 covers the choice and use of feminist reproductive theory, a discussion of its history and uses and includes an examination of the framing of this theory's use in the context of Nancy Fraser's "crisis of care". Section 3 focuses on research methods and design, including a detailed discussion regarding language choice in the development of an opinion survey targeted towards anglophone homeschooling parents meant to gauge their understanding of their role as homeschooling parents in relation to the larger society's capitalist pressures to perform waged labor and meet cultural productivity norms. The paper then closes with section 4's analysis of the collected survey data and closes with concluding thoughts in section 5.

## 1.1 State of the Art<sup>1</sup>

“Though the research on homeschooling is scant, parents’ reasons for choosing it are easily the most commonly studied topic, and over the years several studies—mostly those that allow homeschoolers to express themselves in their own words—have identified five main motivational categories.” (Lois 2012 p 46)

Literature examining why parents choose to homeschool predominantly focuses on the cultural, educational and structural factors that contribute to the decision. While the rationale behind the decision to homeschool does factor into the research question for this paper, the research has not been particularly focused on gender, gender dynamics or how those dynamics affect actual homeschooling practices. To narrow the number of possible background articles for this paper, the decision was made to focus on recent publications, to focus on articles that discuss gender (if at all) and on articles that discuss why parents choose to homeschool.

Beginning with the article “Understanding Families Who Choose to Homeschool: Agency in Context” (Dennison et al 2020), this paper examines the reasons behind parents in New Mexico from marginalized and/or immigrant backgrounds who choose to homeschool and argues for a role for school psychologists in offering support to these families as they transition away from a traditional school setting. In a similar vein, “‘Homeschooling Is Our Protest:’ Educational Liberation for African American Homeschooling Families in Philadelphia, PA” (Puga 2019), explores the concept that homeschooling among African-American families is a response to structural inequalities and systemic racism in the public education system with the action being seen as a radical, political protest against the status quo. A similar idea is further elaborated upon in “African American Homeschool Parents’ Motivations for Homeschooling and Their Black Children’s Academic Achievement” (Ray 2015), which examines the motivation for African American parents to homeschool and focuses on their desire to inculcate pride and understanding in Black culture and history and to foster academic excellence

Changing from African American parents choosing to homeschool for cultural reasons, comes the article “Different solutions to similar problems: parents’ reasons for choosing to homeschool and social criticism of the education system” (Neuman & Guterman 2021) and the dissertation

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<sup>1</sup> Please note, unless otherwise indicated via an article’s title or in the text, all studies were conducted nationwide among American homeschooling parents that met the criteria for the group under targeted examination.

“Why Homeschool, Why us, Why Now?: Parental Motivations for Jewish Homeschooling” (Lewis 2017) , both of which examine the factors that bring Jewish parents to homeschooling. Similarly to African American parents, a primary motivator appears to be religious and cultural transmission. In “Different solutions to similar problems: parents’ reasons for choosing to homeschool and social criticism of the education system”, Ari Neuman and Oz Guterman focus on “whether and in what ways the phenomenon known as homeschooling represents a solution to the education crisis” (Neuman & Guterman 2021) as perceived by Israeli homeschooling parents. While Benjamin S. Lewis’s “Why Homeschool, Why us, Why Now?: Parental Motivations for Jewish Homeschooling”, dissertation examines the motivations among Jewish American parents to homeschool with special focus on cultural and religious transmission.

Lastly, before moving on to discussing works that explore overarching themes of regarding the decision to homeschool, is the dissertation “A Grounded Theory Exploration of the Influences of Christian Worldview Development in a Homeschool Environment” (Bowens 2020) which examines the role of Christian worldviews in homeschooling, focus on how the worldview is inculcated with regards to overall academic experience and as a prime motivator for choosing to homeschool. And Angela R. Watson’s (2018) “Is homeschool cool? Current trends in American homeschooling”, which examines growth and decline trends in homeschooling by state and gives a well reasoned argument regarding the difficulty in truly understanding the scope of homeschooling in the US due to the often institutionally independent nature of homeschooling parents.

In Sharon Green-Hennessy and Emily C. Mariotti’s 2021 article “The decision to homeschool: potential factors influencing reactive homeschooling practice”, wants to tease out the differences in motivation behind parents who selected homeschooling on the basis of “second-choice” criteria. Per Green-Hennessy and Mariotti, “first-choice” homeschooling is “pro-active” and is chosen by parents as the default mode of education, generally as part of larger personal ideologies regarding the quality of public education, the role of children in the family, pedagogical ideals, and/or religious concerns. “Second-choice” parents are “reactive” and choose homeschooling as a response to factors in their child’s educational environment. The goal is to further understand the motivations of this second group. The study allows a generalized

understanding of school environmental factors that may lead to parents adopting a second-choice homeschooling mindset. Similarly, in the dissertation, “Parents’ Perceptions on Negative Experiences in Institutional Schools and Decision to Homeschool in Northwest Arkansas” (Williams 2018), the role of negative school experiences among second choice homeschoolers in choosing to homeschool is examined.

In closing this section examining the State of the Art with regards to the decision to homeschool, are the only two articles this research found that specifically examined the role of gender in educational choices. The first, “Feminist Theory and Educational Policy: How Gender Has Been ‘Involved’ in Family School Choice Debates” (Stamback & David 2005), examines school choice reform from a feminist perspective, focuses on feminist intersectional theory and how attempts at school reform, whether from a neoliberal or liberal perspective, have inherently gendered and class based normative ideas at heart. This article places choices regarding public schools, charter schools, private schools and homeschooling in their proper context within cultural norms regarding normative gendered roles and class. Further, discusses the gendered, heteronormative nature of how homeschooling is widely practiced, portrayed and imagined by the public. The second, a comprehensive book by Jennifer Lois (2012), *Home Is Where the School Is : The Logic of Homeschooling and the Emotional Labor of Mothering*, examining the intersection between motherhood and schooling among homeschooling families and the levels of emotional labor involved. Aspects of this work will be more fully discussed in section 1.3.5 below.

## **1.2 Research Aim**

To examine homeschooling from a reproductive feminist theory perspective with regards to the motivations among homeschoolers and their understanding of their part in providing reproductive labor. This thesis further has the aim of expanding up on current literature that primarily focuses on the reasons for homeschooling and on the educational outcomes of homeschooled children by expanding the scant literature that examines the issue from a gendered perspective in the context of a “crisis of care” and as a direct response to the devaluation of reproductive labor with the understanding that reproductive labor is largely “unseen” yet essential to society and primarily the domain of women and girls.

### **1.2.1 Research Questions**

1. How do homeschooling parents see their contribution with regards to the larger society?
2. Do homeschooling parents see their decision to homeschool as a counterbalance to capitalist and consumerist social pressures?
3. How do homeschooling parents see the act of homeschooling in relation to the devaluing of reproductive labor in society?

## **1.3 Background**

Homeschooling remains illegal in much of the world, especially in developed countries; however, homeschooling as a practice is an increasingly popular educational alternative in much of the English speaking world with strong parent associations, organized legal defense resources and extensive information as to how to begin homeschooling, the legalities and a myriad of options regarding curricula. Homeschooling is most prevalent in the US, Canada, UK, Australia and South Africa, but the desire to homeschool is spreading beyond developed anglophone countries into many parts of the world. Despite being an illegal educational practice in many places, homeschooling parents have and are finding unique ways to subvert local laws to provide a home education.

### **1.3.1 A Brief History of Homeschooling**

“Although homeschooling was quite common from colonial times until about 1920, by the 1960s homeschooling was nearly extinct. Beginning in the late 1970s [sic] homeschooling began to grow again. It is estimated that by early 2014 there were about 2.2 million K–12 homeschool students in the United States.” (Ray 2015 p 72)

Until the industrial era, in many parts of the world, the vast majority of children were educated at home. (Puga 2019, Ray 2015) The shift from a home based education mainly experienced by the elite to publicly funded and provided mass education began with industrialization and the need to ensure a basic level of education for factory workers. (Puga 2019, Ray 2015) Depending on the country involved, this shift led to the end of home based education as a major cultural force between 1890 and the end of WWII. (Puga 2019, Ray 2015) By the end of WWII, with a full shift to industrialized economies for many countries and enactment and enforcement of mandatory schooling legislation, home based education largely disappeared. (Puga 2019, Ray 2015)



However, beginning in the early 1970s and the emergence of both counter culture movements and Christian fundamentalists intent on creating parallel social institutions which they controlled, home based education re-emerged under the title “homeschooling”. (Puga 2019, Ray 2015) Slowly, between the 1970s and 1996, anti-homeschooling legislation was repealed across the US and this trend continues in many other countries. (Puga 2019, Ray 2015) Today, estimates of the number of homeschooled children in the US ranges between 1.1 million and 4 million. (Watson 2018)

### **1.3.2 Why Parents Homeschool**

As previously stated, most of the research into the homeschooling phenomenon has focused on parent motivation. This body of research has determined that there are two clear types of homeschooling parents, those who are “first choice” and those who are “second choice”. Per Green-Hennessy and Mariotti (2021), “first-choice” homeschooling is “pro-active” and is chosen by parents as the default mode of education, generally as part of larger personal ideologies regarding the quality of public education, the role of children in the family, pedagogical ideals, and/or religious concerns. “Second-choice” parents are “reactive” and choose homeschooling as a response to factors in their child’s educational environment.

First-choice homeschoolers can be divided into the following subcategories:

1. Ideologues who “homeschool for religious reasons: they oppose the public schools’ secular orientation and believe it is their family’s right, not the state’s, to take charge of their children’s education.” (Lois 2012 p 46)
2. Pedagogues who “homeschool for academic reasons... They believe the public schools are too inept to teach their children, in some cases, but certainly not all, because their children have special needs or gifts.” (Lois 2012 p 46)
3. Socio-relational homeschoolers who “fear negative peer influence in public schools and want to increase their family’s unity; these homeschoolers are also highly likely to be religious.” (Lois 2012 p 46)
4. New Age homeschoolers who “want to reserve the right to teach their children a globally focused worldview that emphasizes the interrelatedness of all life.” (Lois 2012 p 46)

5. Ethnological homeschoolers, largely encountered in African American communities, who have “concern about the negative racial environment in conventional schools.” (Lois 2012 p 46)

Second-choice homeschoolers may come to adopt many of the motivations of first-choice homeschoolers given that “[m]ost parents and youth decide to homeschool for more than one reason, and their reasons often change over time.” (Ray 2015 p 73) However, one of the defining characteristics of second-choice homeschoolers is that they did not begin their child(ren)’s academic careers with the intention of homeschooling and in fact started their child(ren) in more traditional school settings, whether public or private, and rather that they entered homeschooling following issues with the school environment. The most common factors contributing to second-choice homeschool selection are social issues with bullying being a primary motivator, absenteeism due to family dynamics (health issues in the family, a parent’s work schedule, military deployments), the lack of educational support for children with disabilities, and concerns regarding educational achievement and student engagement. (Green-Hennessy and Mariotti 2021)

### **1.3.3 Societal Factors Motivating Homeschooling Parents- Placing Homeschooling in Context<sup>2</sup>**

For readers from countries where homeschooling remains illegal or is not considered a viable educational option, the decision to homeschool may seem strange, especially in light of the growing numbers of homeschooling families as discussed in section 1.3.1. As discussed in the previous section, section 1.3.2, homeschooling families are divided between first choice and second choice homeschoolers, with first choice homeschoolers having selected this educational choice for a myriad of ideological reasons and second choice homeschoolers having moved their children out of traditional educational settings in response to some type of failure in the school experience.

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the views discussed in this section are reinforced in the free form answers to “other” on the survey. Free form other answers are available in Appendix 2.

But why? What causes parents to be ideologically against traditional schools or to find and/or perceive the school experience a failure? While there does not appear to be much grounded research into this part of the “why”, from familiarity with existing research in the field, from initial research in the course of this study performed in public Facebook groups, from a personal understanding of US cultural norms and how they manifest in personal and political belief, and from personal interest in the topic including following many “mommy bloggers” who homeschool, the “why” and the reasons for why the “why” has not been examined is seems self-evident.

In the English speaking world, but especially in the political cultures of the US, Canada and Australia, there are competing ideas about the role of government in private lives with public education most strongly representing the influence of government in the individual’s daily life. Local government institutions, but especially public education, are the closest to the individual and the ones that have the most impact on the individual over the course of their lifetime. On the one hand most people use the public education system, on the other hand, many people feel that the public education system indoctrinates their children into being “good workers” and not “good citizens”. Many people think of the traditional education system, especially public schools, as “free daycare”, a safe place to “park” your children while you are at work and where they will be socialized to be the next generation of worker. Further to this belief, is the idea that the school day is filled with too much down time and not enough actual learning, with far too much time organizing students, controlling the classroom (in the US it is common to have as many as 32 children in one class with one teacher), and with an emphasis on learning to sit quietly at one’s desk and be “productive”.

In fact, this belief, that the education system favors creating good workers over good citizens and fosters “blind obedience” to rules and processes over “critical thinking” (with the idea that blind obedience is more desirable in an employee over a critical thinking worker who may question business decisions, labor structures or workflows, etc) is represented in many of the questions asked in the research survey. While the countries denoted, especially the US, are famously anti-communist and have strong political rhetoric against socialism, this belief, that the education system perpetuates capitalist structures (for further discussion see section 3.0) may seem

jarringly socialist, if not outright communist, in nature. However, in the context of countries, especially the US, which have strong traditions regarding suspicion of too much government involvement in the individual's life, the extending of that suspicion to the education system, especially the public school system, seems like a natural extension of that strain of thought.

#### **1.3.4 Gender and Education**

“[F]ew studies have considered the gender politics of parents' incorporation or the fact that school-choice programs are formulated in ways that often reveal gendered and social-classed assumptions about families, employment, markets, and education.” (Stamback & David 2005 p 1633)

Education at the pre-, primary and secondary levels is largely considered the realm of women, both with regards to who is teaching, but also with regards to who in the family system society expects to be responsible for the academic achievement of the child(ren). (Stamback & David 2005) The way in which pre-university level education is discussed and the ways in which society is structured around that education are incredibly gendered and adhere to heteronormative mores. (Stamback & David 2005) For example, when schools call for a parent to come pick up a sick child, they inevitably call the mother even if the father (or another adult) is indicated as the appropriate point of contact. (Stamback & David 2005) Despite explicit written instruction to the contrary, the power of heteronormative cultural norms holds sway. (Stamback & David 2005)

This norm, wherein the default for family structure is that of a heteronormative, married, monogamous couple with the wife assuming the role of primary carer for the child(ren) persists despite massive changes in society over the last 50 years. (Stamback & David 2005) Further, the effects of this norm influence the ways in which society discusses education, the assumption about who is doing the educating and who has responsibility for ensuring the adequacy of this education. (Stamback & David 2005) These effects extend out into policy decisions and further exacerbate the social structures that encourage these norms, even as they have become antiquated with today's changed family structure. (Stamback & David 2005)

#### **1.3.5 Gender and Homeschooling**

“The vast majority of homeschoolers are stay-at-home mothers in two-parent, heterosexual families with a husband supporting the family in the paid labor force... because homeschooling takes an extraordinary amount of time and attention, it is much easier to accomplish when the labor is divided so that one parent can be devoted to it full-time. Because mothers are much more likely than fathers to leave the paid labor force to care for young children, this gendered family arrangement is extremely common among homeschooling families.” (Lois 2012 p 45)

Like more traditional forms of education, homeschooling is heavily gendered in its implementation, in how it is perceived by the larger society and in how it is portrayed by those who practice it. (Lois 2012 p 93) While homeschooling is not strictly the purview of married, heterosexual women, the majority of research shows that homeschooling is largely performed by stay at home mothers (SAHM) and this view is reinforced by the ways in which these women interact with the rest of the world via social media. (Lois 2012 p 45) Many “mommy bloggers” are SAHM in heteronormative, monogamous, married relationships with a breadwinning husband who present an idealized image of motherhood and homeschooling to the world. (Lois 2012 p 45)

While not all homeschooling parents are cis-gendered, heterosexual, married and monogamous SAHM, the gendered pattern of homeschooling appears to hold true with women being the main drivers of home education and principally responsible for its implementation. (Lois 2012 p 93) Less common, though not fully unheard of, are single mothers and married women in homosexual relationships who homeschool. (Lois 2012 p 93) The literature gives few examples of fathers taking on primary homeschooling duties, though they may often provide supplemental education to the child(ren) and no examples of either single fathers or married men in homosexual relationships homeschooling (this of course presents a potential new area of study into homeschooling, are the numbers simply so small that they are not becoming apparent in the research? or are there truly no single/married, gay fathers homeschooling?) (Lois 2012 p 93)

Given that the task of education follows the social mores of the large society within the homeschooling family structure, it should be no surprise that these families tend to also follow gendered patterns regarding housework. (Lois 2012 p 93) This means that homeschooling mothers are not only fully responsible for their child(ren)’s education, but also for maintaining the household. (Lois 2012 p 93) As well, homeschooling mothers are judged by the larger society for having “excessive” and “deviant” emotions regarding their children, with “their

maternal emotions spin[ing] out of control, which led to the irresponsible behavior of homeschooling.” (Lois 2012 p 71) This view, of their “excess emotional intensity” (Lois 2012 p 71), forces homeschooling mothers to “prove” to the larger society that their educational choices for their child(ren) are as good as, if not better, than traditional school settings as a rebuttal to their “deviance”. Thus, homeschooling mothers face even greater pressure from within the family structure and from the larger society to conform to social mores and to perform as well as, if not better, than both professional teachers and non-homeschooling SAHM. (Lois 2012 p 93)

## **2. Theory**

“In the words of Bhattacharya: ‘If workers’ labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker?’” (Backer & Cairns 2021 p 1090)

The underlying theory of this paper is feminist social reproduction theory- also called social reproduction feminism (SRF)-, not to be confused with social reproduction theory (SRE) which is an educational theory with Durkheimian roots regarding the role of education in recreating and reinforcing capitalist structural norms. (Backer & Cairns 2021) While there is emerging consensus that SRF and SRE are in fact sub branches of the same theory regarding the reproduction of people, social norms and economic structures, there are also strong arguments on the side of SRF that SRE in fact represents a subordinate topic of SRF given the gendered nature of education, especially at the pre- and primary school levels. (Laslett & Brenner 1989 p 383) For the purposes of this paper, SRF will remain the primary focus, but aspects of SRE as a subfield of SRF will be referenced as needed.

### **2.1 Defining Reproductive Labor**

“As a form of affective labor, producing feelings of love, warmth, caring, happiness, and other positive emotions, reproductive labor generates value by itself while also drawing on and contributing to productive labor in ways that provide workers with the means to tolerate, circumvent, and alter exploitative relations that emanate from advanced capitalism.” (Griffith et al 2018 p 224)

Reproductive labor is any work “involved in the maintenance and reproduction of human beings”. (Griffith et al 2018 p 228) This includes, but is not limited to, everything from sexual reproduction of new humans; education as a form of reproducing knowledge and social structures; the duties and responsibilities of the home which see the needs of the individual for food, cleanliness and affective care being met; care for children and vulnerable extended families

members (the elderly, the sick, the disabled); and the work that goes into creating and maintaining extended familial, community and social ties. (Griffith et al 2018)

## **2.2 Origins of SRF**

Social reproduction feminism, or more aptly, feminist social reproduction theory, originated in the 1970s with the work of Dalla Costa and James to bring attention to the vitally important, yet undervalued and unpaid work of women in the home. (Dalla Costa & James 1971) Initially focused on obtaining salaries for housewives performing housework in an effort to support not only individual women, but to also recognize the importance of this type of labor to society, SRF has expanded overtime to include other forms of labor that are traditionally undervalued, unnoticed, yet essential to the continuation of people and the social structures upon which they rely for survival. (Anderson 2001)

## **2.3 SRF as Theory**

“The term ‘social reproduction’ was coined by feminist scholars to refer to the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people on both a daily basis and intergenerationally.” (Nakano Glenn 2001 p 71)

SRF concerns the socio-economic systems that affect the doing of reproductive labor with an understanding that reproductive labor is an essential factor in "social reproduction" and “the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people on both a daily basis and intergenerationally”. (Nakano Glenn 2001 p 71) SRF provides a theoretical framework for understanding the value of reproductive labor as a key factor of social reproduction within the context of capitalist and patriarchal structures where reproductive labor is devalued by both capitalism and patriarchy in their structural function in maintaining the status quo regarding the hierarchical position of women and girls and of what is viewed as “non-essential” and “non-productive” labor. (Nakano Glenn 2001 p 71) Essential to this understanding, is that reproductive labor is perceived as primarily “women’s work” and the characterization of this type of labor as being done solely by women contributes further to its devaluation and de-essentialization. (Nakano Glenn 2001 p 72)

## **2.4 Crisis of Care**

Crisis of care

“refers to the pressures from several directions that are currently squeezing a key set of social capacities: those available for birthing and raising children, caring for friends and family members, maintaining households and broader communities, and sustaining connections more generally.” (Fraser 2012)

As previously discussed in the discussion on SRF, the crisis of care reflects the devaluation of reproductive labor and the pressures of the capitalist economic system to either eradicate reproductive labor or to commoditize it. (Fraser 2012) Attempts to eradicate reproductive labor ignore the essential nature of this work for the continuation of humans and of the social structures upon which both people and the capitalist system rely. (Fraser 2012) Commoditization of reproductive labor ignores the heavily interpersonal, intimate and emotionally weighted nature of most work in this category, as well as the resistance to this form of labor to standardization. (Fraser 2012) Further, the crisis of care framework recognizes the ways in which the capitalist system attempts to treat reproductive labor as an externality with the understanding that economic theory regards externalities as “free” for producers despite the very real costs of externalities. (Fraser 2012)

As Fraser repeatedly explains in her article, “Contradictions of capital and care”, “the ‘crisis of care’ is best interpreted as a more or less acute expression of the social-reproductive contradictions of financialized capitalism” (2012) where emphasis is placed on productive, paid work at the expense of what is perceived as “unessential” and “unproductive” reproductive labor and the care of the individual (reproductive care). This devaluation, as Fraser asserts, has not only a gendered, but also an intersectional facet. As discussed above in explaining SRF, reproductive labor is gendered in that it is primarily done by women and girls, and increasingly in the Western context, performed by an “underclass” of women and girls from marginalized backgrounds and the global south. Both the gendered and marginalized characterization of those performing reproductive labor contribute to further devaluation. (Fraser 2012) This dual attack on reproductive labor in the context of increased socio-economic pressures to be highly productive and extreme consumers, creates Fraser’s crisis of care as individuals, families and communities struggle to have their reproductive needs met and to continue the social ties that many forms of reproductive labor create.

## **2.5 The Use of Theory**



For the purposes of this research paper, and in furtherance of the paper's aim to explore homeschooling as a response to the devaluation of reproductive labor in the context of a crisis of care, both SRF and the crisis of care framework will be used in conjunction. The crisis of care framework is deeply influenced by SRF and its theories regarding gender, reproductive labor, this labor's under- and devaluation by society, and the essential nature of this form of labor. Thus, the use of SRF in concert with the crisis of care framework allows for a deeper understanding of how reproductive labor is disregarded by the capitalist structure and the ways in which the individual may react to this stance. As well, SRF is informed, as relevant, by SRE, especially as the topic of this paper is homeschooling and SRE provides a strong foundation for understanding the role homeschooling plays in the educational context with regards to social reproduction.

### **3. Methods**

Analysis of this paper primarily focuses on data collected using quantitative methods- a survey- while the survey's construction was informed from initial data obtained using qualitative methods.

#### **3.1 Qualitative Methods**

Initial research was two-fold. First, a standard literature review to understand the state of the art and to gain familiarity with field specific terminology. Second, using insights gained from the literature review to begin field studies using Facebook groups. Facebook groups were analyzed using the following parameters:

1. the group is public
2. the group had homeschool or homeschooling in the title
3. the group had a minimum of 1,000 members
4. the group's content was in English
5. the group focused on homeschooling and support, eliminating groups concerned with selling/reselling books and curricula or focused on homeschooling events.

Within those limits, 13 homeschooling groups were examined using the following key words: choice, choose, choosing, family, together, work. This search elicited information on the ways in

which homeschooling parents discussed homeschooling, the choice to homeschool, and their views on homeschooling. Their language choices heavily informed the quantitative survey.

### **3.2 Quantitative Methods**

The survey is composed of 49 questions (see Appendix) and was distributed to the same public Facebook groups from the qualitative stage of research and kindly shared by friends who are or have homeschooled with their peers.

Survey construction was carefully considered in an attempt to elicit responses revealing the respondent's views on productive versus reproductive labor and the role of traditional versus homeschooling education within that context. Consideration was taken to avoid overly academic language and field specific terminology that may be unfamiliar to the layperson. Further, given the often politicizing nature of American public discourse (with the recognition that this survey was disseminated in a mix of international and US focused groups, but the understanding that homeschooling is far more common in the US context) , especially with regards to gender, religious belief and feminism, every attempt was made to use as politically and culturally neutral language as possible to avoid alienating respondents and most particularly religiously, socially and/or politically conservative respondents.

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations<sup>3</sup>**

Care was taken to ensure that ethical considerations regarding participant's information was taken. In the first instance, ethical considerations were the basis for using only public Facebook groups in the qualitative stage of data gathering. Public Facebook groups are just that, accessible to anyone with a Facebook account and accessible on major search engines like Google. By the nature of being a public forum via a platform where their identity is readily apparent, respondents are tacitly acknowledging that their answers on comment threads are accessible to anyone for any purpose. Despite that understanding of the "publicness" of such forums, care was taken to largely use data collected in aggregate and to anonymize as much as possible any direct quotes used.

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<sup>3</sup> Ethical considerations were informed by Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0 Association of Internet Researchers, <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>.

In the second instance, ethical considerations were considered with regards to how the quantitative phase of the research was conducted. This consisted of ensuring that respondents were drawn from a large population pool, that unique identifying information was not requested (names, specific geographic locations, contact information, etc), by asking for simple demographic information (age and gender versus more specific and readily identifiable personal characteristics such as ethnicity and religion) and by attempting to use non-polarizing language in the survey. As well, the post requesting survey participants in each Facebook group included a brief description of the survey and the researcher's email information for questions or anyone curious in reading the completed research project (see Appendix).

#### **4. Analysis<sup>4</sup>**

“A major limitation to causal research on the effects of homeschooling is that homeschoolers self-select into this education model for a variety of reasons. Those reasons alone might be enough to make homeschool children different from their traditional public school peers regardless of differences in the educational model or pedagogy. The selection bias inherent to homeschooling makes empirical analyses attempting to determine causal relationships nearly impossible.” (Watson 2018 p402-403)

The survey ran for 6 weeks and was disseminated by myself to public homeschool groups on Facebook and by friends with ties to the homeschooling community. At the time of closing the survey, 39 people had responded to the 49 question long survey.

As discussed in depth in the Quantitative Methods section 3.2, care was taken to ensure the linguistic neutrality of the survey questions to avoid overly academic language and phrases and terminology that are cultural landmines in the English speaking world and most especially in the US and Canada where the majority of homeschoolers reside. This meant that the same or similar questions were asked repeatedly in slightly different ways and that there was an attempt to be thematic regarding the questions as opposed to specific. Thus, in analyzing the data from the survey, questions were placed in groupings which include: (1) demographic data; (2) questions

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<sup>4</sup> Free form responses to the “Other” option on the survey were possible. Respondents were able to select one of the supplied answers and other, when available, thus, in many instances, this resulted in more than 39 responses to questions. Where this is the case, these answers are not included in the results and are instead available for review in Appendix 2.

regarding the interplay between social expectations and family; (3) questions concerning ideas about the economy, specifically the capitalist system, and the family; (4) more generalized homeschooling questions; (5) questions attempting to gauge respondent's views on reproductive labor; and, (6) closing questions regarding survey length and open-ended questions allowing respondents to share anything they would like. Given the overlapping thematic nature of many of the questions, some questions have been placed for comparison in more than one analytical category, this reflects the complexity of this topic where many societal and economic factors influence respondent's perspectives and resulting answers.

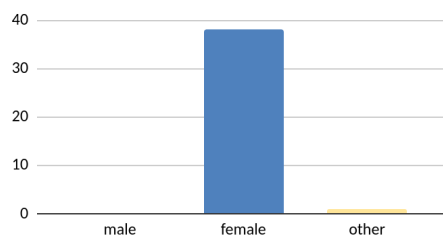
Perhaps one of my most interesting, but not necessarily relevant for the purposes of this thesis, findings were about the assumptions respondents made regarding the questions (see free form answers to "other" in Appendix 2). Respondents were never asked if they only homeschooled or if they were involved in paid work, but many made comments about working too. The decision to not ask about paid work was deliberate, many homeschooling parents, especially mothers, are involved in some type of paid labor, MLMs (multi-level marketing) and blogs/vlogs being the most common. While these women would often classify themselves strictly as SAHMs, they are involved in the labor market however informally. Given that the complexity of delineating between a mother who works full- or part-time outside the home between a mother who runs a small cottage business between a mother with a YouTube channel is difficult and that many of these working mothers do not consider themselves to be working, examination of these nuances was not included in the survey. Further, such nuances regarding employment do not answer any of the research questions regarding how these women see their role as homeschoolers in relation to the larger capitalist and consumerist system. As well, answers regarding work habits are often more reflective of financial circumstances and not of personal preferences or, more to the point for this study, reflective of personal beliefs.

#### **4.1 Demographics**

Standard demographic questions were asked, including gender, age, country, state/province, number of children and ages of child(ren) homeschooling. Unfortunately, one respondent chose to list her children's ages in the format "7-23", making this data set unusable for this study. The remaining questions received usable responses.

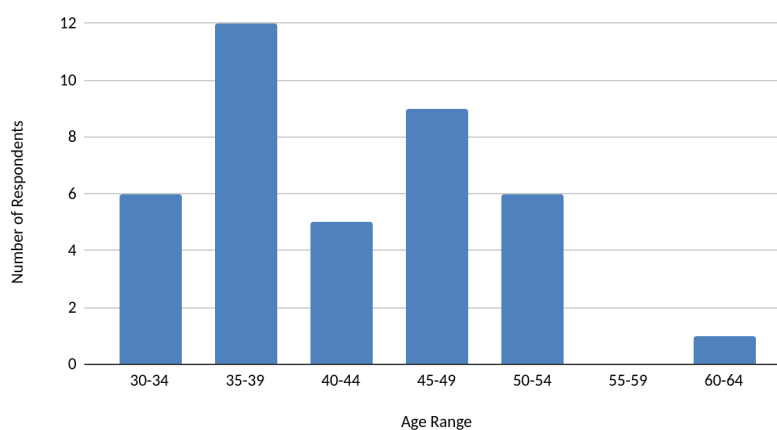
With regards to gender, 97.44% of respondents identified as “women” and 2.56% identified their gender as “other”. While purposefully avoiding asking the question of the gender of the homeschooling parent to avoid the same complexity inherent as the question of paid work, from respondents' subsequent answers, especially the free responses, the primary homeschooling parent in all of these families is female. This aligns with discussions in sections 1.3.4 and 1.3.5 regarding the gendered nature of schooling in general and homeschooling specifically. While a data set of 39 respondents is small, findings regarding the gendered breakdown are in line with existing research and are reflective of the arguments regarding the gendered nature of reproductive work as discussed in section 2.0.

Table 1.0 Gender



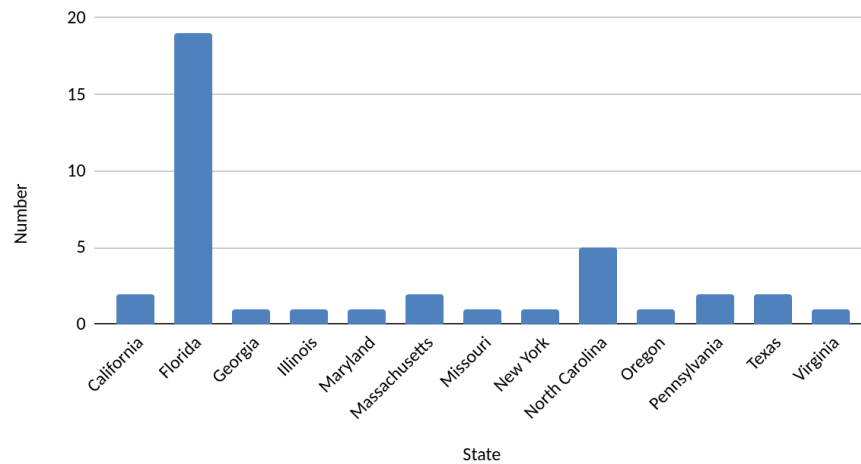
The ages of respondents ranged from 30 to 60 with the highest number falling within the 35-39 age range.

Table 1.1 Age



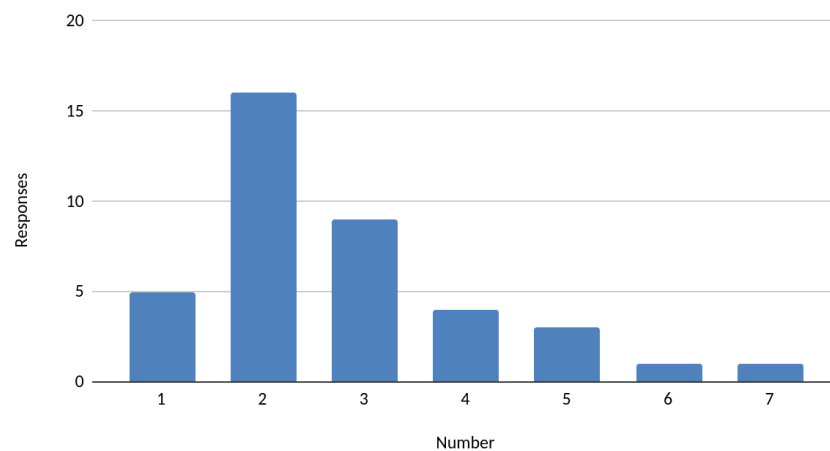
All respondents were from the US and they resided in 13 states with the most represented state with 19 respondents being Florida.

Table 1.2 State/Province



The number of children among respondents ranged from 1 to 7 with the 2 children being the most common family size with 16 respondents.

Table 1.3 Number of Children

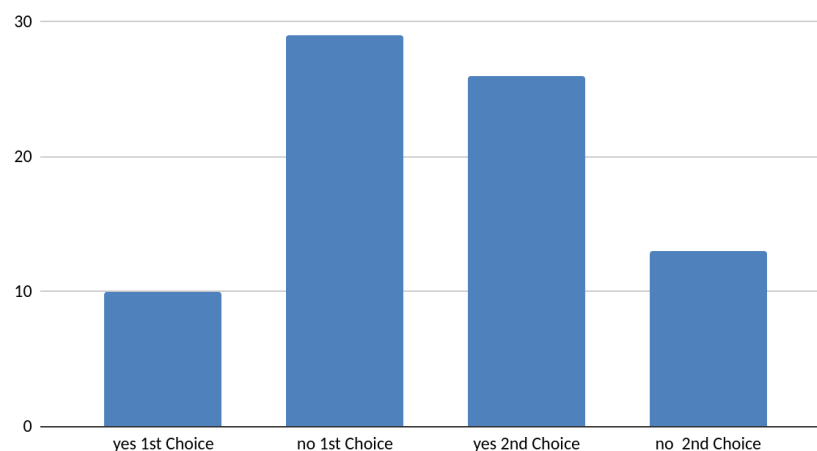


Perhaps the most important discovery of this section of the survey is that almost all of the respondents are women and that, given respondent's answers, the assumed gender of the primary homeschooling parent is female. This complies with previous findings in the literature and confirms the supposition of this research study that education in general and homeschooling specifically is a strongly gendered activity.

## 4.2 Education and Homeschooling

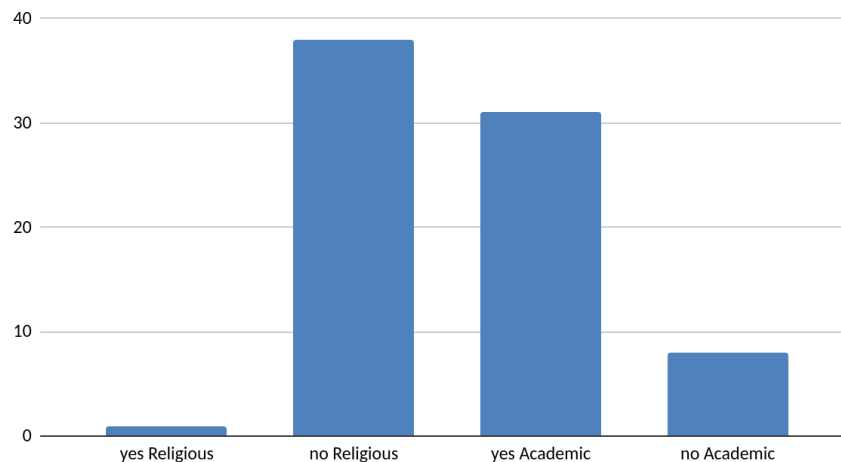
This section begins with a look at the breakdown between first choice and second choice homeschoolers as these two groups had initially differing motivations for entering the homeschooling world, though they, as noted by Lois (2012) often come to hold similar views. When asked if they identified as first choice homeschoolers, 25% responded “yes” with 75% responding “no”. When asked if they identified as second choice homeschoolers, 66% responded “yes” with 33% responding “no”.

Table 2.0 1st Choice vs 2nd Choice Homeschoolers



The next two questions also involved underlying motivations for homeschooling and attempted to distinguish between those homeschooling for religiously motivated reasons and academically motivated reasons. When asked if they homeschooled for religious reasons, only 3% of respondents said “yes” and 97% of respondents said “no”. This was a surprising outcome because the ideology, especially religiously motivated ideology has been established as the primary ideological factor among first choice homeschoolers. (Watson 2018) Less surprisingly, when asked if they homeschooled for academic reasons, 80% of respondents said “yes” and 20% said “no”. Academic reasons are a strong motivator among all homeschoolers, whether primary or secondary choice, and is usually a contributing factor in the decision to homeschool even if it is not always the principal motivator. (Watson 2018)

Table 2.1 Religious vs Academic Motivations



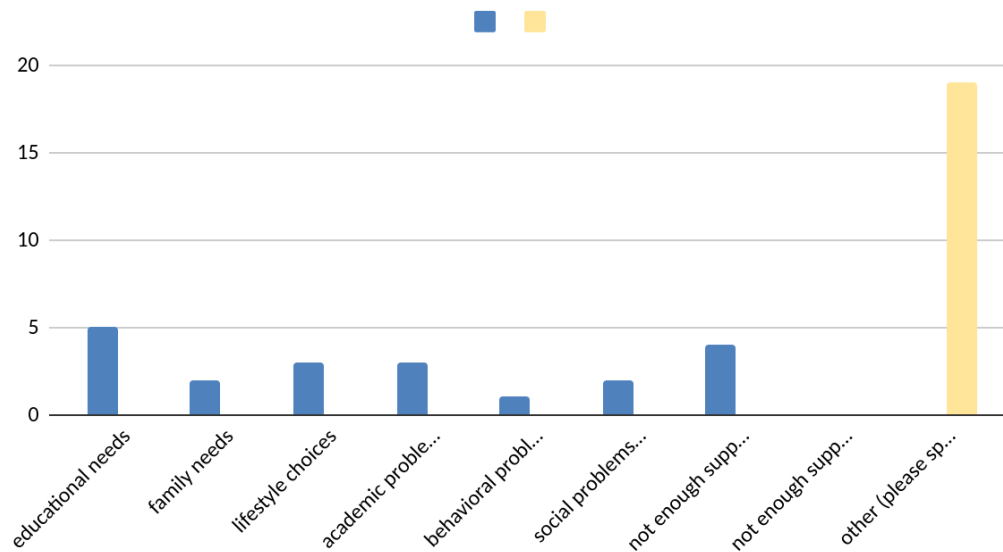
The final two questions on this theme concerned academic and other motivations for homeschooling. Respondents were asked if homeschooling was chosen to meet their child(ren)’s unique academic needs, this allows for “yes” responses from both parents of gifted children and parents of children with learning or other disabilities. 78% responded “yes” to this question, while 22% responded “no”. To tease out further the types of unique academic needs that the child(ren) in question might have, respondents were offered the opportunity to select from among the following responses:

1. educational needs
2. family needs
3. lifestyle choices
4. academic problems with the school
5. behavioral problems with the school
6. social problems with the school
7. not enough support for learning issues/styles
8. not enough support for medical needs
9. other (please specify).

Results are shown in Table 2.2 below (for other, free form answers, please see Q12 in Appendix 2). The results below, and the free form results available in Appendix 2, reflect the varied ways that homeschooling families enter home education.



Table 2.2 Reasons for Switching to Homeschooling

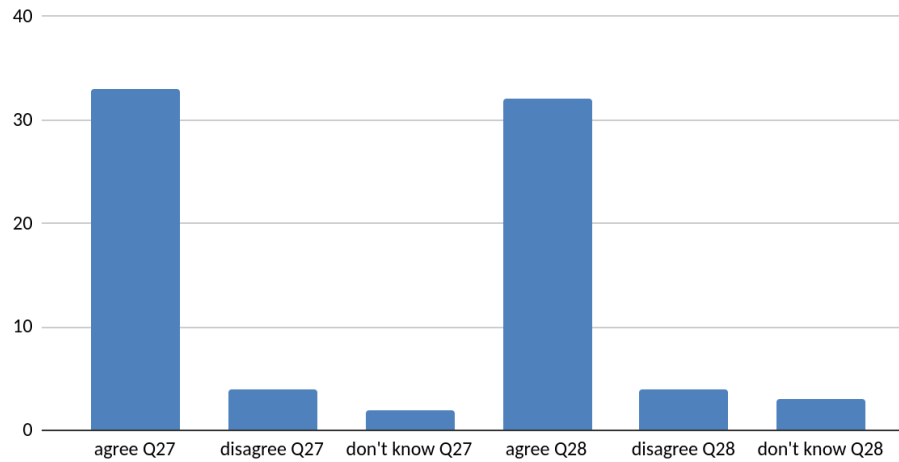


While giving a mix of answers, the primary result of this section is a glimpse into how homeschooling parents perceive the role of education as a facet of social reproduction.

#### 4.2.1 Respondent Perceptions of Homeschooling vs Traditional Education

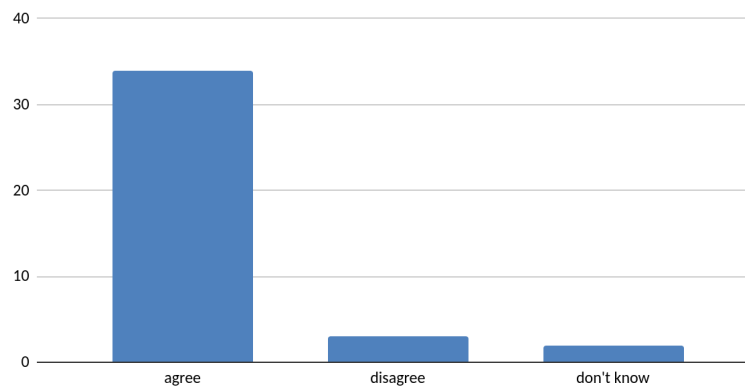
This section concerns a subgrouping of questions within the theme of homeschooling versus traditional education with an emphasis on the ways in which homeschooling parents feel that this educational model is superior to and offers better flexibility than the traditional model while also reflecting many of the underlying factors influencing attitudes towards homeschooling as discussed in section 1.3.3. Beginning with “Q27 The education system trains workers and not citizens” and “Q28 The education system focuses too much on our children being future workers”, respondents' answers are indicative of attitudes towards traditional, and especially public, education systems. 85% of respondents answered “agree” to Q27 with only 10% disagreeing and 5% not knowing/being unsure as to the question. Numbers were similar for Q28 with 82% responding “agree,” 10% answering disagree and 8% responding “don’t know”. These answers reflect an understanding of the reproductive role of education per SRE as a subfield of SRF wherein education reinforces existing social structures and encourages adherence to capitalist norms.

Table 2.3 Views on How the Education System Trains Workers over Citizens



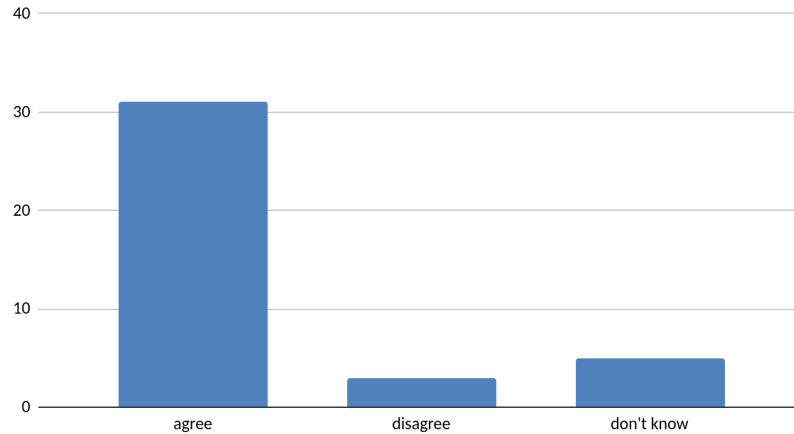
This criticism by parents of the traditional education system continues in the next question with 87% agreeing that schools do not teach children to think critically and only 8% of respondents disagreeing with an additional 5% not knowing.

Table 2.4 The education system doesn't teach children to think critically.



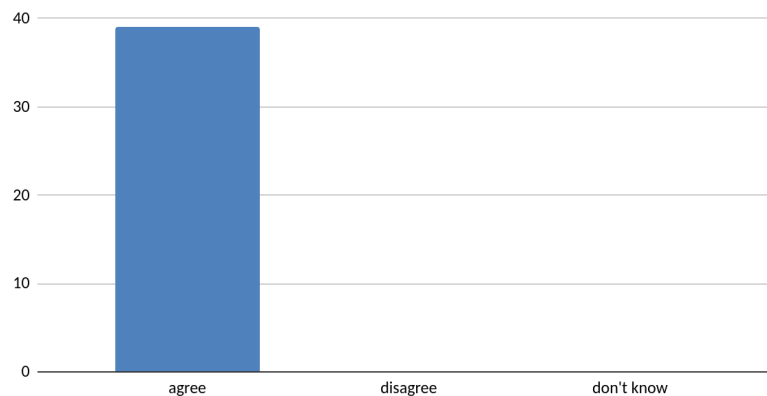
Another critique of the standard educational model is that it is engineered to offer parents a safe space for their children during the work day and is therefore not structured towards the promotion of family time. This opinion is reflected in responses to Q30 with 80% of answers agreeing that the education system does not allow sufficient family time, 8% disagreeing and 13% not knowing.

Table 2.5 The education system doesn't allow enough time for family.



The final question in this theme is that of the ability of homeschooling to be adjusted to meet the unique needs of the individual student, as opposed to the more uniform treatment experienced in a classroom setting. 100% of respondents answered agree and this further reflects parental concerns about the role of education in an SRE framework where the focus is on conformity to a set standard with the intention of socializing the individual to fit into the structural norms of the capitalist system.

Table 2.6 Homeschooling allows me to tailor curriculum to fit my child(ren)'s needs.



In closing sections 4.2 and 4.2.1, it has hopefully become clear the ways in which homeschooling parents view the decision to homeschool as a direct response to their concerns about the ways in which traditional educational models focus on educating children for their future role of work over their role as citizen, on reinforcing their ability to adhere to capitalist social structures at the expense of family life and to conform to a standardized system as opposed to meeting the needs of the individual. All of these factors reflect not only critiques regarding the

education system from an SRE perspective, but also reflect issues regarding the “strains” on reproductive labor as expressed in the crisis of care framework. (Fraser 2016)

### **4.3 Society and Family**

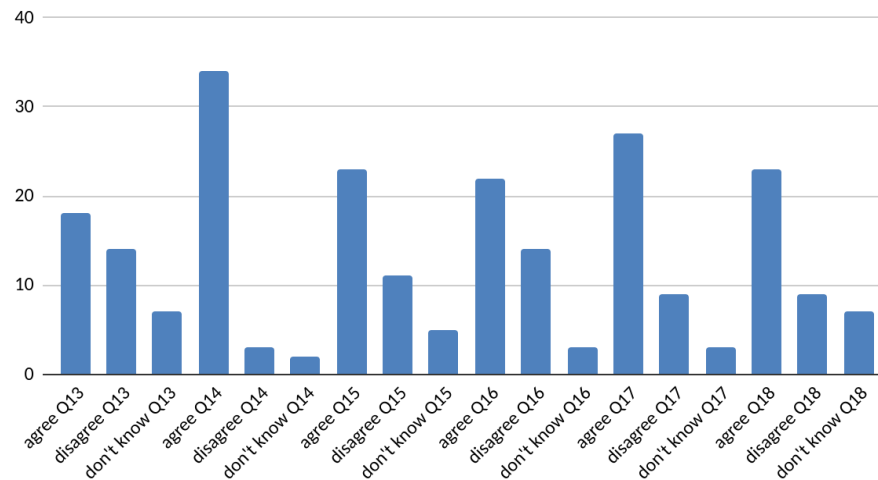
The next thematic grouping of questions concerns how respondents perceive the valuation of family and community ties, these relationships are considered foundational to reproductive labor and are an essential aspect of SRF. Further, these non-commercialized social ties represent the fundamental basis of “social capital” as described by Fraser and pressures on these informal networks are a key factor in the crisis of care and attempts to further devalue reproductive labor. (Fraser 2016)

The questions in this section are as follows: “Q13 Society doesn’t value family”; “Q14 Society doesn’t allow for enough family time”; “Q15 Society doesn’t see the value in family time”; “Q16 Society doesn’t value community”; “Q17 Society doesn’t value the role of parents enough”; and “Q18 Society reveres parents, especially mothers, but doesn’t give them enough support”. The results for these questions are a bit more mixed than the resounding “agrees” from the previous sections, however, they still clearly reflect an understanding that society devalues family, community and the role of parents. To Q13, which asserts that society does not value family, 46% answered “agree”, 36% answered “disagree” and 18% responded “don’t know”. Similar to responses to Q30 from the previous section, 88% answered “agree” to Q14 which stated that society does not allow enough time for family with only 8% disagreeing and 5% not knowing. With slightly less assurance, 59% answered “agree” to “Q15 Society doesn’t see the value in family time” with 28% disagreeing and 13% not knowing. To “Q16 Society doesn’t value community”, 56% answered “agree”, 36% responded “disagree” and 8% answering “don’t know”, this result follows the respondent pattern as seen in Q15. The next question, “Q17 Society doesn’t value the role of parents enough”, had strong responses with 69% agreeing, 23% disagreeing and 8% not knowing. The final question in this series, “Q18 Society reveres parents, especially mothers, but doesn’t give them enough support”, mirrored the less assured answers given to Q15 and Q16 with 59% agreeing, 23% disagreeing and 18% not knowing. In addition, this question elicited possibly the most vehement free responses of all the questions with the following comments:

“I agree that mothers aren't given enough support”;  
 “Society does NOT revere parents, least of all mothers, and does not give enough support”;  
 “Mother’s are not revered if they were they would be supported”; and,  
 “You can’t reverse without supporting”.

These comments, and the responses for Q13 through Q18 reflect that the majority of respondents perceive society as not being supportive of the family unit, of community, of parents and by extension of the activities related to reproductive labor.

Table 3.0 Society's Views of Family & Community



The finding from this theme of questions clearly show that homeschooling parents are aware of and agree with the idea that reproductive labor, as represented via family and community ties, is devalued by the larger society and formalizes the arguments of SRF about that the devaluation of reproductive labor as a key feature of capitalist structures. These findings further reinforce the crisis of care framework which asserts that productive labor is favored at the expense of reproductive labor while continuing the pretense that reproductive labor is external to and not important for the continuation of productive labor.

#### 4.4 The Economy and Family

This section concerns the theme of the valuation of productive versus reproductive work by the larger society and within the context of a capitalist and consumerist system. Given, as previously discussed in sections 1.3.3 and 3.2, the controversial use of terms like “capitalist”, “socialist” and “communist” and the attempt to avoid any other form of potentially alienating language in the survey, questions regarding this topic were careful to frame the questions in terms of valuing money, work and consumption over family, parenthood and being a good citizen. In line with

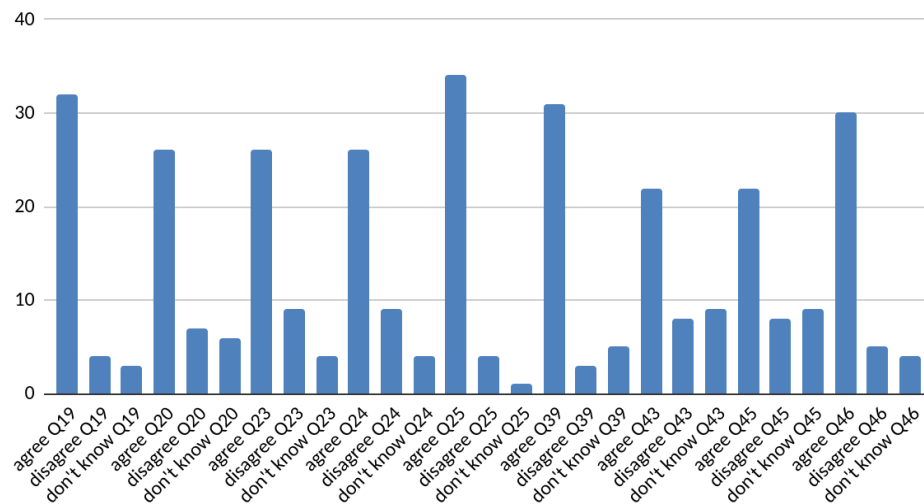
other responses previously analyzed, the findings on this theme confirm the idea that homeschooling parents are aware of the society's favoritism for productive labor at the expense of reproductive labor and shows a marked preference for the visible, consumer results of this productive labor.

In an attempt to capture a more nuanced understanding of respondents regarding the relationship between the values of the capitalist economic structure and the roles of person, parent, family member and community member, this section has one of the largest number of questions with 9 being examined. These questions are: "Q19 Society values being a good worker over being a good person"; "Q20 Society values being a good consumer over being a good citizen"; "Q23 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good person"; "Q24 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good parent"; "Q25 Society places too much importance on money and not enough importance on people"; "Q39 Homeschooling is more important to me than paid work"; "Q43 I think being a homeschooling parent is more important than being a good employee"; "Q45 I think being a good parent is more important than being a good employee"; and, "Q46 I think educating my child(ren) is more important than paid work".

82% "agree" with the assertion of "Q19 Society values being a good worker over being a good person", while 10% answered "disagree" and 8% did not know. Less strongly, 67% agreed with "Q20 Society values being a good consumer over being a good citizen" with 18% disagreeing and 15% not knowing. "Q23 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good person" had similar responses with 67% agreeing, 23% disagreeing and 10% not knowing. Responses to "Q24 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good parent" mirrored those to Q20 and Q23, with 67% agreeing, 23% disagreeing and 10% not knowing. For "Q24 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good parent", again 67% agreed, 23% disagreed and 10% did not know. Responses strongly favored "agree" at 87% favoring "Q25 Society places too much importance on money and not enough importance on people", 10% disagreeing and only 3% not knowing.

The final four questions in this series specifically concern respondents' perceptions of parenthood, paid work and the role of homeschooling in the context of a capitalist economic system that devalues reproductive labor. 80% answered “agree” to “Q39 Homeschooling is more important to me than paid work” with 8% disagreeing and 13% being unsure. The strength of agreement dropped in response to “Q43 I think being a homeschooling parent is more important than being a good employee” with 56% agreeing, 21% disagreeing and 23% not knowing. Strong agreement returned with “Q45 I think being a good parent is more important than being a good employee” to which 90% of respondents agreed, 8% disagreed and a mere 3% did not know. The final question, “Q46 I think educating my child(ren) is more important than paid work”, had similar responses with 77% agreeing, 13% disagreeing and 10% not knowing.

Table 4.0 The Valuation of Productive vs Reproductive Labor



Responses to this theme show that homeschooling parents are aware of the preference by society for paid work that adheres to productive labor norms and the devaluation of unpaid work, especially as represented by reproductive labor in the family system. Again, these responses mirror the arguments of both SRF and the crisis of care framework and reinforce the argument that homeschooling parents are aware of the counterculture, or at least the counter-economic structure, nature of their decision to favor reproductive labor as represented via homeschooling over productive labor.

#### 4.5 Reproductive Labor

This theme examines respondent's perceptions of reproductive labor, especially in the context of a capitalist economic structure that devalues reproductive labor in favor of productive labor. Again, answers to these questions clearly show that respondents understand the socio-economic forces at play that favor productive labor while discounting the value of reproductive labor. This theme represents the first time in the analysis of the research where some answers have already been examined, while these answers will be reflected in the table, the statistical breakdowns will not be re-explored in this section.

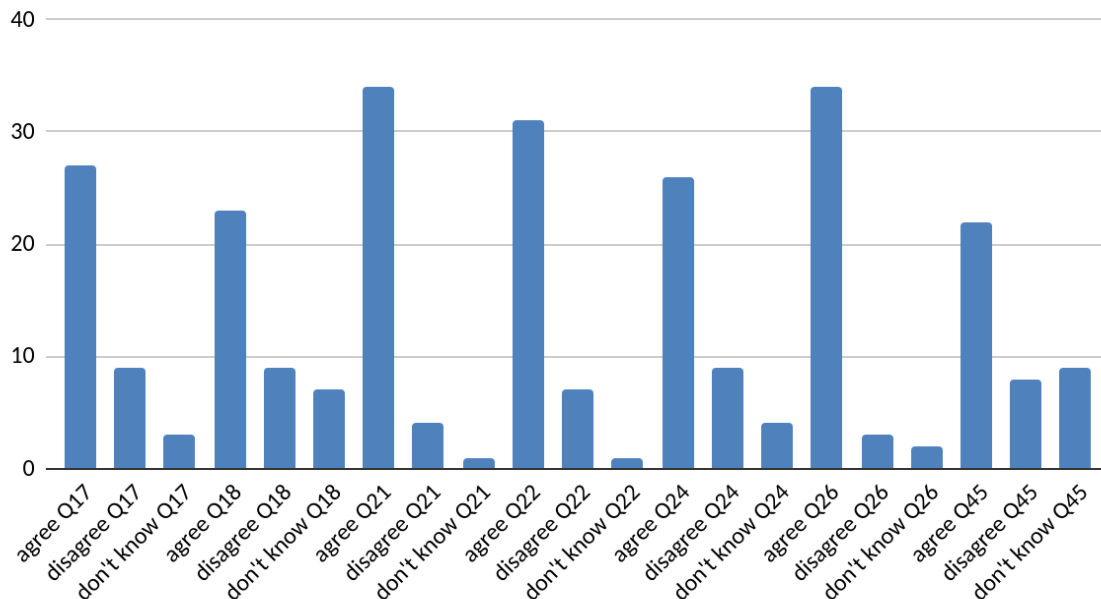
The questions in this theme are: "Q17 Society doesn't value the role of parents enough", repeated from section 4.3; "Q18 Society reveres parents, especially mothers, but doesn't give them enough support" previously in section 4.3; "Q19 Society values being a good worker over being a good person" explored in section 4.4; "Q20 Society values being a good consumer over being a good citizen" discussed in section 4.4; "Q21 Society doesn't value the unpaid work people do in the home. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)"; "Q22 Society doesn't value caring for or raising children"; "Q23 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good person" also in section 4.4; "Q24 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good parent" examined in section 4.4; "Q25 Society places too much importance on money and not enough importance on people" analyzed in section 4.4; and lastly, "Q26 Society places too much importance on paid work and not enough importance on the unpaid work we do to care for our families. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)".

The three new questions related to this theme discussed below concern the specifics of reproductive care and how respondents perceive society does or does not value this form of labor. Answers to these three questions resounding "agree" with each statement and confirm that homeschooling parents are aware that the larger capitalist structure devalues this type of work. To "Q21 Society doesn't value the unpaid work people do in the home. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)", 87% responded "agree" with 10% answering "disagree" and 3% "don't know". "Q22 Society doesn't value caring for or raising children" had similar results with 78% responding "agree", 18% answering "disagree" and 3% "don't know". The final question, "Q26 Society places too much importance on paid work and not enough importance on the unpaid



work we do to care for our families. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)”, mirrored these responses with 87% agreeing, 8% disagreeing and 5% not knowing.

Table 5.0 Respondent's Views on Reproductive Labor



These three new responses and the inclusion of thematically related questions discussed in previous sections, confirms homeschooling parents' perception regarding the devaluation of reproductive labor in the context of a crisis of care. It is a bit more difficult to determine respondent's awareness of the devaluation of reproductive labor within the framework of SRF, but it is clear that respondents they recognize the overall lack of regard the larger society holds for the work of maintaining the individual and family as represented by the unpaid work performed in the home.

#### 4.5.1 How Homeschooling Supports the Value of Reproductive Labor

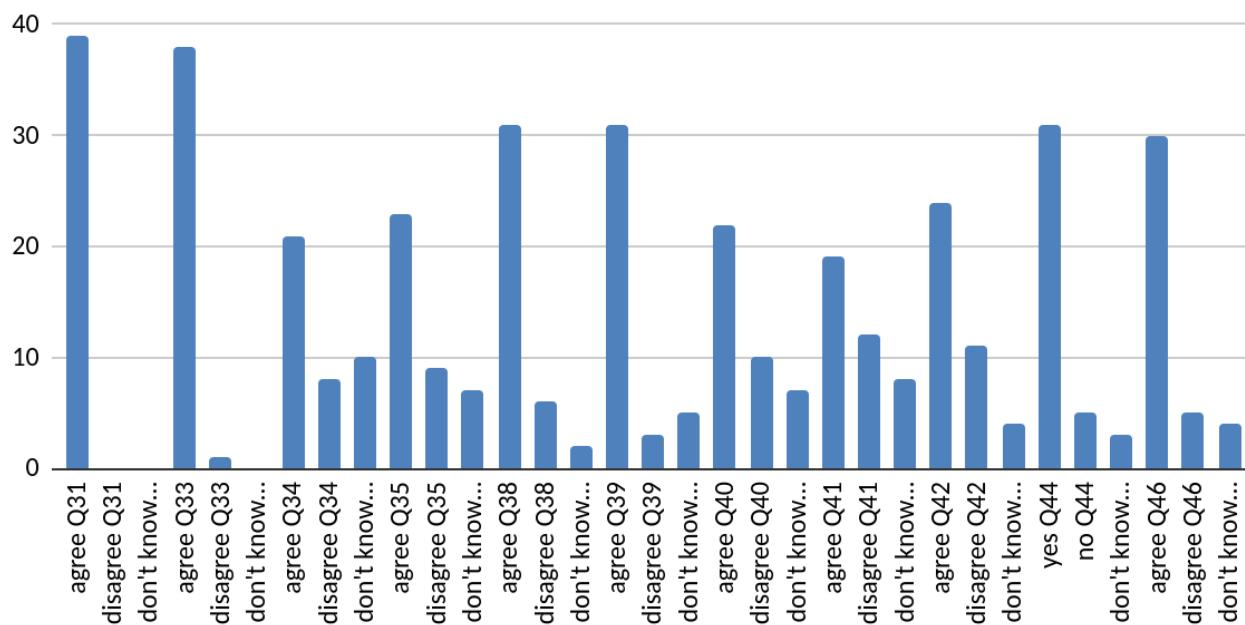
This final section of analysis closes with an exploration of the theme of homeschooling as a response to the devaluation of reproductive labor. This final theme represents the core aim of this research study to examine the decision to homeschooling as a response to the devaluation of reproductive labor as represented by education, family and community ties and family duties in the context of a crisis of care where this devaluation of reproductive labor becomes an acute situation with the potential to undermine the capitalist structure.

Like section 4.5, this section includes both new and previously examined questions, and like the previous section, only new responses will be explored. The thematic questions in this section are: “Q31 Homeschooling allows me to spend more time with my child(ren)”; “Q33 Homeschooling is important to me as a parent”; “Q34 Homeschooling gives me an opportunity to show the value of being a parent to society”; “Q35 Homeschooling allows me to show others how important raising children is”; “Q38 Homeschooling gives me the ability to show my child(ren) that the most important thing is being a good person”; “Q39 Homeschooling is more important to me than paid work” discussed in section 4.4; “Q40 I think being a homeschooling parent is my most important contribution to society”; “Q41 I think being a homeschooling parent restores the value of parenthood”; “Q42 I think being a homeschooling parent gives meaning to my life”; “Q44 I think homeschooling my child(ren) shows them how much I care about them”; and finally, “Q46 I think educating my child(ren) is more important than paid work” previously in section 4.4.

Responses to this line of questioning were more mixed than in previous thematic sections. The first question in this theme, “Q31 Homeschooling allows me to spend more time with my child(ren)”, had a 100.00% response of “agree”. While “Q33 Homeschooling is important to me as a parent”, had 97% of respondents agree and only 3% disagree. The next question, “Q34 Homeschooling gives me an opportunity to show the value of being a parent to society”, saw a lower “agree” rate with 54% agreeing, 20% disagreeing and 26% not knowing. “Q35 Homeschooling allows me to show others how important raising children is” had similar results to Q34 with 59% agreeing, 23% disagreeing and 18% unsure. To “Q38 Homeschooling gives me the ability to show my child(ren) that the most important thing is being a good person”, 80% of respondents agreed, 15% disagreed and 5% did not know. For “Q40 I think being a homeschooling parent is my most important contribution to society”, 56% agreed, 26% disagreed and 18% were unsure. “Q41 I think being a homeschooling parent restores the value of parenthood”, had one of the weakest “agree” rates with only 49% agreeing, 31% disagreeing and 21% not knowing. Second to last question, “Q42 I think being a homeschooling parent gives meaning to my life”, received 62% “agree” responses, 28% “disagree” and 10% “don’t know” answers. The final new question,

“Q44 I think homeschooling my child(ren) shows them how much I care about them” had strong numbers in favor with 80% agreeing, 13% disagreeing and 8% unsure.

Table 6.0 Homeschooling as a Response to the Devaluation of Reproductive Labor



As previously stated, the responses to this line of questioning were more mixed than to previous thematic areas; however, they still show that respondents recognize the value of homeschooling as a counterbalance to socio-economic norms that favor paid labor and consumerism over unpaid labor and family ties. The results for this line of questioning favor the essential argument of this research study in exploring the idea that homeschooling represents an acknowledgement, however subtle, of the devaluation of reproductive labor and reflects attempts to restore value and dignity to that form of work. Homeschooling, as a responsive act within the structure of a capitalist and consumerist focused economic system, is a rejection of the primacy of this structure in the lives of the individual and is a practice which has the ability to counter the economic pressures on social reproductive labor as represented by a crisis of care.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study was commenced with the aim of exploring homeschooling as a profoundly, if unrecognized, feminist response to the devaluation of reproductive labor in the context of a crisis of care and with the theoretical foundation of feminist reproductive theory (SRF). Starting with the introduction, section 1.0, where relevant themes concerning homeschooling were explored, principal among them the ways in which education in general and homeschooling in particular, is a deeply gendered sphere with the vast majority of practitioners being women, this paper examined the ways in which homeschooling is primarily a women's activity and therefore falls under the labels of not only social reproduction and reproductive labor, but also reproductive care as envisioned in the crisis of care framework.

Section 1.3 covered various background factors of homeschooling from its history and the motivations of homeschooling practitioners to how homeschooling is perceived within the larger socio-political context to the inherently gendered nature of education and homeschooling. For the purposes of this paper, expounding on how the literature shows the importance of gender in both the educational and homeschooling spheres is essential for furthering the understanding of how homeschooling is an inherently feminist response to the under- and devaluation of reproductive labor.

To that end, section 2.0 discussed the theoretical framework of this study and defined the term reproductive labor where reproductive labor is any and all work that contributes to the creation and maintenance of people and their social systems. The origins of feminist social reproduction theory (SRF) were explored, as was the relationship between SRF and educational social reproduction theory (SRE). Crisis of care was defined and explained as was its deep relationship to SRF and how the interplay of the crisis of care framework with SRF informs the analytical interpretation of research results in this study. While the methodological slant, covered in section 3.0, focused on survey creation and the qualitative research used to inform the development of the quantitative survey.

Analysis, found in section 4.0, focused on placing the survey's 49 questions in thematically related topics covering demographics, education and homeschooling, respondent perceptions of homeschooling versus traditional education, society and family, the economy and family, the role of reproductive labor and how homeschooling supports the value of reproductive labor. The analysis section also emphasized how the survey results fit into each thematic area and supported the aim of this thesis to understand how homeschooling is a feminist response to the devaluation of reproductive labor in the context of a crisis of care and with an SRF theoretical foundation.

Results from the analysis of survey data per thematic areas shows that respondents are aware of the social reproductive nature of education especially with regards to perpetuation of the capitalist economic structure as understood in SRE (treated as a subfield of SRF). Further, respondents demonstrated an understanding that homeschooling provides a counterweight to this form of social reproduction by offering children and families an alternative to the traditional educational system. While not overt, the role of women as the primary homeschooling parent was subtly clear from the survey responses, especially from the free form "other" responses (see Appendix 2) and this confirms the gendered nature of the homeschooling model as already discussed in the existing literature in sections 1.3.4 and 1.3.5. Lastly, respondent's answers confirm the supposition that they recognize the devaluation of reproductive labor and view homeschooling as a way to show their children the value of this form of labor.

In closing, this study provides a good opening salvo into a new subfield of research into homeschooling, and gives promising initial findings confirming this researcher's supposition that homeschooling reflects a subtly feminist response to the devaluation of reproductive labor in the context of a crisis of care and within the boundaries of both SRF and SRE. While, as discussed below in section 5.1, there is definitely room for further examination of this and related topics, finding that there is such a relationship between society's devaluation of social labor and homeschooling parent's adoption of this educational model as a counterbalance to social norms regarding capitalist and consumerist pressures is exciting for this researcher.

## **5.1 Room for Further Research**

While this study does confirm the researcher's supposition that the move to homeschooling by many parents, especially women, reflects a devaluation of reproductive labor and is a response to a crisis of care, the study sample size is too small to make sweeping and definitive statements. However, this study does show that there is room for further research on this topic and that it is a highly relevant area of research.

While analyzing the results of this study, a number of relevant questions that would add nuance to the issues regarding distinctions between productive (paid) and reproductive (predominantly un/underpaid) labor emerge. Among those that are a relevant addition to future surveys are: (1) are you the primary homeschooling parent; (2) what is the gender of the primary homeschooling parent; (3) is your household two-parent; (4) do you consider yourself to be a working parent (paid labor); and (5) do you consider yourself to be a stay at home parent (not primarily involved in paid work).

Proposed question 1 avoids the issue of distinguishing between the homeschooling and non-homeschooling parent in two parent households where one parent may be performing the bulk of the homeschooling and the other parent is involved in peripheral ways such as helping to supplement with other activities, teaching specific topics or aiding in the selection of educational materials. Like many aspects of the inter relational nature of the family unit, real families have few clear cut binary structures. Similarly, proposed question 2 allows for the possibility of a same-sex couple, while proposed question 3 allows for the possibility of a single parent family, though this is incredibly rare in the homeschooling world. (Watson 2018)

Lastly, while the gendered and heteronormative nature of the homeschooling world is apparent from this study and in discussion of the existing literature, it does of course presents a potential new area of study into homeschooling, the question of men being the primary homeschooler and of single and/or gay men being homeschooling parents. Existing research does not appear to show that there are any gay and/or single men homeschooling and that very few men in heteronormative relationships are the primary homeschooling parent. Are the numbers simply so small that they are not becoming apparent in the research? Or are there truly no single and/or gay fathers homeschooling? (Lois 2012 p 93)

## Appendix 1

### Posted to Facebook

Hello, here's the link to a survey for my master's thesis:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6NGNXTK> . I'm a graduate student at Umea University in Sweden and I'm studying how parents feel being a homeschooler positively contributes to society. The research focus is on how homeschooling can be a reaction against society's emphasis on being a consumer and on earning money. Please feel free to contact me for further information, for the final paper or with any questions at: [alle0054@student.umu.se](mailto:alle0054@student.umu.se).

### Survey Header

Hello, I'm a graduate student at Umea University in Sweden and I'm studying how parents feel being a homeschooler positively contributes to society. The research focus is on how homeschooling can be a reaction against society's emphasis on being a consumer and on earning money. Please feel free to contact me for further information, for the final paper or with any questions at: [alle0054@student.umu.se](mailto:alle0054@student.umu.se).

### Homeschooler Opinion Survey \* indicates a required question

\* Q1 Gender male/female, other

\* Q2 Age

\* Q3 Country

\* Q4 State/Province

\* Q5 Number of Children

\* Q6 Ages of Child(ren) Homeschooling

\* Q7 Are you a first choice homeschooler? (always planned to homeschool) yes/no

\* Q8 Are you a second choice homeschooler? (homeschooling after trying traditional schools) yes/no

\* Q9 Do you homeschool for religious reasons? yes/no, other (please specify)

\* Q10 Do you homeschool for academic reasons? yes/no, other (please specify)

\* Q11 Do you homeschool to meet your child(ren)'s unique academic needs? yes/no, other (please specify)

Q12 If your child(ren) have ever attended traditional schools, why did you switch to homeschooling?  
select all that apply

educational needs

family needs

lifestyle choices

academic problems with the school

behavioral problems with the school

social problems with the school

not enough support for learning issues/styles

not enough support for medical needs

other (please specify)

**Please note:** The following questions (Q13-Q46) have the response value agree, disagree, don't know and other (please specify):

- \* Q13 Society doesn't value family.
- \* Q14 Society doesn't allow for enough family time.
- \* Q15 Society doesn't see the value in family time.
- \* Q16 Society doesn't value community.
- \* Q17 Society doesn't value the role of parents enough.
- \* Q18 Society reveres parents, especially mothers, but doesn't give them enough support.
- \* Q19 Society values being a good worker over being a good person.
- \* Q20 Society values being a good consumer over being a good citizen.
- \* Q21 Society doesn't value the unpaid work people do in the home. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)
- \* Q22 Society doesn't value caring for or raising children.
- \* Q23 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good person.
- \* Q24 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good parent.
- \* Q25 Society places too much importance on money and not enough importance on people.
- \* Q26 Society places too much importance on paid work and not enough importance on the unpaid work we do to care for our families. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)
- \* Q27 The education system trains workers and not citizens.
- \* Q28 The education system focuses too much on our children being future workers.
- \* Q29 The education system doesn't teach children to think critically.
- \* Q30 The education system doesn't allow enough time for family.
- \* Q31 Homeschooling allows me to spend more time with my child(ren).
- \* Q32 Homeschooling allows me to tailor curriculum to fit my child(ren)'s needs.
- \* Q33 Homeschooling is important to me as a parent.
- \* Q34 Homeschooling gives me an opportunity to show the value of being a parent to society.
- \* Q35 Homeschooling allows me to show others how important raising children is.
- \* Q36 Homeschooling gives me the opportunity to show my child(ren) how important family is.
- \* Q37 Homeschooling gives me the opportunity to show my child(ren) how important community is.
- \* Q38 Homeschooling gives me the ability to show my child(ren) that the most important thing is being a good person.
- \* Q39 Homeschooling is more important to me than paid work.
- \* Q40 I think being a homeschooling parent is my most important contribution to society.
- \* Q41 I think being a homeschooling parent restores the value of parenthood.
- \* Q42 I think being a homeschooling parent gives meaning to my life.
- \* Q43 I think being a homeschooling parent is more important than being a good employee.
- \* Q44 I think homeschooling my child(ren) shows them how much I care about them.
- \* Q45 I think being a good parent is more important than being a good employee.
- \* Q46 I think educating my child(ren) is more important than paid work.
- Q47 Is there anything you think should have been asked that wasn't?
- Q48 Is there anything you want to add?
- \* Q49 Do you think this survey is too long? yes/no



## Appendix 2

Free form responses to the “Other” option on the survey. Respondents were able to select one of the supplied answers and other, when available, thus, in many instances, this resulted in more than 39 responses to questions. Where this is the case, these answers are not included in the results in the analysis in section 4.0.

### Q9 Do you homeschool for religious reasons?

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	We are religious but I wouldn't say religion is out primary reason
2	school could not accomodate my childrens' disabilities
3	Better education, I want my children to learn more than what's on a state test

### Q10 Do you homeschool for academic reasons?

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	I taught for 20 years. I enjoy the freedom we have in schedule and can add more fine arts and sports in our day now.
2	Academic as well as social emotional and to be sure our children are taught all the things we want them to learn example history . School is too long . Children have a lot to learn at home
3	In a way- more academic experience

### Q11 Do you homeschool to meet your child(ren)'s unique academic needs?

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Advanced
2	Some
3	I don't think their beds are that unique compared to most kids

### Q 12 If your child(ren) have ever attended traditional schools, why did you switch to homeschooling? select all that apply

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	NA
2	Covid safety
3	Not enough focus on learning through play, almost no time for healthy social interaction, dumb rules that diminished creative thought for the sake of keeping the group orderly.
4	I can only select 1. Academic and extreme safety problems with our district.
5	School lockdown, violent, unsafe conditions
6	Not happy with what is/ isn't being taught in schools
7	School wasn't COVID safe. Masks not required at height of pandemic.
8	We felt God leading us to homeschool.
9	family needs, academic, social and behavioral problems, not enough support for

	dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADHD, kinesthetic learners.
10	Not enough support/learning styles; family needs; educational needs, not enough support for mental health
11	The issues I decided to pull my child out for were: unmet educational needs, lack of support for life threatening medical needs, bullying (by both students and teachers!), and a desire for more family time (which is denied by public school as an excused absence, leading to threats of truancy charges)
12	Pandemic gave us the push to switch to homeschooling.
13	Anxiety, autism, and classrooms don't mix
14	Needs not being met for learning issues. We have social emotional, behavioral and some mental health needs that are best met at home. I could t get it to let me answer more than one
15	There were multiple reasons and why we left public school 13 years ago is different than why we continue to homeschool. Bullying by Peers and teachers, problems with the assistant principal, the emphasis on testing, the lack of proper socialization, the sexualization and objectification of girls by the school and so many more
16	Schools failed to follow IEPs. School admin participated in targeted retaliation against family.
17	Not enough fun!!! Kids don't need to be tortured for 12 years to learn.
18	The school environment was stressful. Kindergarteners put on online learning to meet goals but it didn't actually help their education, behavioral issues in the school that created a stressful environment, learning in a place where code reds were the norm and little kids cried because their non neurotypical classmates couldn't stay quiet- a lot of reasons
19	Standardized testing

### Q13 Society doesn't value family.

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	If it did it would make it more possible for parents and children to spend more time together.
2	it values some types of families but not others
3	I think they do but they misunderstand what that means, eg. "family friendly" policies actually divide families
4	They value it, just not to the same degree we do.
5	I can't answer this because there are many different definitions of a family

### Q14 Society doesn't allow for enough family time.

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics doesn't allow for enough family time.
2	Not for me personally, but for many I believe this is true

### Q15 Society doesn't see the value in family time.

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics doesn't see the value in family time.

2	there isn't a single, common definition of "family time" upon which all of society agrees
3	Again, I think they do but not enough or not in the right way

**Q16 Society doesn't value community.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics doesn't see the value in community.
2	Neutral
3	Differently than we do.

**Q17 Society doesn't value the role of parents enough.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics doesn't value the role of parents enough.

**Q18 Society reveres parents, especially mothers, but doesn't give them enough support.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Society has high expectations of mothers, but I wouldn't say mother's are "revered".
2	Economics through politics blocks support.
3	I agree that mothers aren't given enough support
4	Society does NOT revere parents, least of all mothers, and does not give enough support
5	I don't think society reveres mothers
6	Mother's are not revered if they were they would be supported
7	You can't reverse without supporting

**Q19 Society values being a good worker over being a good person.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics values being a good worker over being a good person.
2	I think this is not as true anymore
3	O really I agree. There are exceptions, but it is a sad reality.

**Q20 Society values being a good consumer over being a good citizen.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics values being a good consumer over being a good citizen.

**Q21 Society doesn't value the unpaid work people do in the home. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics doesn't value the unpaid work people do in the home. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)
2	Highly agree

**Q22 Society doesn't value caring for or raising children.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics doesn't value caring for or raising children.
2	Neutral
3	They do value it but they think one needs professionals to do it
4	I think elderly and disabled adult care also falls under this umbrella.

**Q23 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good person.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics says being a good worker is more important than being a good person.

**Q24 Society says being a good worker is more important than being a good parent.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Society says women need to be both a good worker and a good parent.
2	Economics says being a good worker is more important than being a good parent.
3	They don't say it but they enact policies that show that's what they think.

**Q25 Society places too much importance on money and not enough importance on people.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics places too much importance on money and not enough importance on people.

**Q26 Society places too much importance on paid work and not enough importance on the unpaid work we do to care for our families. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Economics places too much importance on paid work and not enough importance on the unpaid work we do to care for our families. (housework, yardwork, childcare, elder care)

**Q27 The education system trains workers and not citizens.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	We're not using the education system
2	I think there is indoctrination but it is into a certain type of "citizenship"
3	on the fence
4	I couldn't agree more.

**Q28 The education system focuses too much on our children being future workers.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Not users
2	They are training them for something but it is not factory work as it once was

**Q29 The education system doesn't teach children to think critically.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Not until university
2	Individual teachers here or there promote critical thinking and independent thought, but I don't believe it's a tenet of the greater education system.
3	They kill natural curiosity

**Q30 The education system doesn't allow enough time for family.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Parents don't want more family time. The education system is being used to babysit and raise their children.

**Q32 Homeschooling allows me to tailor curriculum to fit my child(ren)'s needs.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Yes, but it doesn't mean that what they need exists

**Q34 Homeschooling gives me an opportunity to show the value of being a parent to society.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Society is immaterial to decision
2	This isn't why I homeschool or a particularly important aspect to me, but it's an absolute byproduct.
3	Homeschooling gives me an opportunity to show the value of being a parent to Economics.
4	I don't homeschool to "show society" anything.
5	I don't think society is paying attention to what I am doing
6	I don't find homeschooling to be a sign of 'better' parenting, but a privileged choice individual to each family.
7	I'm doing it for the benefit of my children not anyone else's approval

**Q35 Homeschooling allows me to show others how important raising children is.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	I don't care about what others think
2	I don't homeschool to "show others" anything.
3	Again, society is not noticing
4	I don't homeschool to show other people anything. I homeschool for my child.

**Q36 Homeschooling gives me the opportunity to show my child(ren) how important family is.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Family would be important regardless

**Q37 Homeschooling gives me the opportunity to show my child(ren) how important community is.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Important regardless
2	This can be accomplished by non-homeschoolers just as easily.

**Q38 Homeschooling gives me the ability to show my child(ren) that the most important thing is being a good person.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Is it the most important thing?
2	That is not my goal in homeschooling.
3	I don't think being a good person is the most important thing

**Q39 Homeschooling is more important to me than paid work.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	Both are possible
2	At this point in my life, being able to work and homeschool is a top priority for me. However, if it came down to it I would value working to provide necessities more than homeschooling.
3	My paid work would be teaching. I don't want to teach in schools now. Homeschooling is not a consideration in my choosing not to get paid to work.
4	I'm very successful in my career and homeschool my kids. I do both and both are important to me and allow me to contribute to society. I'm a psychologist and do research on media effects. I've spoken at the UN, FBI, state department, tons of media interviews etc but I'm also very active in the homeschool community. I run a group and an umbrella school. Both are important

**Q40 I think being a homeschooling parent is my most important contribution to society.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	I think I have more to offer than just that one facet of my life.
2	I teach music to children and I think that is a different but just as important contribution.
3	It's important to raise your children to be happy healthy humans

**Q41 I think being a homeschooling parent restores the value of parenthood.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	It restores it within myself.
2	Some years I also worked while homeschooling. That didn't make me a less valuable parent.
3	Parenthood of all shades is valuable. Families look and operate in many different ways.

**Q42 I think being a homeschooling parent gives meaning to my life.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
-------------	------------------------

1	Sure, some meaning, but I'm now than that
2	Meaning in my life comes from many things, including homeschooling.
3	I believe it is part of God's purpose for my life along with reaching others kids through music
4	It is my current focus, but my life had meaning before homeschooling and will continue to have meaning once I finish.
5	I think it is meaningful work but I wouldn't say it is THE meaning of my life
6	Right now it is a huge portion of my life that affects many aspects, but it's a passing phase, much like college and toddler mom days were.

**Q43 I think being a homeschooling parent is more important than being a good employee.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	You need to be able to provide educational materials, transportation, and food. It is very difficult to be entire "off grid."
2	I think they are equally important, we need income to be able to homeschool our children.
3	It's not an either : or.
4	It depends on the job.
5	Both can be true
6	For me, yes. As a blanket statement, no.
7	Being a good person is more important than any job

**Q44 I think homeschooling my child(ren) shows them how much I care about them.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	I hope it does, but when/if I wasn't homeschooling there were/are plenty of other ways to show how much I care.
2	But there are lots of ways to show this!
3	They may not realize it yet though

**Q46 I think educating my child(ren) is more important than paid work.**

Respondents	other (please specify)
1	This only applies if you have a separate source of income.
2	I believe one supports the other. My paid work gives me the freedom to homeschool my kids.
3	It is possible for our family because I have a working spouse. If we had no income, I wouldn't have the luxury of this opinion.
4	Both are important
5	For me, right now, yes. Not necessarily for every family or for all a child's time in education.

**Q47 Is there anything you think should have been asked that wasn't?**

Respondents	Responses
1	Really horribly phrased prompts

2	maybe HOW we homeschool would be relevant - my family unschooled
3	I think you should explore economics and how it uses politics to pad its profit on the shoulders of the workers and the environment.
4	There is a lot of parents in the United States, perhaps other countries that actively unschool, we do not, preferring a full bodied curriculum and schedule. That may be a question you want to add to get an idea of types of homeschooling education practiced in the home.
5	These questions were too limited to allow me to communicate how homeschooling impacts our life.
6	You are assuming that homeschool parents don't work for pay. Many do. You should have asked that.
7	What convictions drive your homeschool? Are you planning to homeschool throughout the child's education or do you plan to also use other schools?
8	Is your homeschool inclusive of ideas and identities?
9	No
10	No
11	Lots of things but don't know purpose of questionnaire to know which direction to take it

#### Q48 Is there anything you want to add?

Respondents	Responses
1	Texas schools are extremely bad and feel more like a custodial parent/babysitter while parents have to go out and work. I will do my absolute best to never have to send them there. Also with school shootings and constant school standings here it is not a safe institution.
2	I think homeschooling shows children THEIR value in the world!
3	I believe you are conflating society with economics and its influence through politics and media.
4	Public education is not useless, but it is underfunded. Homeschooling isn't for everyone and it's not the only solution. People need access to better public education.
5	I feel like the questions get at an older view of what the schools are doing and what society thinks. Once schools were established to train workers but now they are still indoctrinating children but in different ways, eg. training them to have certain political or societal views.
6	You have asked all the right questions, and just validated my beliefs by giving me a forum to express my beliefs. If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me at [personal information redacted]
7	I feel very privileged to have the choice to homeschool. I think it's important to realize there are many families who would homeschool if they could, and that there are children who need schooling other than homeschool. My choices do not make me a better or more valuable parent than someone who can't or doesn't want to homeschool.
8	No
9	You aren't able to just answer other as an option.
10	Please do not use our answers to make home education look bad. We have enough stereotypes and stigma. We need positivity and appreciation of home education. We aren't religious homeschoolers. We are secular. We aren't all the same or fit in the same box. If you'd like to discuss feel free to call me. [personal information redacted]



11	No
12	Gender. Homeschooling as a mom be as a dad and how we value men working or being a homeschooling dad vs a mom doing either of those options.

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