An Exploratory Study of the Role of Technology in the Rise of Homeschooling

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Albert G. Andrade
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by
ALBERT G. ANDRADE

has been approved for
the Department of Educational Studies
and the College of Education by

__________________________________
Teresa J. Franklin
Associate Professor of Educational Studies

__________________________________
Renée A. Middleton
Dean, College of Education
ABSTRACT

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Director of Dissertation: Teresa J. Franklin

The purpose of the research was to understand the relationship between the advent and wide-scale diffusion of computer and communication technologies and the growth of home education in the U.S. As a qualitative study, 27 practicing and former homeschool parents from the greater Albany, NY region were recruited to participate in five focus group interviews. Questionnaire, one-on-one interview, and participant reflection data were collected, coded, and analyzed as well.

As a group, participants perceived that modern media and internet technologies, along with several confluent social, political, and economic forces had facilitated, and perhaps fuelled, growth in homeschooling in the U.S. Participants felt that access and use of modern technologies had enabled their capacity to educate their children at home. Most participants perceived that modern technologies helped provide the emotional and intellectual capital needed to make the leap to homeschooling.

Results indicated that computer and communication technologies had helped parents lower informational, interpersonal, instructional, and psychological barriers of entry during the process of deliberation leading up the decision to homeschool. Once participants had committed to homeschooling, modern technologies helped them create, access, and sustain communities of practice. In addition, results showed that technology
had helped participants energize latent or percolating ideologies of choice, individualism and parental sovereignty.

Future investigation should broaden the scope of the research to identify and examine the political, social, and cultural forces that, along with modern technology, have enabled the growth in homeschooling the U.S. Future research should aim to validate and extend the findings from this study in an effort to develop an explanatory framework for understanding the modern homeschooling phenomenon.

Approved: __________________________________________________________

Teresa J. Franklin

Associate Professor of Educational Studies
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It seems freedom of choice has become the new law of the educational land (Boyd, 2007; Crowson, 2000; Kafer, 2005; Maeroff, 2003; Tice, Chapman, Princiotta, & Bielick, 2006). From the institution of charter schools and voucher programs (Smarick, 2008), to the diffusion of distance and virtual education (Hickok & Patrick, 2004; Maeroff, 2003; Setzer & Lewis, 2005), from the rise of home education (Bauman, 2005; Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2006; Ray, 2005b) and the apparent re-emergence of free schools (Harman, 2004) and non-profit alternatives (Robb, 2006), to the widening array of programs and services offered by conventional public and private schools (School choices for parents, 2005), not to mention a surging tutoring market (Borja, 2005; Bray, 2006), the range of institutional and instructional alternatives available to parents and children appears to be expanding (Crowson, 2000; Kafer, 2005; Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005).

In comparison to other choice-oriented education reforms and innovations, the home education movement arguably has been the most successful (Bauman, 2002; Crowson, 2000). Figures generated and acknowledged by the U.S. Department of Education (Bi-click, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001; Henke, Kaufman, Broughman, & Chandler, 2000; Lines, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2006), the U.S. Census Bureau (Bauman, 2002), policy institutes (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007; Hill, 2000b; Lyman, 1998), as well as homeschool legal advocates, (Klicka, 2001), researchers (Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Lyman, 2000; McDowell & Ray, 2000b; Ray, 2005b), and critics (Apple, 2005; Reich, 2005) have pointed toward a similar pattern: Since the 1970’s,
homeschooling has become a viable educational alternative for a growing number of families in the U.S.

According to analysis of survey data published by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) (Princiotta et al., 2006), roughly 1.1 million or about 2.2 percent of school age children in the United States were being educated at home as of 2003. Other estimates have set the number of homeschool children slightly higher, at about 1.7 million (McDowell & Ray, 2000b). When weighted, these NCES data represented approximately 50 million students in the U.S. ages 5-17 with a grade equivalent of kindergarten through 12th grade (Princiotta et al., 2006).

During the four year period between 1999 and 2003, the National Household Education Survey Program (NHES) collected nationally representative data that could be used to gauge the prevalence of homeschooling. Using NHES data, the National Center of Educational Statistics found that the number of children educated at home rose 29% (Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2004) from an estimated 850,000 (Bielick et al., 2001). The Department of Education has estimated that home education might be growing ten times as fast as the general school-aged population (Bauman, 2005; Lines, 1999), although growth rates may have leveled off somewhat (Lines, 2003). By the year 2010, some researchers have predicted that the number of home-educated children in the U.S. might reach between two and three million (Lines, 1999; Ray, 2005b).

Besides generating estimates of the prevalence of homeschooling in the U.S., NCES data has helped outline some of the general characteristics of the homeschool population nationally. As of 2003, homeschool children were “more likely to be White (77 percent) and less likely to be Black (9 percent) than were public schooled students
“(61 and 16 percent, respectively)” (Princiotta et al., 2006, p. 8). Homeschooled students “were less likely to be Hispanic (5 percent) than students in either public or private schools (17 percent and 10 percent, respectively)” (p. 8). Homeschool children tended to live in two-parent households, and came from larger families (3 or more children) than families who enroll their children in conventional public and private schools. Most “homeschool students (78 percent) lived in households with an annual income of $75,000 or less, compared to 75 percent for public school students and 50 percent of private school students” (p. 11).

Though under-explored in comparison to other choice-based reforms in education (Archer, 2000; Belfield, 2005; Nemer, 2002b), the research literature on the homeschool movement has grown as its numbers have increased during the past two decades (Lines, 2003; McDowell & Ray, 2000b). Aside from studies based on estimating the number of homeschool children in the U.S. (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Henke et al., 2000; Lines, 1991a, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2006), prior research has examined a range of issues including the demographic profile of homeschool families (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Isenberg, 2002; Lines, 2000a; Montes, 2006), the reasons and motivations families choose home education (Bielick et al., 2001; Lyman, 2005; Nemer, 2002b; Princiotta et al., 2006), as well as the academic achievement (Belfield, 2004; Ray, 2005a; Rudner, 1999) and the social and moral development (Kingston & Medlin, 2006; McDowell, 2004; Medlin, 2000) of homeschooled children.

Observers with reservations about home-based education have registered their concerns in the existing literature as well (Apple, 2000; Franzosa, 1984; Lubienski, 2000; Reich, 2001). Nevertheless, the evidence compiled to date has shown that homeschooling
is “not an ephemeral fad” (Ray, 2005b, p. 15) or a “fringe movement of religious zealots or survivalists who are hostile to public schooling and government” (Levin, 2003, p. ix). Recent data has suggested that it is no longer appropriate or accurate to cast homeschool families as “educational vigilantes” (Richardson & Zirkel, 1991, p. 159). McDowell and Ray (2000b) have found that “Home education is thriving; its ranks are swelling, and its children are flourishing” (p. 1). Some evidence has shown that adults who were educated at home appear to be doing well with a majority of them reporting highly positive attitudes about their homeschooling experiences (Ray, 2004a).

Problem

Despite the research community’s deepening understanding of the size, shape, and character of the homeschool movement, as well as its political underpinnings, observers have admitted that the causes underlying its growth as a viable educational alternative remain unclear (Bauman, 2005; Lines, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2004; Stevens, 2001; VanGalen & Pitman, 1991). Neither the educational community nor the general public has fully grasped what is behind the rise in home education in the U.S. (Bauman, 2005).

Research has revealed some of the specific reasons why a growing number of families are opting out of the conventional school system (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Hill, 2000a; Lines, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 2005b). Concerns about safety, perceptions of low quality schools, preferences for individualized curriculum and instruction, and a desire to incorporate religious instruction into the child’s formal education invariably have bubbled to the top tier of explanations (Bielick et al., 2001; Lines, 1999; Lyman, 2005; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 1999). Yet, existing research has
not sufficiently informed or explained the growth of the homeschooling movement over the past three decades (Bauman, 2005; Princiotta et al., 2006).

Understanding the reasons parents choose to homeschool is one thing. But understanding the social, cultural, economic, geopolitical, and technological forces that might have created the opportunity to make such a choice is another (Apple, 2005; Boyd, 2007; Crowson, 2000; Stevens, 2001). In a call for focused research, Kurt Bauman, a demographer at the U.S. Census Bureau, declared, “our lack of knowledge and concern may be blinding us to one of the most important forces shaping education today – and it is time to make sense of it” (2005, para. 5).

Purpose

The goal of the research was to explore and examine the possible relationship between the diffusion of computer and communication technology and the growth of homeschooling in the U.S. At the heart of the research was the idea that the information age and the further development and diffusion of accelerating technologies might be ushering in a new era of professional and educational options and autonomy (Fletcher, 2006b; Hickok & Patrick, 2004; Kurzweil, 2005; Levin & Arafeh, 2002). As Marshall McLuhan predicted (1956), the walls of the classroom appear to be collapsing under the flood of media and communication technologies.

My objective was to initiate an exploratory study of the forces and conditions that have enabled the growth of home education in the U.S. The research was grounded by the idea that the rise in homeschooling has not been an educational revolution or movement per se (Bauman, 2005; Davis, 2005; Stevens, 2001), but rather a social phenomenon quite possibly brought on by a convergence of several global forces (Apple, Kenway, & Singh,

A prospective framework of such forces might include the rising costs of education (Warren & Tyagi, 2003), the cultural shift toward individualized conceptions of intelligence, learning, and self-fulfillment (Bransford, Brown, & Cockling, 1999; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Ekoko, 2006; Gardner, 1983; Holt, 1981; Perkins, 1995), the opposing politics of private and state-based reforms (Boyd, 2007; Galston, 2006), the changing relationship between individuals and organizations (Malone, 2004; Murnane, 2005; "New Organization," 2006; Pink, 2005b), the evolution of copyright law (Fisher & McGeveran, 2006; Lessig, 2004; Post & Johnson, 2006), or the changing status of women and their shifting perceptions of motherhood (Isenberg, 2002; Stevens, 2001), among other possibilities.

Marking the first step of the investigation, the research singled out the diffusion of computer and media technologies for its possible role in the elevation of homeschooling to the national stage. As Patricia Lines (2003), a former U.S. Department of Education senior researcher, wrote, “To a large extent, homeschooling is a modern movement filling contemporary needs and utilizing modern information technology” (p. 6).

During the research, I did not speculate nor suggest that the diffusion of advanced media technologies like the internet somehow caused or created the homeschooling phenomenon. However, a diverse range of literatures (Anderson & Rainie, 2006; Hickok & Patrick, 2004; Huerta & Gonzalez, 2004; Jackson et al., 2004; Panettieri, 2006; Princiotto et al., 2006; Ray, 1997; Stevens, 2001; "Survey of New Media," 2006; "Tough
Choices," 2007; Wriston, 1992) have pointed to a possible link between the emergence and diffusion of computer and communication technologies and the spread and adoption of homeschooling.

For example, a study conducted by the Department of Education revealed that “41% of the students homeschooled in 2003 had engaged in some sort of distance learning” (Princiotta et al., 2006, p. 18). Mitchell Stevens (2001), a sociologist and Associate Professor at the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University, highlighted access to resources and existing networks of homeschool parents, as a potentially enabling condition for homeschool growth.

In *Strengths of their Own*, Dr. Brian Ray (1997), president of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), suggested that homeschool families seem to qualify as early adopters of new computer technologies. Ray reported that over 83% of children that are educated at home used computers as part of their studies, and that compared to national norms, homeschool families tended to be quicker about equipping their children with advanced technologies.

The results from a number of reports published by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Anderson & Rainie, 2006; Horrigan, 2006; Horrigan & Murray, 2006; Horrigan & Rainie, 2006; Levin & Arafeh, 2002; Madden, 2006) have suggested that the spread and penetration of broadband internet technologies across all regions and populations of the U.S. have helped people make important decisions and cope with “life’s major moments” (Horrigan & Rainie, 2006, p. 1). During the conceptual development of the research, it seemed unlikely that the decision to homeschool would not qualify as one of these moments. Nor did it seem likely that increased access and use
of computer and communication technologies had not played some part in facilitating and perhaps fueling a family’s decision to homeschool. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. In what ways did computer and communication technology influence parents’ decision to homeschool?

2. How did homeschool parents initially perceive of the potential affordances and disaffordances of computer and communication technology as they considered the decision to homeschool?

3. How did families use and depend on computer and communication technologies in practice to enable and sustain homeschooling?

4. How have parents’ perceptions and use of computer and communication technology evolved since deciding to homeschool?

5. In what ways did a desire for greater educational control, autonomy, or freedom enter into parents’ decision to homeschool?

Definition of Terms

The field has defined homeschooling in a variety of ways. Lines (1999) defined it as “the independent education of school-aged children under their parents’ general monitoring that replaces full time attendance at a campus school…most of the child’s educational program is under the direct oversight of parents and includes families who self-identify as homeschoolers, even if they utilize part-time school enrollment” (p. 1). In an abbreviated interpretation, Lyman (2000) defined homeschooling as “the education of school-aged children at home rather than at school” (p. 18). According to Ray (2004a), “homeschooling is the practice of educating children, during what most people call the
elementary and secondary school years, in a learning environment that is home-based and parent-led (or, at least, clearly under the authority of the parents, rather than under the authority of a state-run or private school)” (p. 3).

Researchers at the Department of Education (Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006) qualified previous interpretations by defining the home educated child as an individual between the ages of 5 and 17 years of age whose part-time enrollment in a conventional public or private school does not exceed 25 hours per week. Using earlier NHES and CPS survey data sets, NCES researchers (Henke et al., 2000) set the range to include homeschool children between 6 and 17 years of age. As of 2003, roughly 18% percent of homeschooled children were enrolled in public or private school part time (Princiotta et al., 2006).

Preferences in terminology have varied across the print and electronic media. In 2003, Lines explained, “The term homeschooling is preferred generally by those who practice it, while the research community has preferred the terms home schooling, home-schooling, or home education, but this preference appears to be changing” (p. 1).

Some observers have preferred the term home education over homeschooling as an appropriate label for the independent, home-based, parent-led education Ray (2004a) describes. For Ray, the term home education evokes a clearer reflection of the diversely structured and implemented approaches parents have employed to educate their children at home. For other observers (Lyman, 2000), the term home education captures the distinction between education of the individual child and compulsory state-based schooling. On occasion, the term homeschooling has been used to refer to various
philosophical and practical instantiations of home-based education like unschooling (Holt, 1981) or de-schooling (Illich, 1971).

For purposes of the research, the terms homeschooling or home education were used interchangeably to describe the practice of independent homeschooling monitored primarily by parents, as opposed to various forms of “enrolled home study” (Lines, 2003, p. 1). In contrast with independent homeschooling, enrolled home study is essentially a form of off-campus learning in which students are registered and enrolled in conventional public or private schools and follow a prescribed curriculum and participate in assessments supervised by teachers and administrators (Anderson, 2006; Lines, 2003).

Enrollment in an online or distance education program where the student satisfies program and course requirements from home typically has not been considered as homeschooling by most observers and officials. Homeschooling has not included students who are educated at home because of a temporary illness (less than six months) (Princiotta et al., 2006).

The key difference between the homeschooling described and discussed in the research and contrasting models of home-based education has been that the child’s general instructional program is directed and controlled primarily by parents and occurs independently from the direct oversight of school personnel or state officials. For the typical homeschool student, enrollment in an online course would represent a home-based component of a larger parent-led instructional plan or program. Neither the instructor’s nor the institution’s reach would extend beyond the delivery and administration of the course.
Full time enrollment in an online education program offered by a conventional public or private institution would not be considered homeschooling, even though the student would fulfill the requirements from home or some other off campus setting. In this case, the parents and student would be subjected to and directly accountable for the policies and practices of the instructional provider.

Significance

The sheer size and growth of the homeschool population in the U.S. have underscored its significance as a research topic. Comparisons to other choice-oriented reforms have indicated its significance as well (Tice et al., 2006). Home education is currently legal and practiced in all 50 states in the U.S. (Lines, 2003), whereas charter schools are available at present in only 40 states (Smarick, 2008). By most estimates, the number of home educated children is greater than or about equal to the approximately one million students enrolled in roughly 4,046 charter schools operating across the U.S. (Smarick, 2008).

In addition, homeschool children currently outnumber students participating in other choice-based initiatives like voucher programs, which have impacted only a few thousand students in select urban cities (Gardner, 2000). The growth of home education has outpaced student enrollment in private schools, which according to U.S. Census Bureau and Department of Education data has remained relatively flat (Bauman, 2005; Tice et al., 2006).

Further comparisons have indicated that homeschooling is on the rise elsewhere in countries such as New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the U.K. and South Africa (Beck, 2004; Klicka, 1997; Taylor & Petrie, 2000; Vynnycky, 2003), as well as in Mexico,
Canada and Germany (Ray, 1999). These and other findings have suggested that the rise in home education should be viewed as a social phenomenon that is playing out on a national and global scale (Frey, 2000; Stevens, 2001).

Aside from its growth in terms of the numbers of students involved, the study of homeschooling is significant in that it seems to have diffused on a larger scale than other educational reforms (Bielick et al., 2001; Lines, 1999). As a result, the growth of home education might have greater immediate impact on educational practices and force organizational changes in existing school systems (Bauman, 2002). Some observers (Hill, 2000a; Lines, 1999), have predicted that homeschooling might possess greater long-term potential to create new educational forms and institutions (Bray, 2006; Hill, 2000a; Huerta & Gonzalez, 2004; Lines, 2000b) than other educational innovations.

In a paper written for the National Center for the Study of Privatization of Education, former University of California professor Kariane Nemer (2002b) argued that further study of the homeschool movement might provide “insights for cognitive psychologists interested in families who adhere to child-centered or ‘unschooling’ (see Holt, 1981) approaches to learning” (p. 1). Nemer added, “Further research might also inform curriculum developers interested in learning how homeschool parents tailor lessons to meet the individual needs of each of their children, and scholars focused on policy and market-based reforms” (p. 1).

Audience

The research was intended for a range of audiences including educators, scholars, policy makers, and parents. If the number of children educated at home continues to grow, pressure on superintendents, principals, and teachers to understand and perhaps
develop new relationships with parents to accommodate homeschool children is likely to mount (Anderson, 2006; Bauman, 2005; Lines, 2003; Marean, Ott, & Rush, 2005). Likewise, as home educated students prepare and apply for admission to colleges and universities in increasing numbers (Belfield, 2005; Ray, 2004b; Zehr, 2006), similar pressures should be expected at the undergraduate level.

The research was intended to inform the political arena as well. Across the nation, many policymakers and public officials have become sensitive to the political influence of the relatively small but well-organized constituency of homeschool parents (Cibulka, 1991; McDowell & Ray, 2000b; Stevens, 2001). Understanding the underlying technological forces of the homeschool phenomenon will help to inform “policymakers and administrators who may be thinking about offering resources to support a potentially new and revolutionary trend toward partnership-building between home-based education and schools” (Lines, 2003, p. 1).

With at least one million children receiving their education at home, the general public has become increasingly aware of home education as an alternative to conventional public or private schooling (Basham et al., 2007). Findings from a 2006 Harris Poll survey found that about one-third of U.S. adults know someone who educates their child (or children) at home (Harris Poll, 2006). The research promises to help orient parents to the current homeschool phenomenon by placing it in a broader social context.

Finally, the intended audience included scholars and researchers interested in school reform and the inherent tensions between state and private education. There is still much to be learned about the home education phenomenon (Bauman, 2005). The research contributed to the existing literature by studying individuals living and working in an
increasingly global and connected society, who have made the decision and commitment to educate their children at home.

Methods

Because of the theory-building nature of the research, the proposed study was based on a constructivist research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994), and emphasized the theoretical and methodological perspectives of the qualitative research tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). To explore the role that computer and communication technologies might be playing in the rise of home education, questionnaires, focus group and one-on-one interviews were employed as central data collection methods. Five focus group interviews and six one-on-one interviews were conducted. Analysis involved a recursive process of coding, grouping and sorting, and integration (Spradley, 1979) of the questionnaire, focus group, and interview data.

In keeping with current conventions, (Hollander, 2004; Kitzinger, 1995; Reed & Payton, 1997), analysis of the focus group data involved an examination of the interactional and social dynamics of participants in each of the groups. An examination of the psychological, emotional, and philosophical change processes that participants experienced as they considered their decision to educate their children at home was conducted as part of the focus group and interview data analysis (Lawson, 1999).

Participants

A group of 27 former and practicing homeschool parents representing six self-organizing and self-regulating homeschool organizations active in and around the greater Albany, New York region were recruited as the primary informants for the study. Each of the homeschool groups varied in size, character, and philosophical and pedagogical
focus. Two of the groups I contacted were more religiously oriented and structured, while the others evolved as loosely bound, consensus based networks of families with an eclectic mix of religious, pedagogical, and social inclinations. Each of the groups emerged and developed as voluntary grassroots networks of individuals who freely had sought and associated with practicing homeschool parents for support and guidance.

Participants were recruited on the basis of their willingness to volunteer and discuss their homeschooling experiences. Despite the decentralized character of the general homeschool population (Hill, 2000a; Nemer, 2002b), participants were selected through a purposive sampling process (Merriam, 1988; Morgan, 1998b). The aim of the participant selection process was to assemble a group of homeschool parents that reflected the increasingly diversified character, views, and motivations of the larger homeschool community (Bauman, 2005; Lines, 2000a; Princiotta et al., 2006).

Limitations

The research was limited somewhat by the lack of racial and ethnic minorities and male homeschoolers recruited for participation. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the limitation did not impact the fielding or the outcome of the research. Nevertheless, gaining access to homeschool groups and individuals was a challenge during the recruitment process.

Unlike typical education-based research in which an investigator can seek and recruit a satisfactory number of participants from one or an aggregate of school or classroom settings, locating and assembling the sample of homeschool parents involved an extended process of making connections and gaining the trust of individuals spread out across a range of relatively private and autonomous home education communities and
households. Definitive lists of home educators in any given region (including Albany, NY) do not exist (Lines, 2000a).

Self-selection and the wariness of some home educators of state agencies, government-sponsored programs, and researchers somewhat limited my capacity to recruit a group of former and practicing homeschool parents that genuinely reflected the population of homeschoolers nationwide (Hill, 2000a; Lines, 2003; Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995; Yeager, 1999).

**Delimitations**

Issues of representation did not necessitate a broader state-wide, national or international search for participants. The research was situated and bound to the greater Albany, New York region. Limiting recruitment of participants to the practicing and former homeschool parents in the greater Albany area was appropriate given the exploratory goals and objectives of the study, the demographic profile of the population in the Albany area, and the wide range of public and private educational choices available to school-aged children in the region. The findings were associated with the current cultural, social, and political context of the area studied and were not generalizable to the larger homeschool population.

The scope of the study was not intended to gauge or inform directly issues concerning the prevalence of home education. Nor did the research seek to further examine and expand prior research concerning the characteristics and demographics of the home education population. The aim was to discuss and explore questions concerning a possible relationship between computer and communication technologies and the rise in home education with a relatively small group of experienced homeschool parents as an
approach to understanding the underlying forces that might be enabling and perhaps driving the home education phenomenon.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Prior to the early to mid-1990’s, little nationally representative data on home education existed (Bielick et al., 2001). Early efforts to estimate the growth and character of the home education movement across the U.S. involved triangulating a variety of research methods including the collection of survey data from homeschool organizations and curriculum suppliers; review and analysis of state education agency databases where parents had filed papers to local officials; and the collection of information from homeschool leaders and state officials (Lines, 1991a).

In comparison to other choice-based reforms, nationally representative research on home education has remained relatively limited (Belfield, 2005; Levin, 2003; Nemer, 2002b). Although, as the home education movement has grown during the past two decades, so has the research literature (Lines, 2003; Ray, 2004a). To date, several nationally representative studies have been conducted by researchers interested in understanding and explaining the rise of home education in the U.S. (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Lines, 1991a, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2006).

Studies sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006) used nationally representative data collected in 1996, 1999, and 2003 as part of the National Household Education Survey (NHES) Program to estimate the prevalence, general characteristics, and motivations of the homeschool movement in the U.S. Other U.S. Department of Education studies (Lines, 1991a, 1999) analyzed an aggregate of data collected from State Education Agencies (SEAs) with information about parents who had filed papers directly to an SEA or to local education

Resources

Review of the literature for this proposal began with the collection of articles, reports, and commentaries that followed the release of an issue brief published by NCES in 2004 entitled “1.1 Million Homeschooled Students in the United States in 2003” (Princiotta et al., 2004). A subsequent search of the U.S. Department of Education and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) databases for home education resources was conducted. I relied on three edited volumes on home education (Cooper, 2005; McDowell & Ray, 2000a; VanGalen & Pitman, 1991) as primary sources to frame historical, contextual, and theoretical issues. The fourteenth edition of an annotated bibliography on home education produced by Dr. Brian Ray (2005a), president of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), was used to guide and refine the selection of relevant sources.

This review was derived from research reports, policy papers, and conference presentations collected from a variety of print and online sources, including the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), The Future of Freedom Foundation (FFF), The Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), The Brookings and Cato Institutes, The Heritage Foundation, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University, the center for Civic
Innovation at the Manhattan Institute, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Center for Study of the Privatization of Education at Teachers College at Columbia University, The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School, and the Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Discussions concerning the prevalence and general profile of the home education population drew primarily from the most recent nationally representative studies (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Henke et al., 2000; Lines, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2006). Related studies, reports, and reviews to situate questions concerning the role of computer and communication technology and the rise in home education in historical, global, and legal context were also cited.

Caveats

Self-selection of the sample group was an issue common to many of the survey-based studies on home education (Lines, 2003). By definition, home education has included families who self-identify and report to officials and researchers as homeschool families, even if they are enrolled part-time in a state or private school program (Lines, 1999). According to Patricia Lines (2003), former senior research analyst at the U.S. Department of Education, “most surveys will sample lists from an association, a magazine’s subscription list, or a list of those who have filed papers with a state or local education agency. This limits much of the extant survey-based research to homeschoolers who have done something that will put their name on a list” (p. 9).

Readers should note that no national or state list of homeschool children exists (Lines, 2003), which Reich (2005) argued has contributed to the rather imprecise estimates concerning the prevalence and growth of home education population. As a
result, data on homeschool families in many states has not accounted for all
homeschooled children (Lines, 1999). In some cases, a state’s compulsory education laws
may not have applied to a particular child (e.g. a child has not yet reached, or is beyond,
compulsory school age). In other cases, a state constitutional or statutory provision may
have excused families that homeschool on the basis of religion from reporting to a state
or local official (Lines, 2003; Reich, 2001).

In addition, private school laws in some states may not have required homeschool
families to provide documentation (Lines, 1999). Studies commissioned by the Home
School Legal Defense Association (Ray, 1997) revealed that about 63% of respondents in
a nationwide survey of home educators reported they had not filed any kind of paperwork
with state or local officials (Lines, 1999). The wariness of some home educators of state
agencies, government-sponsored programs, and researchers (Hill, 2000a; Lines, 2003;
Mayberry et al., 1995; Yeager, 1999) has contributed to the self-selection issue. Some
homeschool parents have been especially opposed to government-sponsored inquiry and
research (Kaseman & Kaseman, 1991; Lines, 2003; Mayberry et al., 1995).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the research to date has not distinguished between
independent home education and enrolled home-based education (Lines, 2003). Enrolled
home-based education typically has involved full-time enrollment in a state or private
school with some portion of the learning taking place off-campus (Lines, 2003). A
percentage of the existing data on homeschooling might have included a subset of
children who qualify as enrolled home-based learners.

A tendency for some homeschool children to shift between home education and
conventional public and private schools as family circumstances and academic goals
change over time has contributed to the some variance in homeschool statistics (Bauman, 2005). Roughly half of homeschool families with more than one child report that they sent some of their children to a regular public or private school, and one out of five homeschool children attended school part-time (Bauman, 2005).

Research has indicated that the majority of children are educated at home, on average, for 1 to 2 years (Bauman, 2005; Lines, 1999). Reporting slightly higher figures, Ray (1999) found that the average between 3 to 4 years. Turnover of children between educational institutions and the home from year to year has helped contribute to the lack of statistical precision.

Critical Review

*Prevalence*

The research focused on the observed and documented prevalence and growth of home education in the U.S. during the past thirty years (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Lines, 1991b; Princiotta et al., 2006).

Different research methods have produced different estimates (Lines, 1999). Paul Hill (2000a), a research professor at University of Washington’s Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs and director of the Center of Reinventing Public Education, noted that facts about homeschooling can be hard to come by. In Hill’s opinion, prior to studies conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006), the best estimates of the homeschool population were conducted by Lines (1999) and by Bruno and Curry (1997).

For estimates that have aimed to include the population of homeschool families who do not file papers with state or local education agencies, readers should review
research conducted by Brain Ray (1997), president of the National Home Education Research Institute, for the period prior to the NCES studies.

Retroactive studies conducted in 1988 suggested only 10,000 to 15,000 students were schooled at home as of the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, figures which closely mirrored estimates made by educational reformer and homeschool advocate John Holt (Lines, 1999). As of 1978, almost 100 percent of school children ages 6-18 were in institutional schools, with 88% of those students attending public schools (Ray, 1999).

By 1983, estimates of the number of children educated at home nationwide ranged from 60,000 to 125,000 (Lines, 1999). Five years later, the figures suggested that the population of homeschoolers in the U.S. had grown to 150,000 to 300,000 (Lines, 1999). By the fall of 1990, estimates of homeschooled children had expanded to 250,00 to 350,000 (Lines, 1999). Ray (1999) arrived at a higher estimate of about 400,000 for the same period.

Between 1990-1995, estimates of the homeschool population doubled, and perhaps tripled, from roughly 250,000 to 350,000 to 700,000 to 750,000 highlighting a growth rate of 20 to 25% (Lines, 1999). Ray’s (1997) totals for that period ranged from 700,000 to 1.1 million. For the remainder of the 1990’s, the number of children educated at home continued to rise at a rate of 7-15% per year (Bauman, 2001; Bielick et al., 2001; Lines, 1999). By 1999, Ray’s estimates of homeschool children in the U.S. rose to roughly 1.5 million (1999). Lines (1999) predicted a more modest figure that year of about one million. In 2001, The Department of Education and the U.S. Census Bureau analyzed nationally representative data and found that the number of homeschooled
children in the U.S. was somewhere between 850,000 (Bielick et al., 2001) and 790,000 (Bauman, 2002).

Subsequent study and analysis (Bauman, 2005; Henke et al., 2000; Princiotta et al., 2006) have suggested that Ray’s estimates might have been inflated somewhat. As of 2003, NCES reported 1.1 million, or 2.2% of the population of school-aged children nationwide were being educated at home (Princiotta et al., 2006). The NCES figure excluded children enrolled for more than 25 or more hours per week in a public or private school and children who were educated at home temporarily because of illness (Princiotta et al., 2006).

Alongside a general concurrence about its growth, some researchers (Bauman, 2005; Hill, 2000a) expect the growth of homeschooling to reach a saturation point eventually. Researchers have pointed out that no data exists to suggest where that saturation point might be. There has been some speculation that public receptivity will factor into its rate of growth (Belfield, 2005; Lines, 2003). But given the trajectory of its growth during the past two decades, Bauman (2005) cautioned there should be no expectation that the home education movement will recede as a viable educational option for many families.

Profile

For purposes of the research, it was important to consider the ways in which computer and communication technologies might be perceived and explored as a form of social glue binding a growing and increasingly diverse and population of homeschool families together (Fletcher, 2006b; Hickok & Patrick, 2004; "Survey on Media," 2005).
In general, the political, socio-economic, and religious profile of families who have educated their children at home are not remarkably different from their peers who have sent their children to public or private schools (Bauman, 2005; Belfield, 2005; Isenberg, 2002; Lines, 2003; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 2005b; Reich, 2005). “It would be a mistake to stereotype homeschoolers. They include the full range of American society” (Lines, 2003, p. 10). At all grade levels and across all groups, homeschooling rates have increased (Princiotta et al., 2006). Although the face of the homeschool movement appears to be changing (Taylor, 2005), some characteristics have tended to set the homeschool population apart from the broader population of families with school-aged children (Lines, 2003).

**Demographic**

Overall, homeschool families have been pro-education, civic-minded, and socially active members of their communities (Lines, 1994b, 2000a; McDowell, 2004). They have tended to be non-Hispanic white, middle-class families. Some observers have proposed that the racial characteristics of the homeschool population may be changing (Bauman, 2005; Lines, 2003). There has been some suggestion of a trend toward an increase of home education in minority and single-parent households (Apple, 2006; Princiotta et al., 2006; Taylor, 2005; Zehr, 2005). The literature has indicated that homeschooling may be spreading to households with parents who have earned advanced levels of education and specialized training (Pannapacker, 2005; Tice et al., 2006).

“Homeschool families tend to live outside of the northeastern region of the U.S. in communities with low child poverty and relatively few minority neighbors” (Montes, 2006, p. 16). Families with three or more children have been more likely to homeschool
than smaller families (Bauman, 2002; Henke et al., 2000; Princiotta et al., 2006). In most cases, the mother has been the one who assumed and managed most of the teaching load (Stevens, 2001).

Homeschooling has occurred at higher percentages in households headed by two parents than it has in single parent homes (Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 1999), especially in households with one working parent (Bauman, 2002; Princiotta et al., 2006). As Bauman (2002) explained, “having a non-working or partially employed parent at home might present a possible limitation to the future growth of home education, though this constituency of families is far from exhausted” (p. 10). Nevertheless, Bauman went on to say that less than 10% of homeschool children live in households with both parents working full-time.

The literature has shown that homeschool families tend to be well-educated and economically secure (Bauman, 2005; Belfield, 2005; Henke et al., 2000; Princiotta et al., 2006). Students in households with at least one parent with a postsecondary education were more likely to be homeschooled than students in households with parents’ whose highest level of educational attainment was a high school diploma or less (Bielick et al., 2001; Pannapacker, 2005; Tice et al., 2006). Yet, recent data has indicated a rise in home education in households where parents earned a high school diploma or less (Princiotta et al., 2006).

According to Montes (2006), the demographics between younger and older students is almost indistinguishable across all characteristics except for the disability rate. Montes found that younger homeschool students are one fourth less likely to be reported as having a disability. In addition, his research has revealed that “younger homeschoolers
are almost twice as likely to live in urban communities, and older home educated children are more likely to live in rural communities” (p. 13). An increase in home education was also observed in the sixth through eighth grade levels between 1999 and 2003 (Princiotta et al., 2006).

Motivations

Since the early 1990’s, there has been some inclination across the literature to categorize homeschool parents broadly as either religiously and philosophically motivated “ideologues” or academically motivated “pedagogues” (VanGalen, 1991). As described by Kinston and Medlin (2006), the ideologues have tended to “embed their child’s education within a particular framework of political, religious, or philosophical values and beliefs, and the term pedagogues has been used to characterize parents who are critical of the quality of public education and are motivated to provide the highest quality education possible for their children” (p. 1). In an effort to understand the underlying tensions in parents’ decisions to homeschool, Nemer (2002a) broadened these categories in her discussion to capture the autonomous- vs. civic-minded motivations of homeschool parents.

Kingston and Medlin (2006) introduced a “socio-relational” (p. 1) category of motivations. The addition of a socio-relational category was intended to capture parents’ motivation “to nurture their children’s social development and promote close family relationships” (p. 1). Studies have shown that families are motivated to homeschool for a variety of reasons (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006). In general, the research has indicated that the specific reasons parents give for homeschooling tend
to derive from a mix of pedagogical, ideological, and socio-relational motivations (Kingston & Medlin, 2006).

According to Bauman (2002), “no simple division exists between religiously motivated and academically motivated parents” (p. 14). Analysis from the 1996 and 1999 National Household Education Surveys (Bauman, 2002; Montes, 2006) suggested that parents’ attitudes about regular schools is a better indication of where the motivational division lies. As Bauman (2002) has argued, “If there are two classes of homeschoolers, they differ mostly in terms of the degree to which they express negative attitudes toward the schools that are available to them now” (p. 14).

Even so, review of the literature has indicated that parents decide to homeschool for a variety of reasons (Lines, 2003; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 2005a). Negative perceptions about the lack of safety in schools, concerns over the quality of teaching and curriculum, and the moral and ethical climate in schools have been commonly identified as animating influences on parents’ motivation to homeschool.

Nationally representative data has shown that over 50% of homeschool families surveyed believe they can do a better job of educating their children than the existing school system (Bauman, 2002). Figures from the U.S. Department of Education appeared to affirm the idea that a combination of concerns about the school environment and the quality of instruction weighed heavily in the decisions to homeschool for many parents (Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006).

In contrast, Reich (2005) has argued that the reasons families decide to homeschool go deeper than concerns about the quality of public schooling. “The availability of high-quality public schools would not motivate the vast majority of
homeschool families to send their children into public schools; to say that people need permission to homeschool because the public schools are woeful is a red herring” (p. 110). Stevens (2001) discovered that many families choose to homeschool for ideological reasons or to provide specialized care or instruction for children with specific problems.

Contrary to previous observations (Mayberry et al., 1995), recent studies (Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006) have indicated that only about one third of homeschool families report that they homeschooled primarily for religious reasons. References to prior survey data (Mayberry et al., 1995) showed that “homeschool families were more than twice as likely as the national population to attend church or to say that religious commitment was very important” (Lines, 2003, p. 11). Further down the list, many parents have chosen to homeschool to address the special needs of the child, encourage family unity, or pursue individualized instruction (Princiotta et al., 2006).

NCES studies conducted in 1999 and 2003 have shown virtually no changes in the basic reasons why families homeschool. Some researchers (Kingston & Medlin, 2006; Montes, 2006) have found that the motives for home education tend to evolve over time and may differ across ages groups. Montes (2006) reported that younger students are “twice as likely to be homeschooled because of parental objections to what the school teaches in K-3” (p. 13), and that “younger students are three times more likely to be homeschooled to develop character and morality” (p. 13).

Lifestyle

For a growing number of parents, the motivation to homeschool was not driven centrally by religious or educational ideology (Conlin, 2006; Kingston & Medlin, 2006;
Pannapacker, 2005). Attitudes about how to raise and unify a family (Kingston & Medlin, 2006; Stevens, 2001), along with concerns about anachronistic practices and policies at even the best-endowed schools (Conlin, 2006; Florida, 2005) have become motivating influences for some homeschool families. In 2003, Lines reported that both religiously and academically motivated parents “all hoped to spend more time with their children” (p. 6).

According to Pannapacker (2005), well educated parents with secure, yet relatively medium incomes, seem to be opting for more modest lifestyles in relatively affordable regions of the country in order to homeschool their children. In his discussion on the strength of family-oriented motivations Stevens (2001) explained, “time and again, parents told me that their child’s self-development was worth virtually any sacrifice…careers suspended, incomes cut, houses left uncleaned or unfixed, adult social lives curtailed dramatically, all in the interest of giving more to the kids” (p. 7).

Historical Context

The re-emergence of family-oriented home-based schooling in the U.S. observed during the 1960’s and 70’s occurred decades before the advent and growing ubiquity of modern desktop computing and internet communication era (Stevens, 2001). The literature has pointed to a range of social, economic, and political forces that might have set the stage for the rise in home education observed during the dawning of the internet era during the 1990’s.

As pointed out by several observers of the homeschool movement (Hill, 2000a; Ray, 2005b; Reich, 2001), home-based education is not a new approach to education in “religiously pluralistic” (Carper, 2000, p. 8) colonial America. During the pre-industrial
era in the United States, private and home schools were the primary methods of educating children until calls for the common school during the 1840’s and the emergence of compulsory education laws began to pave the way for the institution of a national state-sponsored education system (Burkard & O'Keefe, 2005; Carper & Hunt, 2007; Richman, 1994; Rothbard, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1996; West, 1965/1994).

Throughout the pre-industrial period, the family was considered as the “primary unit of social organization and the most important educational agency” (Carper, 2000, p. 9). With few exceptions, parents provided an education for their children that reflected their religious beliefs (Cremin, 1970). Parents generally viewed early formal schooling arrangements with churches, local communities and governments, and voluntary associations as “extensions of the household that would reinforce their educational efforts” (Carper, 2000, p. 12).

During the middle and late decades of the 19th century, home education had virtually vanished in the U.S. (Carper, 2000). By 1890, about 86% of children 5-14 years of age attended public schools, and the other 11% went to private schools (Carper, 2000). The early history of the institution of public schooling in the U.S. has been well documented (Carper & Hunt, 2007; Cremin, 1970; Rothbard, 1974; Tyack, 1974; West, 1965/1994, 1975; Young & Block, 1999). A review of this history essentially has shown that by the beginning of the twentieth century, home education in the U.S. had been greatly marginalized by “forces of urbanization, immigration, and industrialization, energized by the values of capitalism, Protestantism, and republicanism” (Carper, 2000, p. 12).
Educational historians (Cremin, 1970; Rothbard, 1974; Tyack, 1974; West, 1965/1994) along with observers and researchers of home education (Apple, 2005; Carper, 2000; Lines, 1999; Lyman, 2000; McDowell & Ray, 2000b; Princiotto et al., 2006; Reich, 2001; Stevens, 2001) have acknowledged that the modern homeschooling phenomenon in the U.S. is rooted in the country’s religious, social, and political history. James Carper (2000), an associate professor of educational history at the University of South Carolina, discussed the role of the Protestant church in supporting the political shift from family-oriented education toward the institution of national state-sponsored schooling during the 19th century, a role which Carper has argued spurred the re-emergence of home-based education during the 1960’s.

In Carper’s view, “Protestants generally approved of early public schooling because it reflected Protestant beliefs and was viewed as an integral part of a crusade to fashion a Christian – which, to the dismay of the Roman Catholics meant Protestant – America” (p. 12). In what Carper saw as a political maneuver, “the Protestant church allied with Unitarian reform leaders like Horace Mann in hopes for a Protestant Kingdom of God in America with a new established church – the common schools” (p. 13).

By the middle of the 20th century, conservative Protestants found themselves increasingly at odds with the public education institutions they had supported nearly a century earlier (Stevens, 2001). Carper (2000) added that for many religious conservatives, “state schools had become neutral on religious matters and had established secular humanism as the official creed of American education” (p. 16).

In a shift that set the stage for the modern homeschool movement, conservative Protestants of the 1960’s began to seek and embrace family and home-based educational
arrangements of the pre-industrial era as an alternative to a public education system they had once supported (Carper & Hunt, 2007; Stevens, 2001). Commenting on pre-1960’s homeschooling Lines (1991b) added that “homeschoolers were largely limited to those who were geographically isolated, traveling or stationed abroad, and those who undertook home schooling because of religious tradition” (p. 11).

Research conducted by Mitchell Stevens (2001) corroborated and built on Carper’s historical summary of the homeschool movement. As discussed by Stevens, the modern homeschool phenomenon is rooted in two social and cultural movements of the 1960’s. The first can be traced back to various liberal reforms in education guided by the progressive ideas of individuals like John Holt, Ivan Illich, Bill Ayers, Paul Goodman, Marshall McLuhan, and others (Skinner, 2005). The second branch of the homeschool movement emerged from the galvanization of Christian-based organizations and networks with strong beliefs against what was viewed as a steady shift in state-sponsored schools toward secular humanism and the erosion of family life (Lyman, 2000; Stevens, 2001).

Michael Apple, professor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Educational Policy at the University of Wisconsin, has written about the larger historical and social backdrop within which the modern home education movement is set (Apple, 2000, 2005). In Apple’s view, the growth of homeschooling reflects a shift in educational and social policy that has been fueled by “years of well funded, creative, ideological efforts by the right to form a broad-based coalition” (2005, p. 78). According to Apple, the coalition’s aim is one of ‘conservative modernization’ in which democracy has been reduced to
consumption practices, and citizenship has been reduced to possessive individualism; and a politics based on resentment and fear” (p. 78).

Global Context

For purposes of the research, it was important to situate the modern homeschooling phenomenon in a global context (Apple et al., 2005; Barbules & Torres, 2000; Billups, 2000; Hickok & Patrick, 2004; Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; "Survey of Higher Education," 2005). The entry point for exploration into the research questions rested on previous observations and opinions suggesting that the dramatic growth in the modern homeschool movement, since the early 1990’s in particular, have coincided with and perhaps have been enabled by the advent of the internet era (Farris & Woodruff, 2000; "George Bush's Secret Army," 2004; Lines, 2003; Pink, 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 1997).

As discussed in previous sections, prior research has shown that homeschool parents decide to educate their children at home for a variety of reasons. But the underlying motivations that may be driving parents’ decisions to homeschool have yet to be examined fully through a broader global lens. To date, there has been little direct evidence available to explain the underlying causes in the rise of home education in the U.S. (Bauman, 2005; Princiotta et al., 2006).

However, a sweeping view of broad social, economic, and technological trends suggested that the forces facilitating and perhaps driving the modern home education movement might be more global than local, and more rational than ideological or political (Davidson & Rees-Moog, 1997; Florida, 2005; Friedman, 2005; Malone, 2004;
Bauman (2005) commented, “the meteoric growth of homeschooling is an expression of parents’ anxiety about changes in the broader world and the world of education. One parent starts homeschooling just as another might seek a better neighborhood, influence over school policies, or pay money for tutoring, SAT preparation, and private schools” (para. 7). Lines adds, “home education is a modern movement filling contemporary needs and utilizing informational technology” (Lines, 2003, p. 6). The following sections introduce some of the ways in which globalization generally and information technology specifically might be animating and affecting parents’ inclinations and capacity to homeschool.

**Competitive Unreadiness**

It seems that many politicians, industry leaders, and parents who are working, living, and raising families in the information and internet era have sensed that education is not ready for the 21st century (Casner-Lotto & Benner, 2006; Fletcher, 2006a; Florida, 2005; Friedman, 2005; Hoff, 2006; Honey, Fasca, Gersick, Mandinach, & Sinha, 2005; Malone, 2004; Murnane, 2005; Stine et al., 2006; "Tough Choices," 2007). In an interview for BusinessWeek, Richard Florida, Hirst Professor at George Mason University’s School of Public Policy and author of *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent* remarked, “everyone’s talking about how today’s schools aren’t the right institutions anymore” (Conlin, 2006, para. 8).

During a widely publicized and cited speech delivered in February 2005 at the National Education Summit on High Schools, Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft, raised
concerns about students’ competitive unreadiness to the national level with his declaration that, “America’s schools are obsolete” (Gates, 2005, para. 11). A week later, CNET news reported that Intel Senior Vice President Pat Gelsinger also worried aloud about the quality of public schooling during a panel discussion with technology leaders at the annual Intel Developer Forum 2005. “We have a lousy education system…I fear for our long-term competitiveness,” said Gelsinger (Fried, 2005, para. 2).


The results of a 2005 study conducted by the American Institutes of Research in Washington, DC on the literacy of college students suggested that concerns from industry leaders and government officials are not entirely unwarranted (Baer, Cook, & Baldi, 2006). The study, funded by the Pew Charitable Trust Foundation, found that over half of graduating college students lack basic skills across all disciplines, including an incapacity to do basic real-life tasks like understanding a credit card application (Baer et al., 2006).

Reports from the National Academy of Science (NAS) and National Education Commission on Education suggested that many students are struggling at lower grade levels as well ("National Education Commission Report," 2006; Stine et al., 2006). Citing
NCES data, the NAS report stated that more than one-third of 4th and 8th grade students in the U.S. had performed at or above proficiency levels in math, while high school seniors ranked below the international averages in math in 21 countries (Stine et al., 2006).

Worries about Work

The arrival of the information age and the faster, flatter (Friedman, 2005) and more transparent (Anderson & Rainie, 2006), yet increasingly monitored and less private world that has resulted (Anderson & Rainie, 2006; Brin, 1998; Turkle, 2004) has spurred an industry concerned with the future of work (Casner-Lotto & Benner, 2006; Davidson & Rees-Moog, 1997; Florida, 2005; Malone, 2004; Murnane, 2005; Pink, 2001; Rifkin, 1995/2004; Stine et al., 2006). Trying to make sense of the impact that the information age has had on work and the workforce, many observers accept the idea that the relationship between individuals and organizations is changing as a given (Florida, 2005; Friedman, 2005; Malone, 2004; Ohmae, 2005; Pink, 2005a; Wriston, 1992). It has become almost cliché to suggest that the reign of the paternalistic organization and its provision of lifelong employment and care in exchange for corporate loyalty and commitment are waning (Malone, 2004; "New Organization," 2006; Pink, 2001, 2005a; Valery, 2005).

As Daniel Pink, author and former speech writer for Vice President Al Gore, has explained, “jobs which used to be the pathway to the middle class in the U.S., are either being automated or outsourced” (Pink, 2005a, para. 1). To put it another way, Peter Drucker’s venerable “knowledge worker” (Wriston, 1992, p. 3) has become a growing part of a new global workforce of independent workers and free agents (Pink, 2001;
Valery, 2005). Worries about the destabilizing effects of an increasingly global economy have amplified calls to raise one’s intellectual game, prepare to work with a broader and more diverse range of colleagues, and expect a lifetime of learning (Golden, 2005; Pearlman, 2006; Pink, 2005a).

In 2005, Thomas Freidman, New York Times foreign affairs columnist and author of the best-seller *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, created an accessible and apparently resonant metaphor for understanding how the world is adapting to life in the information age. Because of inexpensive and rapidly diffusing technologies (Anderson & Rainie, 2006), unprecedented levels of affluence, automation, and abundance (Pink, 2005b), along with the on-going spread and acceptance of the English language worldwide (Anderson & Rainie, 2006), economic and social playing fields across the globe have expanded and become increasingly connected (Freidman, 2005; Pink, 2005).

Authors of a National Academies of Science report (Stine et al., 2006) wrote that “a substantial portion of our workforce finds itself in direct competition with lower-wage workers from around the globe…and thanks to globalization, driven by modern communication, workers now face competitors who live just a mouse click away (p. 3).

On this flattening economic and social terrain, some observers have maintained that power is shifting to smaller groups and individuals (Anderson & Rainie, 2006; Davidson & Rees-Moog, 1997; Friedman, 2005; Ohmae, 2005; Pink, 2005b; Shapiro, 1999; Valery, 2005; Wriston, 1992), with citizenship giving way to consumerism as a basis for allegiance to the nation-state and its institutions (Anderson & Rainie, 2006; Davidson & Rees-Moog, 1997). According Barry Diller, head of Interactive Corporation,
disintermediation, or taking out the middle man, has become a legitimate principle of organization ("Why ask Jeeves," 2005).

With globalization setting the stage for the research, it seemed natural to speculate about how forces that appear to have broadened and stiffened competition at the corporate and government levels worldwide might be influencing institutions of education similarly by affording parents new capacities to compete or collaborate with, or transcend conventional schools.

**Prevailing Attitudes**

In contrast with widely broadcast concerns from the business and government communities about the capacity of the next generation of workers to compete in the 21st century, findings from two reports funded by the GE, Nellie Mae Education, and Wallace Foundations (Johnson, Arumi, & Ott, 2006a; Johnson, Arumi, Ott, & Remaley, 2006b) have suggested that the majority of superintendents, principals, and parents in the U.S. perceive that their schools are preparing and equipping children rather well. Survey data from the studies revealed that 69% parents believe their children are prepared to succeed in college, and that 61% of parents believe their children will acquire the skills necessary to compete in the workforce (Johnson et al., 2006b).

Results showed that while the majority of parents support proposals for an intensification of math and science instruction (Bush, 2006; Stine et al., 2006), almost 60% of parents believe that the levels of math, science, and technology currently being taught in schools is “right” (Johnson et al., 2006b, p. 10). Polling research conducted by Rose and Gallup (2001) seems to support the idea that most parents across the U.S. are
generally satisfied with the quality of public and private schooling, especially when parents were asked about the schools in their local communities.

Indications that the majority of school officials and parents are satisfied generally and perhaps “complacent” (Johnson et al., 2006b, p. 9) about the quality of schools, may not have sufficiently diminished the nagging sense among a growing number of families that life in the information age requires a different kind of preparation and training (Bauman, 2005; Crowson, 2000; Lines, 2003). Research from the U.S. Department of Education has shown that for the past decade a growing number families have been gravitating toward educational alternatives (Tice et al., 2006). Perhaps homeschool families in particular have been unwilling to wait for their state and local school districts to adapt to the changing calculus of living in an increasingly connected global economy.

*Home education and the role of computer and communication technology*

Review of the home education and information technology literatures has highlighted the possibility that a relationship exists between the emergence and diffusion of advancing computer and media technologies and the rise of home education (Conlin, 2006; Farris & Woodruff, 2000; "George Bush's Secret Army," 2004; Lines, 2003; Panettieri, 2006; Stevens, 2001). Commenting on technology and the rise of homeschooling in a BusinessWeek Online article (Conlin, 2006), Florida remarked, “it would be been impossible to homeschool like this 20 years ago” (para. 4).

Moving beyond Florida’s informed speculation and opinion, there has been some empirical evidence that suggests a link between modern media technologies and the rise in home education nationwide. U.S. Department of Education researchers (Princiotta et al., 2006) found that “41% of the students homeschooled in 2003 had engaged in some
sort of distance learning. About 19% percent of those students had taken a course or received instruction provided by the internet, email, or the World Wide Web” (p. 18).

Stevens (2001) identified access to resources and existing networks of homeschool parents as an enabling condition for homeschool growth. Ray (1997) has suggested that homeschool families seem to qualify as early adopters of new computer technologies. According to Ray (1997), over 83% of children that are educated at home use computers as part of their studies, and that compared to national norms homeschool families tend to be quicker about equipping their children with advanced technologies.

Given the general profile of the homeschool population (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006), findings from a recent NCES report (Debell & Chapman, 2006) indicated that the majority of homeschool families likely fall on the have rather than have-not side of the digital divide. Using representative Current Population Survey (CPS) data from 2003, Debell and Chapman (2006) found that computer and internet use appear to be divided along demographic and socioeconomic lines.

According to the authors, “Use of internet and computer technologies is higher among Whites, than Blacks and Hispanics. Students living with highly educated parents were more likely to use these technologies than students living with less educated parents, and those living in households with higher family incomes are more likely to use computers and the internet than those living in lower income households” (p. iv). Results showed that “students from two-parent households are more likely to use the internet than those from single parent households” (p. v).
A series of studies on the penetration, use, and impact of information and internet technologies conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Horrigan, 2006; Horrigan & Murray, 2006; Horrigan & Rainie, 2006; Levin & Arafeh, 2002; Madden, 2006), the U.S. Departments of Commerce (Cooper & Gallagher, 2004; Cooper & Victory, 2002) and Education (Debell & Chapman, 2006; Hickok & Patrick, 2004; Parsad & Jones, 2005) have indicated a possible link between the spread of the internet across all regions and populations of the U.S. and its growing role in helping people live and make important decisions in their professional and educational lives (Horrigan & Rainie, 2006).

Review of the literature on the diffusion of internet and information technology over the past decade has supported the idea that the wide-scale spread of communication and computer technologies throughout the general population should be considered as a possible influence on the growth of homeschooling. Findings from the on-going Pew Internet and Life project have indicated that over 94% of adults use the internet, and the percentage is rising (Macgill, 2007). As of 2006, over one third of the population logged on to the internet every day (Horrigan & Rainie, 2006).

As of 2005, 42% of households had a high-speed broadband connection to the internet (Madden, 2006) up from 9.1% in 1991 and 19.9% in 2003 (Cooper & Gallagher, 2004). Although only 24% of rural internet users report having a high-speed connection at home as 2005 (Horrigan & Murray, 2006), “62% of adult rural Americans were using the internet compared to 70% of non-rural Americans” (p. 9). The finding reflected “the narrowest difference in overall internet penetration between rural and non-rural Americans” (p. 9) recorded to date.
Horrigan and Rainie (2006) of the Pew Internet and American Life Project surveyed internet users and found that 45% of Americans “say the internet helped them negotiate their way through major episodes in their lives during the previous two years” (p. 1). The study revealed that between 2002 and 2005, “internet use grew by 42% in the number of users who said the internet played a major role as they decided about a school or college for themselves or their children” (p. 1).

New information technologies have not been inherently deterministic (Turkle, 2004). The advent of computer and communication technologies certainly has not caused the rise in home education. As former Citicorp Chairman, Walter Wriston (1992) pointed out, understanding the role of technology typically is of secondary importance when it comes to understanding the transformation of public and private institutions.

Yet new technologies have influenced the way people think and behave (Turkle, 2004). They can break down boundaries of place (McLuhan, 1956; Meyrowitz, 1985; Panettieri, 2006), and they can be adopted in ways that influence the balance of control and power in social and economic systems (Beniger, 1986; Davidson & Rees-Moog, 1997; Shapiro, 1999). Geoffrey Fletcher (2006b), editor of the Technology Horizons in Education Journal, observed optimistically that “we are approaching a tipping point in the way technology is recognized as a force in education”

Central Issues

The pursuit of questions concerning how technology might have influenced the home education movement necessarily involves an orientation to the issues that have been and continue to be of central importance to homeschool parents and advocates, as well as policy makers and critics. Review of the literature on homeschooling has shown
that the issues have remained essentially consistent over the past two centuries and are likely to persist into the future.

Arguments for and against home education have been grounded within an array of historical, philosophical, political, legal, and moral perspectives about its legitimacy as an approach to caring for and formally educating children (Bastiat, 1850/1998; Bolick, 1987; Galston, 2006; Lines, 1994a; Reich, 2001; West, 1965/1994). Issues concerning the degree to which education should or should not be conceived of and instituted in principle as a necessary function of the state have underscored positions from both sides of the home education debate (Apple, 2005; Lines, 1994a; Young & Block, 1999). As Lines (1994a) explained, “Homeschooling requires us to reconsider anew the constitutional balance between majoritarian rule and individual liberty” (p. 9).

Research and commentary concerning the growth of home education (Bauman, 2005; Princiotta et al., 2006), its academic effectiveness (Belfield, 2005; Ray, 1997; Rudner, 1999; Welner & Welner, 1999), the motivations of homeschool parents (Bielick et al., 2001; Lyman, 2005; Nemer, 2002a; Ray, 2005b) and their qualifications as teachers (Evans, 2003; Franzosa, 1984; Ray, 2004a), the social, moral, and cognitive development of homeschooled children (Kingston & Medlin, 2006; McDowell, 2004), legality (Farris, 1990; Lines, 2003; Somerville, 2005), the regulation of homeschooling (Kelly, Barr, & Weatherby, 2006; Reich, 2005; Richman, 2006), civic education and compulsory attendance law (Apple, 2000; Burkard & O'Keefe, 2005; Cibulka, 1991; Galston, 2006; Nemer, 2002a), and so on surround deeper philosophical and instrumental issues of educational freedom (Greene, 2002; Reich, 2005) and the doctrine of parens patriae (Richman, 2006), a ruling having to do with the reach of the state’s authority to
protect young children (West, 1965/1994), and in so doing oversee and manage the education and mental health of the child (Richman, 1994).

Debate about home education has frequently highlighted and tested assumptions embedded in what Myron Lieberman, Chairman of the Education Policy Institute, called the “neighborhood effects” (West, 1965/1994, p. xvii) argument. The neighboring effects argument basically says that mass public education produces broad positive spill-over from which society at large benefits (West, 1965/1994). Assumptions concerning “the necessity of schools to reduce crime, increase educational opportunity and inculcate the common values of a democratic society, and achieve economic growth” (p. xvii) have tended to flow from a neighboring effects perspective.

Fordham University professor Bruce S. Cooper (2005) has written that the central issues within the home education debate reflect a range of “reactions to the problems and inadequacies in existing schools, and a new direction in schooling that stands on its own” (p. xi). In reaction to the emergence of home education, some observers have viewed home education as a retreat from mass state-sponsored education as a necessary condition for ensuring the “public good” (Lubienski, 2000, p. 211), and a rejection of community responsibility (Evans, 2003) and civic participation (Apple, 2005). Reich (2001) has maintained that state-sponsored schooling is a necessary means for checking and balancing a “trilogy of interests” (p. 9) concerning parental, state, and children’s rights.

Commonly at issue has been the idea that the provision of government-regulated schooling is the most effective way to ensure that all young citizens have access to an equitable and quality civic education (Lubienski, 2000; Reich, 2005), and that conventional private and public schools provide the most appropriate setting “to expose
children to and to engage children with values and beliefs other than those of their parents” (Reich, 2001, p. 30). This idea has highlighted beliefs about the degree to which schools should have a necessary interest and role as administrators and arbiters of care for a child (Galston, 2006; Reich, 2005) to ensure that the child’s civic and cultural freedoms are preserved (Reich, 2005) and to avoid “ethnically servile” adults (p. 112).

According to Lines (1994a), “almost all homeschool families are decentralists (p. 15). She concluded that, “home education families have not turned their backs on the broader social contract as understood at the time of the Founding [of America]. Like the Anti-federalists, these homeschoolers are asserting their historic individual rights so they may form more meaningful bonds with family and community. In doing so, they are not abdicating the American agreement. To the contrary, they are affirming it” (p. 20).

Nemer (2002a) discovered that although homeschool parents choose not to send their own children to conventional school, many of them are “civic-minded and support public schools in both theory and practice” (p. 5).

Issues concerning private vs. public control over the child’s education and development appear to have been as centrally entrenched in the home education debate as they have been in battles concerning other educational choice-based reform movements, and the stakes seem just as high (Crowson, 2000). For critics, the ideals of an equitable and democratic society achieved primarily through state-sponsored models of mass education are at stake (Apple, 2000; Reich, 2001). Conversely, advocates of market-driven, home-based, and individual approaches to education tend to view the state itself as the greatest obstacle in the pursuit of a similar democratic ideals (Coulson, 2006; Hornberger, 2006; McPherson, 2005; Richman, 1995).
Legality

As of 1993, home education became legal nationwide (Somerville, 2005). Though differences in regulations vary from state to state, (Bolick, 1987; Farris, 1990; Klicka, 1994/2005; Lines, 2003), regulatory differences may be starting to “wash out” (Crowson, 2000, p. 298). At present, home education has become an accepted way to meet compulsory education laws across the country (Lines, 2003; Reich, 2005).

Home education is not regulated by federal law (Lines, 2003). In fact, homeschool families were excluded from the procedures and provisions outlined in The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, though all states require homeschool families to submit information and in some cases instructional plans with local or state educational agencies (Lines, 2003). In many states, like New York and Ohio, homeschool students are required to participate in state-level standardized evaluation and testing programs (Lines, 2003). In other states like North Dakota, parents are required to meet a specific level of education or certification (Lines, 2003). Citing conflicting data, Reich (2005) pointed out that ten states do not require parental notification.

According to Lines (2003), “the U.S. Supreme Court has never decided a case that involves homeschooling in its contemporary form, but there are analogous cases” (p. 13). These cases have set precedent for arguments involving the constitutionality of modern homeschooling (Bolick, 1987; Reich, 2001; Wormhoudt, 1974; Young & Block, 1999).

Resting on the Fourteenth Amendment, the case of Pierce v. Society of Sisters in 1925 has provided perhaps the strongest constitutional basis for home education (Bolick, 1987; Young & Block, 1999). In the Pierce case, “the Supreme Court found an Oregon
law making private school illegal and compelling all children to attend public school to be unconstitutional” (Young & Block, 1999, p. 199).

Commenting on the controversy surrounding parental rights (Galston, 2006; Lines, 1994b; Reich, 2001; Richman, 1994; West, 1965/1994), Reich (2001) acknowledged that the Court’s ruling on Pierce “established the principle that a law compelling parents to send their children to public schools interferes with the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control” (p. 24). The ruling effectively affirmed private schooling and subsequently has been extended to include the rights of parents to educate their own children (Bolick, 1987; Farris, 1990; Klicka, 1994/2005; Lines, 2003) with some regulation.

Other arguments based on the First Amendment, perhaps most notably Wisconsin v. Yoder in 1972 (Callan, 2006; Reich, 2001) and Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education, have set precedent for current cases where families have challenged the constitutionality of compulsory education laws on religious grounds (Cibulka, 1991; Reich, 2001).

While both advocates and critics of home education have acknowledged a steady trend toward the deregulation of home education during the past 20 years (Cibulka, 1991; Klicka, 1994/2005; Reich, 2005), Supreme Court decisions to date have not denied the state’s interest nor its authority to regulate public schooling (Reich, 2001). In some cases, the Court’s decisions have expanded it (Bolick, 1987). Some state and school officials have responded with new regulations and tighter enforcement of compulsory education laws (Richardson & Zirkel, 1991), while others have called for greater centralization and control of home education (Kelly et al., 2006; Reich, 2005).
Lines (2003) has speculated that greater regulation of home education will likely meet great resistance and drive the movement underground. Increased regulation of what have been perceived to be family issues is what many homeschool parents and advocates do not want (Klicka, 1994/2005; McPherson, 2003; Reich, 2005). Instead of increased regulation of home education (Reich, 2005), or incentives for increased collaboration between home educators and conventional schools (Anderson, 2006; Lines, 2003), some observers have argued that greater resources to facilitate the expansion of homeschool networks and parental rights are needed (McPherson, 2003).

Summary

The growth of the home education phenomenon should not be viewed as “a threat to public schooling, but rather a force to change it” (Hill, 2000a, p. 20). Across the home education literature, scholars and researchers generally have accepted that homeschooling “has ‘come of age’ as a vital topic of policy analysis and academic research no longer to be ignored or to be regulated to an out-of-the-loop set of topics for scholarly inquiry” (Crowson, 2000, p. 299).

In light of recent studies (Bauman, 2001; Bielick et al., 2001; Lines, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 1997), a range of scholars and observers have acknowledged that the population of homeschool families can no longer be stereotyped or dismissed simply as fringe anti-social, anti-schooling, or anti-state groups, or as worrisome evidence of an encroaching religious right on public education (Bauman, 2001, 2005; Crowson, 2000; Hill, 2000a; McDowell, 2004; Ray, 2003; Reich, 2005). For an increasingly diverse range of families (Conlin, 2006; Hill, 2000a; Ray, 2005b; Reich, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Zehr, 2005), homeschooling has become part of a broader cultural
and political shift toward what Crowson (2000) describes as “an ideology of choice and individualism” (p. 297).

It was precisely this new ideology that the research sought to explore though a lens of new computer and communication technologies. Discussion of the modern home education phenomenon to date has assumed a coincidental and perhaps enabling relationship between the advent of the internet era and growth of homeschooling (Billups, 2000; Farris & Woodruff, 2000; Hickok & Patrick, 2004; Hill, 2000a; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 1997). But questions concerning the nature of a potential relationship between the rise of home education and advancing computer and communication technologies had yet to be raised explicitly and targeted explorations had yet to be conducted.

The research sought to understand how the larger force of computer and communication might have enabled the broader shift in ideology toward individual and choice-based education generally, and home education specifically, by directly exploring how homeschool families have employed and perceived of new technologies as social, political, and pedagogical tools.

In grudging agreement with Marx, economists James Dale Davidson and Lord William Rees-Moog (1997) stated that “social systems tend to mimic the characteristics of prevailing technologies” (p. 157). Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) argued that advancing microprocessing and nanotechnology have translated into smaller, more portable and connected, and highly complex social systems that can design and deliver services and products down to the individual consumer.

An aim of the research was to borrow this idea to explore how modern computer and communication technologies may have transformed into systems that have afforded
an expanding number of families the capacity to animate their motivations to design and deliver an education down to the individual child.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to systematically outline and describe the data collection process and discuss the procedures employed to analyze the data and carry out the research (Krueger, 1998a). The fielding of the research was guided by the following questions:

1. In what ways did computer and communication technologies influence parents’ decision to homeschool?
2. How did homeschool parents initially perceive of the potential affordances and disaffordances of computer and communication technologies as they considered the decision to homeschool?
3. How did families use and depend on computer and communication technologies in practice to enable and sustain homeschooling?
4. How have parents’ perceptions and use of computer and communication technologies evolved since deciding to homeschool?
5. In what ways did a desire for greater educational control, autonomy, or freedom enter into the parents’ decision to homeschool?

Design

Given the exploratory and inductive nature of the study, the research design emphasized the theoretical and methodological perspectives of the qualitative research tradition (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), “qualitative research is a field of inquiry that has crosscut disciplines, fields, and subject matter” (p. 1), and “has involved an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject
matter” (p. 2). The design was guided by the principle of “studying things in their natural settings, and attempting to make sense of phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 2).

The research followed conventional multi-method principles in order “to secure an in-depth understanding” (p. 2) of the home education phenomenon. It was designed to identify and explore routines, patterns, or anomalies, and to understand the processes and socially emergent, constructed, and inconsistent meanings that practicing and former homeschool parents might have attached to their experience with and use of modern technologies (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Punch, 1998). The research was conducted with an understanding that qualitative research is generally viewed as an alternative to and a critique of the politics and methods associated with positivist research traditions and paradigms (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), and that written interpretations of qualitative research emphasize processes and stress the socially constructed meaning of reality (Punch, 1998).

Since the research questions were designed to prompt current and former homeschool parents to reflect on and discuss their perceptions, attitudes, and use of computer and communication technologies as part of the their homeschooling experiences, field notes, questionnaires, focus groups, participant reflections, and semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used as the data collection methods. From a methodological perspective, the study was designed to examine not only what homeschoolers thought about modern technologies, but also how participants thought about technology, and why they thought about it the way they did (Kitzinger, 1995).
Focus groups were used as the primary method of data collection because of their capacity to “encourage participants to talk to one another, ask questions, exchange anecdotes, and comment on each other’s experiences and points of view” (p. 299). The focus groups were employed as an effective means to inform, contribute to, and contextualize the existing body of research on home education (Bauman, 2002; Bielick et al., 2001; Lines, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2006). The potential for participant bias, reticence, or groupthink inherent in conducting group interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) was considered and addressed by providing participants with multiple opportunities and formats to express their views and opinions during and after the focus group interviews.

In the end, the focus group interviews provided an appropriately evocative approach to explore the ways in which the advent and increasing ubiquity of communication and computer technologies at all levels of the population nationwide (Anderson & Rainie, 2006; Cooper & Victory, 2002) might have influenced parents’ decision and capacity to homeschool their children.

The Researcher

During the development and fielding of a large portion of the research, I was a full-time parent and an undocumented educational provider for our son, who had yet to reach compulsory school age in the state of New York. (Compulsory school age is 6-16 years of age in New York.) Because he had not reached compulsory school age, I was not required to register as a homeschool parent, nor was I was required to submit an Independent Home Education Program (IHIP) to the school district. Technically, we were not a homeschool family. But our son did skip Kindergarten, and he spent a much of his
fourth and fifth years at home with me, my wife, and the cast of social and educative characters we assembled in and around Albany.

Besides my dual role as principal investigator and quasi-home educator, I am a state-trained and certified elementary-level educator. I have studied and worked in public and private school settings from levels K-12 as a researcher or educator since the early 1990’s. Despite my educational experiences as a student, professional, and parent (and perhaps because of them), I am not philosophically, politically, or pedagogically opposed to homeschooling as a viable approach to educating children as a matter of principle. I would consider it as an alternative to conventional public and private educational options.

In terms of educational policy and practice, my philosophical and pedagogical beliefs and biases have gravitated over time toward greater educational choice in both public and private school arenas. To my thinking, the location or setting of the child’s education is largely incidental. Learning can occur in conventional public or private schools, as well as in any number of alternative educational settings, including the home.

Regardless of the setting or institution, I have been inclined to favor forms of education that place the development of the potentials of the individual learner (Gardner, 1999), the authentic activation of knowledge and the deepening of understanding (Perkins, 1992), and the cultivation of intellectual, emotional, and moral character (Coles, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Ritchhart, 2002) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2000) at the center of the individual child’s educational experience.

A desire to animate these beliefs sparked my initial interest in higher education and the role that advancing information technologies might have on the future of public
and private schooling. This same desire provided a point of reference to check my assumptions and biases as I conducted the research.

Participants

The study involved the participation of 27 ($N = 27$) former and practicing homeschool parents recruited from the city of Albany, NY and its surrounding urban, suburban, and rural communities. With a population estimated at 297,556 (U.S. Census Albany County, 2006), the Tri-City area which includes Albany, Troy, and Schenectady, was selected as an appropriate region to seek and recruit participants for the study. The demographics for the region reflected some of the characteristics of the general homeschool population nationally.

According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the greater Albany region is 80% White and 18% Black. Individuals of Hispanic, Asian, Native American heritage reflected the remaining 2% of the population. As of 2006, a median household income of $45,870 for the region was slightly higher than the state median income, and the 10.8% poverty rate for Albany County was roughly 4 percent lower than rates estimated across the state. Levels of educational attainment for the area were higher compared to attainment levels for the rest of the state. Approximately 86% of the population over the age of 25 were high school graduates and a third (33.3%) had earned a high school degree or higher (U.S. Census Albany County, 2006).

The majority of participants described themselves as middle or upper middle class. Six participants estimated their annual household incomes were $50,000 per year or less. Approximately 75% of participants ($n = 21$) estimated their household income ranged between $50,000 and $250,000 per year. Within that group, one third ($n = 9$) of
the participants reported their annual estimated household income within a range of $100,000 to $250,000 per year.

Participants were self-selected and generally reflected the larger population of homeschool parents in the U.S. Seven active homeschool organizations operating in and around Albany were represented in the study. Most of the participants ($n = 19$) lived in either an urban or suburban setting. The remaining participants reported they lived in a rural setting beyond the suburbs of Albany. The relatively high percentage of urban and suburban participants in the sample was not surprising given that the research was situated and limited to the greater Albany, NY region.

Of the sample group of 27 participants, 22 participants were affiliated with at least one homeschool group. Only one of the 23 currently active participants was not affiliated with a homeschool organization. Participants averaged roughly six years of homeschooling experience, with the majority of active participants ($n = 23$) starting around the year 2000 or after. Of the 27 participants, two were male and 25 were female. Twenty-three of twenty-seven participants were currently practicing or former homeschool mothers. All but one of the participants were married and headed a two-parent household with their spouse. One participant in the group was a single mother.

Across the sample, the mother of the household shouldered the bulk of the homeschooling responsibilities. Within a range of 1 to 5 children per household, participants on average reported two children per household. No matter how many children were in the household, the large majority of participants ($n = 24$) homeschooled all of their children.
Compared to the larger population of homeschool parents (Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006), racial diversity was not reflected in the group of participants. Except for one participant of Asian descent, all participants were White. Two of the participants (both White) described their families as mixed race. Confirming previous research (Bauman, 2002; Ray, 2005b), a slight majority of the participants \((n = 16)\) described themselves as either nominal, practicing, or devout in their religious beliefs. Seven participants said that religion was a central part of their family culture and ideology. In contrast, 11 of the participants indicated that religion played no part in their household culture or instruction and did not influence their decision to homeschool.

Parents in all 27 households had attained at least a high school diploma and some college education. In 20 of 27 households, both parents had attained at least an undergraduate degree. At least one parent had attained a Master’s level degree or higher in 19 households, with 9 of those attaining an advanced level degree (Ph.D. or equivalent). In all but one household \((n = 26)\), at least one parent worked full time. In the remaining household, both parents worked part-time and one worked from home.

In line with the typical homeschool model (Lines, 1991b; Ray, 2005b), about one-third \((n = 8)\) of the participants indicated their employment status as a full-time parent (the mother in each instance) with a spouse working full-time. Given that 23 of the 27 participants had indicated that they were homeschool mothers, this figure was not surprising.

In the majority of households, both parents worked. In 19 of 27 households, one parent worked full time, while the other parent either worked part time, went to school, or both, in cases reported by two participants. In five households, both parents worked full-
time. In almost half of the households, at least one of the parents could work from home at least part of the time.

**Setting**

In addition to the comparatively high socio-economic and educational standing of its population compared to rest of state, the Albany region has somewhat reemerged and been recast as New York’s Tech Valley (Albany Chamber of Commerce, 2008). Besides cultivating an identity nationally as a research and technology-friendly region for business and economic development, the region has been recognized for its relatively dense concentration of public and private universities and colleges, including the University at Albany, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, as well as Vassar, Skidmore, St. Rose, Siena, Sage, Marist, and Union Colleges (Albany Chamber of Commerce, 2008). The variety and availability of higher educational institutions has provided the region with access to a relatively well trained and educated workforce and some economic stability as one the region’s primary employers.

The study was situated in the Albany area in large part because of the unique range of public and private educational resources and alternatives available for parents of school-aged children in and around the city. Nine of the state’s approved charter schools currently operate in Albany (NY Charter School Directory, 2006). Three charter middle schools opened in the fall of 2006. Two more charter elementary schools and the area’s first charter high school, Tech Valley High School, opened in the fall of 2007.

At the elementary level, parents have been able to choose from neighborhood public schools, private schools, or three public magnet school alternatives, each with its own curricular and instructional focus (Albany School District, 2006). At the high school
level, there are a number of private, religious, and secular schools in the Albany area. The Albany Free School, the nation’s oldest independent inner-city alternative school, has been operating in the city since 1969 (The Albany Free School, 2006).

In addition to the relatively broad range of conventional and alternative educational options available to parents who live in Albany, several home education groups, including The Home Education Network of the Albany Area (HENAA), The Alternative Learning Center (TALC), Guilderland Area Home Learning Association (GAHLA), Hudson Valley Loving Education at Home (HVLEAH), and the Capital District Home Educators (CDHE), are active in the region.

Each of the seven organized homeschool groups represented in the study varied in size, character, and structure and tended to draw parents with a particular ideological, pedagogical, or religious profile. For example, with a cap of 50 members, the HENAA group evolved from a few families into a relatively small, informal network of home educators. HENAA operated within a loose horizontal administrative structure based largely on consensus. The group met once a week to engage in educational and social activities. Parents met informally every few months to discuss issues concerning the group (e.g. new membership, group policies, or activity planning). The group was economically and pedagogically eclectic with a relatively high number of secular or nominally religious members.

In contrast, the HVLEAH homeschool group was a larger network of parents with more than 150 members. It had a formal organizational structure and a prominent religious orientation. Situating the research in the greater Albany area provided a unique opportunity to hear perspectives on homeschooling from parents who live in an area of
the country where choice-based reforms have been implemented and educational alternatives were available.

**Recruitment**

To achieve a level of consistency with prior research (Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006), parents who had homeschooled one or more of their children for at least one academic year were sought for participation. Participants were selected primarily on the basis of their willingness to volunteer and share their homeschooling experiences with an informal group of 4 – 8 practicing or and former homeschool parents (Morgan, 1998b). To the degree possible, participants were selected through a purposeful or criterion-based sampling process (Merriam, 1988). Race, socio-economic status, pedagogical and religious ideology, geography (urban, rural), and years experience were considered as criteria for selection during the recruitment process.

Given the self-selected character of the sample group of participants and the exploratory nature of the study, probabilistic random sampling was not appropriate and was not used (Merriam, 1988). To the degree possible, principles of segmentation were applied to the process of assembling the focus groups (Morgan, 1998b) “to achieve relatively high levels of homogeneity of participants within groups and relatively high levels of diversity across groups” (p. 59). The purpose of segmentation was to encourage perceptions that individual participants are fundamentally similar. In each group, homeschooling provided a common bond between and across all participants.

Participants recruited for the first, second, and fifth focus group interviews were organized by homeschool group or network. For instance, all participants in focus group one were members of the HENAA homeschool group. Group two was composed of
former homeschool parents who had previously belonged to the same homeschool group. In group five, all six participants knew each other from their regular homeschool group. Focus groups three and four reflected a mix of affiliated and unaffiliated homeschool parents who had registered an interest in contributing to the research. Some of the participants in focus groups three and four knew each other from their regular homeschool group. Yet, these sessions were organized by availability of the participants to meet in addition to homeschool group affiliation.

The recruitment process began almost one year before the first focus group interview data was collected in May of 2007. Early stages of recruitment involved a process of contacting and gaining entry into the local homeschool community by networking with practicing homeschool parents that either I or friends and acquaintances knew. At the outset, recruitment involved an informally deliberate effort to spread the word around the local homeschool community that I was seeking homeschool parents for a graduate-level research project.

Formal recruitment of participants began in April 2007 and continued through June. During a year-long cultivation of relationships before the research was approved, I was able to gain the confidence of a few key leaders of the local homeschool groups who were known and trusted by their own and other local homeschool communities. With the help of these individuals, who vouched for my credentials as a de facto homeschooler and my good intentions as a researcher, I was able to recruit a sufficiently representative number of participants.

A formal recruitment letter approved by the university was sent to a prospective homeschool parent or group leader (Appendix H), if prior contact had not been
established through a previous face-to-face or email conversation or a connection to a mutual acquaintance. Unsolicited cold calls and invitations for participation proved to be a rather unsuccessful approach for recruitment in this research.

Once initial contact with a group leader had been made, the individual functioned as a gatekeeper or liaison between me and members of the larger group. The contact person would forward my invitation to participate to the larger group for consideration. Subsequently, prospective participants would contact me directly by email or register interest through the contact person, who would in turn relay the information to me.

Principles for achieving appropriate levels of similarity and dissimilarity were considered as criteria during the selection process (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Both novice and experienced home educators volunteered to participate. The variety of experience across the focus groups helped ensure that a range of perspectives on homeschooling and technology were heard. Home educators with a decade or more of experience loosely qualified as pre-internet homeschoolers. The more experienced home educators provided a uniquely broad perspective on the role that computer and communication technologies might have played in their inclination and capacity to homeschool well beyond the average of 1 to 4 years (Bauman, 2005; Lines, 1999; Ray, 1999).

Because the target population of homeschoolers to be sought was dispersed throughout the greater Albany area, issues of achieving similarity and dissimilarity of setting (urban, suburban, or rural), religion, and experience, generally addressed themselves during the recruitment process. There was no way to methodologically or ethically target a specific participant characteristic up front. In many cases, I did not
know much about prospective participants other than group affiliation and gender until we met for the interview.

Efforts to achieve similarity and dissimilarity within and across the sample were addressed by casting a rather wide net of recruitment across the region. Invitations to participate were sent electronically to homeschool group leaders whose group proximity was within reasonable driving distance to the city of Albany. Recruitment extended to individuals who lived as far as 30 miles to the north and as far as 25 miles to the south to homeschoolers who lived near the Catskill Mountains. A husband and wife traveled almost an hour from their hometown to volunteer and share their homeschooling experiences for the third focus group session.

To address issues of representation and legitimation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), unaffiliated independent home educators were sought to counterbalance the perspectives of the majority of affiliated participants. In each case, recruitment of these individuals involved reliance on a previous social connection. Without access to local or state educational agency records, a contact person from a homeschool group, or a personal connection, it would have been especially challenging to find independent homeschool parents.

Recruitment of minority homeschool parents was considered. At the time the recruitment process was conducted, there were no homeschool groups or networks in the Albany region that were expressly organized by race or ethnicity. Recruitment did not involve canvassing local homeschool group leaders and contacts for racial minorities who might have been affiliated with a particular group. Invitations for participation were
disseminated through group leaders and personal contacts in an inclusive, race-neutral manner.

A concern was that profiling participation by race would have been inappropriate for the study and may have been viewed as offensive by homeschool group leaders and minority homeschool parents. The recruitment process did not reveal or provide access to prospective or practicing minority homeschool parents and families. The lack of response to invitations to participate may have suggested that affiliated minority homeschoolers did not want to participate. Another possibility may have been that minority homeschoolers might not have been affiliated with the existing homeschool groups that I contacted. Minority parents might not have had access to the interpersonal and electronic networks used to disseminate invitations to participate.

To satisfy the principle of completeness, which involves the addition of participants until the researcher has achieved a sufficient level of understanding of a complex culture or a multi-step process (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), participants were selected and added until a point of thematic and topical saturation had been reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By the fifth focus interview conducted at the end of June 2007, the main themes and topics discussed were recurring and new material or categories had not emerged. It was unlikely that expansion of recruitment at the regional level to conduct six or more focus group interviews would have garnered representation from minority homeschoolers that reflected the national population of homeschool parents. Such representation would have required recruitment at the national level.

A memo outlining the results of the analysis was distributed to all participants by email when the preliminary analysis has been completed. The intent of the memo was to
provide opportunities for participants to respond to the preliminary findings. The memo also provided an additional opportunity to validate the results with participants. A summary of the research was distributed to all participants when the research was completed.

Procedures

Questionnaires, focus groups, one-on-one interviewing, and participant reflections were used as data collection methods for the research.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires (Appendix A) were distributed at the beginning of each of the focus group interviews, rather than in advance of a scheduled focus group interview, to overcome limited administrative and financial resources necessary to coordinate and collect data from a decentralized sample (Reed & Payton, 1997). Distribution of the questionnaire ensured collection of necessary descriptive data about the participants who otherwise may have been reluctant to provide such information beforehand through the mail or online to an outsider. Use of a questionnaire abided by established qualitative research protocol and practice to counterbalance the influence of group culture possible in the focus group interviews (Reed & Payton, 1997).

The questionnaire was intended to serve as a data collection instrument (Czaja & Blair, 1996) to provide demographic descriptive data about the participants in each focus group. The questionnaire was used to help inform understanding of participants’ everyday use of computer and communication technologies, and it served as a unifying up-front organizer to frame discussion and interactions with participants across focus groups (Kitzinger, 1995).
The questionnaires took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires independently. Immediately after participants completed the questionnaires, the researcher collected them and then initiated the focus group interview.

Pretest considerations (Czaja & Blair, 1996) for the questionnaire were attended to through a preliminary review process. Two parents, one former the other practicing, with more than one year of experience, and one participating faculty member from Ohio University provided feedback on the following four elements of the questionnaire: 1) appropriateness of the questionnaire items, 2) item completeness, 3) overall clarity and cohesiveness, and 4) accessibility of the format and questionnaire length.

Both participants reviewed and returned the document with recommendations for minor changes. Likewise, the faculty member identified minor grammatical and typographic revisions, which were subsequently addressed.

Focus Groups

To further address the research questions and to achieve an appropriately diverse range of perspectives (Morgan, 1998b), five focus group interviews were conducted with former and practicing homeschool parents from the Albany area. Each of the focus group interviews were conducted and moderated by the researcher. The focus group interviews were used to take advantage of participants’ prior knowledge and experiences as home educators (Reed & Payton, 1997). The methodological objective was to employ group dynamics and interaction “to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Reed & Payton, 1997, p. 766).
To ensure appropriate levels of compatibility among participants (Morgan, 1998b), four to eight individuals (Hollander, 2004; Kitzinger, 1995; Morgan, 1998b) were assembled for each of the five focus groups, except for the second focus group which had only two participants. Originally, four participants were scheduled for the second focus group interview. But one of the participants did not show up for the interview, and another cancelled at the last minute. Though it was not ideal focus group protocol, the interview was conducted with the two remaining volunteers. The relatively small size of the focus groups helped foster compatibility in sessions where independent unaffiliated parents who were not part of an organized homeschool group and who did not know each other beforehand participated.

Participants were grouped according to their self-identified status as affiliated or non-affiliated home educators. To the extent possible, affiliated participants, who were part of an organized homeschool group or network, were interviewed in focus groups along with other familiar novice and experienced members from their regular homeschool group. Interviewing affiliated participants with other members of their regular homeschool group helped stimulate and enrich discussion (Reed & Payton, 1997) and encouraged participation from parents who felt they had nothing to say (Kitzinger, 1995).

Novice and experienced individual home educators, who were not affiliated with a homeschool organization, participated in the focus group discussions to help broaden the range of perspectives on questions concerning the role of technology on their homeschooling experiences (Reed & Payton, 1997). Interviewing unaffiliated homeschool parents was intended to counterbalance the influence of group culture and
the revalidation of ideas possible in the more homogeneous focus groups of affiliated homeschool parents (Reed & Payton, 1997).

Issues of compatibility were be addressed in both the affiliated and the non-affiliated focus group sessions in part through the use of the questionnaire as an initial focal point of discussion and through explicit facilitation of the discussion to cultivate interaction and familiarity between individual participants. To ensure consistent data collection across each of the prospective focus groups and to ensure quality analysis of the data (Krueger, 1998a), a semi-structured focus group interview protocol (Appendix B) was used (Krueger, 1998b; Morgan, 1998a) to scaffold each of the discussions.

The focus group protocol was reviewed by two current and former homeschool parents and one participating committee member from Ohio University before the focus group interviews were conducted. Each of the focus group sessions was facilitated by the researcher. Given the scale of the research and the level of trust earned with parents over many months, it would have been inappropriate to have had an outside facilitator brought in to conduct the interviews. Introducing an unknown researcher into the research setting would have increased the risk that some of the parents would have refused to participate or been especially guarded in discussing their views and experiences with an outsider during the interviews.

Field notes were taken during and immediately following each of the sessions by the researcher. Limited scope and resources precluded employing one or more note takers into the data collection and verification process. Of course, access to the perspectives of a skilled observer and note taker for each of the interviews would have provided additional validation to the analysis.
Each of the focus group interviews lasted roughly between 60 and 90 minutes (Morgan, 1998b). Including time to complete the questionnaire and the participant reflections, each session ran about 90 minutes total.

The focus group interviews were conducted in three different locations. Focus Group interviews 1, 2, and 4 were conducted at the researcher’s home in Albany, NY. The third focus group meeting took place in a rented conference room of a coffee shop in Clifton Park, NY. The fifth focus group interview was conducted at the home of one of the participants, who lived in a rural area south of Albany.

Selection of a location for each interview was determined on the basis of consensus and convenience for each group of participating parents. For example, the coffee shop was chosen because of its central location for parents. Likewise, one participant offered her home as a location because everyone in the group knew where it was and they wouldn’t have to arrange child care to travel to Albany. It was an extraordinarily generous gesture on her part.

Each of the focus group interviews was audio and video recorded using a mini-DV recorder and a separate digital audio recorder. The audio recordings were of higher quality and were used as the raw data from which the transcriptions were produced. Copies of the audiotapes were sent to a transcription service. Hardcopy and electronic versions of the transcripts were generated and returned to the researcher. The transcripts were then compared to the raw audio and video data and cleaned accordingly to ensure that an accurate reproduction of the focus group discussions had been prepared for subsequent coding.
Participant Reflections

As part of the focus group protocol participants were asked to reflect further on the information and ideas discussed and the interactions observed during the focus group interview (Hollander, 2004). In an effort to create an opportunity for participants to add, amend, or expand on comments made during the focus discussion, participants recorded their reflections on paper at the end of the focus group session (Appendix C). Written reflections were collected by the researcher. Participants were also invited to submit any additional thoughts or perspectives to the researcher by email. All participants completed the reflection activity to close out the focus group discussion.

Written and electronic focus group reflections that were considered as part of the research data and were folded into the analysis of the data. No participant expressly requested that his or her focus group reflections should be considered off the record.

One-on-One Interviews

After a focus group interview had been completed, field notes, participant reflections, and the video recordings were reviewed to inform selection of one or two participants from each focus group for a brief, follow-up, one-on-one interview. Criteria for selection included evidence of emergent inconsistencies, conflicting viewpoints, or “problematic speech and silences” (Hollander, 2004, p. 613) observed within and across the focus group interview data (Kitzinger, 1995). The participants were selected on the basis of the character or content of an individual’s comments, participation, or perspective during the focus group sessions. The willingness of the prospective interviewee to influenced the selection process (Kitzinger, 1995; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Transcripts were reviewed to inform the selection process.
In all, six semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Two participants from group one were interviewed. Review of the field notes and the video recordings from the session revealed that one participant seemed especially quiet during the discussion. The other participant was selected to expand on her views about technology and her homeschooling experiences. One participant from each of the remaining four focus groups was interviewed. Each of the one-on-one interviews was conducted by telephone as an alternative to face-to-face interviews to accommodate participants’ schedules and availability (Hine, 2000).

The one-on-one interviews provided participants with an added opportunity to comment further on undeveloped, unheard, or recurring elements of the focus group sessions. The purpose of the interviews was to clarify and deepen the narratives collected during the focus group discussions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The one-on-one interviews were used as a complementary methodological tool alongside the focus group interviews (Reed & Payton, 1997) to address the limited capacity of focus groups to understand individual thoughts, feelings, and perspectives (Hollander, 2004). The one-on-one interviews with selected participants occurred within two weeks of the focus group interviews. The interviews complemented and extended the focus group data, as well as deepened understanding of the cognitive and psychological process of arriving at the ultimate decision to homeschool (Lawson, 1999). The interviews were used to clarify issues concerning the technology and the growth of homeschooling that emerged during focus group discussions.
The interview protocol (Appendix D) was determined during the review and analysis of the focus group data. Given the informational and interactional differences between focus groups, the one-on-one interviews were based on a template of semi-structured and open-ended questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) designed to elicit narratives from homeschool parents about how technology might have influenced their decision to homeschool.

Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the focus group and one-on-one interview data involved a process of arranging the transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials collected in a way that increased understanding and enabled the presentation of ideas (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In contrast with quantitative analysis, the qualitative approach to data analysis was geared to the discovery of themes and concepts embedded in the focus group and one-on-one interview data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The emergent themes and concepts were then weaved into broader explanation and discussion of the theories and research questions proposed by the study (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The analysis involved a recursive process of considering the thematic and topical, interactional, and journey-based elements of participants’ narratives.

The analysis aimed to “compare the displays of cultural and moral forms” (Reed & Payton, 1997, p. 770) within and across the focus groups. Analysis included “consideration of time, person, and context to allow the researcher to make statements about whether the displays were well-developed or restricted” (p. 770). In keeping with accepted convention (Hollander, 2004; Kitzinger, 1995; Krueger, 1998a; Reed & Payton, 1997), analysis of the data considered the social dynamics of participants in and across
each of the focus groups. Analysis of the one-on-one interview data represented the final stage of “listening for meaning” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

According to Reed and Payton (1997), analysis of social interactions are of interest and should have been analyzed because they affect the statements made during the focus group discussions. Analysis of the qualities of the social interactions among participants in each focus group, and between participants of each group and the facilitator, helped to account for the associational, conversational, and relational dimensions of the “larger social structures in which the focus group discussions take place” (Hollander, 2004, p. 604). Data collected from the questionnaire, focus group reflections, and one-on-one interviews were analyzed in an effort to triangulate and inform issues concerning the socially-dynamic nature of the data collected during focus group interviews (Hollander, 2004; Reed & Payton, 1997).

To deepen analysis of the focus group and one-on-one interview data and inform questions concerning technology’s influence on the process leading up to participants’ decision to homeschool, principles of journey analysis (Lawson, 1999) were applied. The analysis aimed to provide a lens for interpreting and discussing the psychological, emotional, and philosophical change processes that families experienced as they considered their decision to educate their children at home. It provided a framework for identifying and understanding key developmental stages that were experienced within complex change processes of the participants involved (Lawson, 1999). Time, place, and identification of speaker were considered in the journey analysis.
Coding

Analysis of the questionnaire, focus group, and one-on-one interview data involved a recursive process of coding, grouping and sorting, and integration (Spradley, 1979). Review and interpretation of the focus group and interview data involved an ongoing process of reflective analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researcher used basic productivity software (e.g. Word, Excel) to facilitate the coding, sorting, and integration of the research data.

The intent of the coding process was to review and analyze the emergent themes and the topics of discussion to develop theoretical concepts and categories relevant to the research questions. Specific codes were incorporated into the process to capture emergent and evolving themes, narratives, humor, points of consensus and dissent (Kitzinger, 1995). Coding involved making clear distinctions between actual group consensus from personal opinions and perspectives (Kitzinger, 1995). Deviant case analysis where attention to minor opinions that do not align with the group were considered and coded accordingly (Kitzinger, 1995).

Emergent coding categories from the focus group interviews (Appendix F) were used to inform the protocol for the subsequent one-on-one interviews. Part of the coding scheme involved overlaying theories and principles coincident with methods for conducting journey analysis (Lawson, 1999). The framework was used to complement and enrich the interpretations of the data by heightening sensitivity to the psychological, philosophical, and dispositional process that families experienced as they considered and ultimately decided to educate their children at home.
**Sorting**

Coding categories were grouped to organize data from the focus groups and the interviews into an increasingly cohesive and unified narrative that explains or describes the norms and values of the group (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Formal systems exist (Spradley, 1979) and were followed to tag underlying ideas, group similar information, and find connections between related themes to construct a meaningful interpretation of the data.

**Integration**

The integration of methods occurred at the analysis and interpretation stage of the study. The goal was to draw on the inferences made from the questionnaires, focus groups, participant reflections, and one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2003) to test and cross-validate the idea that computer and communication technologies might have had a role in the rise in home education. Once the data was coded and sorted, preliminary and tentative explanations were made. On-going refinement of the tentative explanations lead to the development of a framework of core ideas that were discussed and presented. Data was then integrated and analyzed, and meta-inferences were made.

**Confidentiality**

The research study underwent review by the participating faculty committee and the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary. Individuals did not receive any form of compensation for participation. Individuals were 18 years of age or older in order to participate (Appendix E).
Approval of the research only signifies that the procedures adequately protected the rights and welfare of the participants. The risks associated with participation in this study were expected to be minimal. Participants may have refused to answer any question(s) on the questionnaire or at any time during the focus group or one-on-one interviews. Absolute anonymity was not guaranteed due to the presence of other participants in the focus groups, which could have compromised the confidentiality of the research session (Kitzinger, 1995; Morgan, 1998a).

Responses and contributions to focus group and one-on-one interviews were kept confidential. Documents generated during the recruitment stage of the project were accessible only to the researcher and were destroyed at the completion of the project (Morgan, 1998a). Participants were addressed by first names or pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality during the audio and video recorded focus group sessions (Morgan, 1998a). Participants were not identified by name or by group in any subsequently published reports, articles, or presentations. An alias was assigned to individual participants or groups mentioned or discussed in published reports or presentations. Any records or documentation with identifying information about individual participants, including digital recordings, transcripts, and taped interviews were destroyed at the completion of the project (Morgan, 1998a).
Qualitative data collection methods and analyses (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Spradley, 1979) were used to animate a series of questions designed to probe for a possible link between the wide-scale diffusion of computer and communication technologies and the growth of homeschooling observed in the U.S. over the past two decades (Basham et al., 2007; Bauman, 2005; Bielick et al., 2001; Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Lines, 1999; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 2005b). In an effort to inform and deepen understanding of the homeschooling phenomenon, a naturalistic approach was adopted to identify the processes, practices, and meanings (Creswell, 2003; Schwandt, 1994) homeschool parents might have attached to modern technology as they considered and committed to homeschooling as an unconventional, yet viable, educational option for their children and families.

Analysis involved a review of video and transcribed records of the focus group interviews to assess the quality of interactions between participants during each of the five, 60-90 minute sessions (Hollander, 2004; Reed & Payton, 1997). Transcripts of the focus group interviews were analyzed and coded to situate participants’ perceptions and use of modern computer and communication technologies within the intellectual and emotional journey toward a decision and commitment to homeschooling (Lawson, 1999). An on-going and “situationally responsive” (Krueger, 1998a, p. 18) analyses were employed on the video and written transcripts to verify the focus group interview protocol and to ensure that criteria for saturation had been satisfied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).
Participant Profile

Demographic profiles were considered primarily for purposes of description of the sample group of participants and verification. Because of the small group size, generalizations to the larger population of homeschool parents were inappropriate.

Group Size

Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire data (Appendix A) showed that the sample of 27 participations generally represented the larger population of homeschool parents in the U.S. Seven active homeschool groups or organizations from the greater Albany, NY region were represented in the study. The character of the homeschool groups was diverse and varied in size, organizational structure, and religious and pedagogical ideology. Of the sample group of 27 participants, 22 participants reported an affiliation with at least one homeschool group. Only one of the 23 currently active participants reported no affiliation to a homeschool group or organization.

Experience

Participants reported an average of six years of homeschooling experience with a range of 2 to 21 years. The majority of active participants ($n = 23$) reported they started homeschooling around the year 2000 or after. Twenty-three participants reported they had seven or fewer years of homeschooling experience with 14 participants reporting they had been homeschooling for 5 to 7 years.

Gender

Twenty-three of twenty-seven participants were currently practicing or former homeschool mothers. Of the 27 participants, two were male and 25 were female. Both male and female participants reported that the mother of the household shouldered the
bulk of the homeschooling responsibilities. All but one participant indicated that the mother was the primary home education planner and coordinator in most households.

Almost half \((n = 12)\) of the sample group of participants reported that the mother was the primary instructor for the children as well. Although six participants reported that both parents shared instructional duties, the father was not identified as the sole primary instructor by any of the participants. Several participants \((n = 5)\) also reported that they had sought and employed outside instructors like tutors, coaches, family members, and educare providers to support the child’s overall home education program.

*Number of Homeschooled Children per Household.*

With a range of 1 to 5 children per household, an average of two children per household was reported by participants. Across the sample, 19 of 27 participants reported 1 to 2 children lived in the household. Regardless of the number of children reported per household, the large majority of participants \((n = 24)\) reported they homeschooled all of their children. Follow-up questioning revealed that, in the few cases where participants did not homeschool all of their children, a child in the household was either above or below compulsory school age. In one case, a participant reported that one child went to school at the upper grade levels, while her other two children were educated at home.

*Setting*

Most of the participants \((n = 19)\) reported they lived in either an urban or suburban setting. The relatively high percentage of urban and suburban participants is not surprising given that the research was situated and limited to the greater Albany, NY region. Six participants reported they lived in a rural setting.
Ethnicity

Compared to the larger population of homeschool parents (Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta et al., 2006), minorities were underrepresented in the sample. Except for one participant of Asian descent, all participants were white.

Religion

Confirming previous research (Bauman, 2002; Ray, 2005b), a slight majority of the participants \((n = 16)\) described themselves as either nominal, practicing, or devout in their religious beliefs. Seven participants reported that religion was a central part of their family culture and ideology. In contrast, 11 of the participants indicated that religion played no part in their household culture or instruction and did not influence their decision to homeschool.

Socio-economic Status

Frequency analysis showed that the majority of participants described themselves as middle or upper middle class. Six participants reported estimated annual household incomes of $50,000 per year or less. Approximately 75% of participants \((n = 21)\) reported their estimated household income ranged between $50,000 and $250,000 per year. Within that group, one third \((n = 9)\) of the participants pegged their annual estimated household income at $100,000 to $250,000 per year. One participant reported an estimated household income at more the $250,000 per year.

Marital Status

All but one of the participants reported that they and a spouse were heading a two-parent household. One participant in the group was a single mother earning between $25,000 and $50,000 per year.
Alignment and comparison of the participant’s attained educational level with the corresponding spouse’s attained educational level produced a snapshot of the educational background of parents per participant household. Parents across all 27 households had attained at least a high school diploma and some college education. In 20 of 27 households, both parents had attained at least an undergraduate degree. In 5 households, both parents had earned a Master’s degree or higher. At least one parent had attained a Master’s level degree or higher in 19 households, with 9 of those attaining an advanced level degree (Ph.D. or equivalent).

When corresponding categories indicating participants’ reported employment status and the reported status of the spouse were aligned and compared, analysis showed that in all but one household, at least one parent worked full time. In the remaining household, the participant reported that both parents worked part-time and one worked from home.

Full-time parent was the most frequently reported employment status of participants \((n = 8)\), which was expected given that 23 of the 27 participants also indicated they were homeschool mothers. In line with the typical homeschool model (Lines, 1991b; Ray, 2005b), eight participants indicated a full-time parent at home (the mother in each instance) with a spouse working full-time.

The results also showed that both parents worked in the majority of participant households. In 19 of 27 households, one parent worked full time, while the other parent either worked part time, went to school, or both, in cases reported by two participants. In
five households, both parents worked full-time. In almost half of the households, at least one of the parents could work from home at least part of the time.

Motivations

Coding and analysis of data from item 19 of the questionnaire indicated that participants opted to homeschool for a variety of institutional, pedagogical, ideological, and socio-relational reasons (Appendix F). Analysis of the narrative data collected for item 19 showed that roughly 40% of the responses related to participants’ various dissatisfactions with the options, policies, or practices instituted by conventional schools (e.g. ineffective teaching, inappropriate content, lack of good schools locally).

About 50% of the reasons for homeschooling generated by participants were coded as pedagogical or social motivations (e.g. lack of individualized instruction, negative influences from peers). Religious motivations made up only about 10% of the total number of reasons generated by participants. For example, one religiously motivated participant expressed a desire to “incorporate a Christian worldview” (FG3, HS4). In contrast, a participant from the same group said she was motivated to homeschool because “there was too much religion in schools” (FG3, HS3).

Technology Profile

A large majority of participants \( (n = 25) \) reported they relied on modern technologies “somewhat” to “heavily.” No participant reported that they did not rely on modern technology at all, and only two reported they rely minimally on technology.

Technologies Used

Participants indicated that they employed a wide variety of computer, communication, and media technologies to support and facilitate their homeschooling
practices and activities. To achieve an initial understanding of the diversity of technologies participants reported using, frequency analysis was conducted on item 23 of the questionnaire (Appendix A).

Results showed that all participants reported that they rely on two or more different types of computer or communication technologies. Email and educational software were reported as the technologies most widely and frequently employed. Across the sample, all participants \( (N = 27) \) reported using the internet. The majority of participants \( (n = 22) \) reported they use email regularly. A number of participants used streamed media \( (n = 8) \) and web logs \( (n = 9) \) as well.

Educational software was used frequently by 21 participants, and 24 participants reported that they used DVDs. Besides educational software, a number of participants \( (n = 15) \) used productivity software (like Microsoft Word or Excel) and media design packages like Photoshop. Analysis concerning the extent and character to which the technologies were used day to day was beyond the scope of the research.

**Applications of Technology**

The results of questionnaire analysis indicated that participants implemented computer and computer technologies to animate and support a full spectrum of activities related to the homeschooling enterprise. Networking with other homeschool parents \( (n = 26) \) and accessing and researching instructional resources \( (n = 23) \) were identified by a large majority of participants as ways they used modern technology to support homeschooling.

A majority of participants reported they used modern technologies to support instruction \( (n = 20) \), collaborate with other homeschool parents \( (n = 16) \), cultivate the
child’s social networks \((n = 16)\), access and monitor local and state level homeschooling laws and regulations \((n = 16)\), manage administrative tasks \((n = 18)\), and access state and federal exams and tests \((n = 13)\). Accessing online courses and instructors, curriculum development, and support of professional development and training were reported by a third of participants \((n = 9)\).

**Cost**

Data collection regarding the technology profile concluded with a rough estimate of annual expenses participants believed they incurred for computer and communications technology to support homeschooling. Participants were informed that their from-the-hip estimates should include costs for internet connections, cell phone subscriptions, hardware upgrades, and other rolling costs and fees that would be considered as part of a typical household technology budget.

These rolling annual costs were to be considered along with costs for other homeschooling-specific materials like educational software, DVDs, and so on. The results of the analysis did not reflect an itemized accounting of technology-related expenses for homeschooling. Rather, the estimates were intended to illustrate participants’ perceptions of how much they pay per year for the technologies they tended to rely on to support homeschooling.

Slightly over half \((n = 15)\) of the participants estimated they spent under $1,000 dollars per year on computer and communication technologies. A number of participants \((n = 11)\) reported spending between $1,000 and $3,000 per year. A cross-reference of the participants’ reported employment status and further questioning revealed that several of the participants who estimated that they had spent more than $1,000 per year on
technology added that one of the parents worked at least part-time or ran a business from home. According to participants, working or running a business from home required maintenance of relatively high-end technology for household software and systems.

**Homeschool Journey**

In order to understand how modern technologies might be influencing the growth of homeschooling, the focus group interview transcripts were examined and coded to situate technology within the participants’ respective psychological and conceptual journeys toward becoming homeschooling parents. Coding categories that emerged during the analysis of item 19 of the questionnaire data (Appendix F) were used as a basis to initiate and support the journey and thematic analysis conducted on the focus group data (Appendix G). Analysis of the focus group interview data revealed that participants came to homeschooling from a variety of backgrounds and had decided ultimately to homeschool for reasons unique the child’s and family’s circumstances. Participants’ initial reasons for homeschooling tended to fall into personal, practical, and ideological categories.

**Personal Issues**

Despite the uniqueness of each participant’s homeschool story, results indicated a pattern common throughout the narratives. For many participants, the journey toward homeschooling began with reconciling a range of personal issues concerning the child’s education and development with perceptions of the capacity of conventional public and private schools to address those issues appropriately.

For example, personal issues tended to reflect participants’ concerns about their child’s developmental readiness for institutionalized education. Participants’ willingness
to surrender the care and education of their child to state-sponsored or privately held institutions characterized another kind of personal issue. Several participants described a personal motivation to homeschool as a desire for their child to avoid and transcend the negative or painful influences they had experienced themselves as conventionally schooled students. Participants recalled experiences ranging from hurtful social episodes in junior high school to chronic academic boredom and intellectual apathy.

**Practical Issues**

Reinforcing findings from the analysis of the questionnaire data, participants articulated some of their specific dissatisfactions and problems with conventional schooling as a category of practical motivations for homeschooling. Some of the common concerns with conventional schooling voiced by participants are listed below.

1. lack of appropriate educational options, choices, or control
2. low quality, inappropriate, or ineffective instruction
3. inappropriate or non-rigorous curriculum
4. lack of safety
5. negative or inappropriately mediated social and cultural influences
6. intrusiveness of school culture and policies on home and family life

**Ideological Motivations**

During discussions about why and how participants decided to homeschool, participants described how their initial motivations to homeschool tended to expand over time from personal and practical issues toward a broader set of ideas and values about the nature of learning, conceptions of teaching, the purpose of education, and the role of family, as they gained experience.
Exceptions to this pattern were heard as well. For example, one participant described how she knew she would homeschool years before she even had children. For her, the journey to homeschooling started with an awareness and commitment to the pedagogical advantages of homeschooling. She added that the reconciliation and resolution of practical and personal matters (wanting a better education for her daughter, concerns about negative social and intellectual influences in schools) came later once her daughter had reached compulsory school age.

Nevertheless, a general expansion from practical to ideological and philosophical motivations marked the homeschool journeys of many participants. Across all of the focus group interviews, participants identified several higher-order and rather educationally progressive rationales for homeschooling that they felt developed over time:

1. belief in individualized, self-paced instruction
2. preference for educational and experiential authenticity
3. exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences
4. belief in student-centered, self-regulated learning
5. preference for project-based, thinking-centered learning
6. desire to cultivate closer family ties and relationships

*Stages of the Homeschool Journey*

As participants across the focus group interviews recalled and described their experiences as prospective and then practicing homeschool parents, a process emerged across participants’ narratives. The process included five elements: predisposition, recognition, deliberation, identification, and expansion.
For many participants, the homeschool journey began with a latent or percolating predisposition to seek educational alternatives followed by a point of recognition that triggered homeschooling as a potentially viable option. Once participants became aware of homeschooling as a possibility, participants entered into the deliberation phase of the journey. Obviously, as practicing and former home educators, the deliberative process for participants culminated with a decision to homeschool.

The next phase of the process involved redefining or modifying one’s identity as a homeschool parent. In some cases, the women in the group described how they had arrived at and reconciled their decision to walk away from or decelerate successful careers to commit to becoming a homeschool parent. Other women described how they had to renegotiate their new dual role as parent and educator. As participants put homeschooling into practice and gained experience, expanding and articulating a deeper, more sophisticated rationale for homeschooling characterized the fifth element of the process.

Results of the journey analysis indicated that participants experienced their respective passages through the five stages as an organic emotional and intellectual process, rather as a systematic progression from one stage to the next. Participants experienced the elements of homeschool journey differently. For some participants, deliberation was experienced as an extended process of managing self-doubt and perseverance, which in some cases involved persuading an ambivalent spouse or seeking acceptance from extended family members and friends. Other participants experienced the deliberation phase of their homeschool journey as a relatively brief and unremarkable culminating event. As one participant recalled, “My husband was on board as soon as I
told him I wanted to homeschool our daughter. We just knew it was the right thing to do” (FG3, HS1).

The remaining sections of the chapter illustrate how participants situated, applied, and perceived of modern technology as part of their homeschool journeys according to the original research questions.

Technology and Its Perceived Influence on the Decision to Homeschool

*Unscaffolded Perceptions of Technology*

Participants did not identify computer and communication technology as having any influence on their motivation to homeschool on item 19 of the questionnaire (Appendix A). Likewise, technology did not emerge during the focus group interviews as a topic of discussion until it was made salient to the conversation. Analysis of the transcripts and video recordings from the focus group interviews revealed that participants readily discussed their motivations for homeschooling and identified and elaborated on the various challenges they experienced during the process leading up to and following the decision homeschool.

Yet, no participant mentioned modern technology as a potentially enabling element of their homeschool journey until it was introduced explicitly as part of the focus group protocol (Appendix B). As a result of the observed lack of saliency of modern technology in the data collected from the first focus group interview and questionnaires, the protocol was modified slightly to disembed the topic of technology during subsequent interviews.
Scaffolded Perceptions of Technology

Once the topic of modern computer and computer technology was introduced into the focus group interviews, discussions concerning the possible relationship between technology and homeschooling tended to default to issues concerning the internet and various web-based technologies. When reflecting and commenting on the ways that computer and communication technologies might have influenced the decision to homeschool, participants tended to express one of three points of view:

1. Technology influenced my decision to homeschool.
2. Technology did not influence my decision to homeschool.
3. Technology did not influence my decision to homeschool, but it helped make homeschooling easier once we decided to do it.

Technology Influenced Decision to Homeschool

For participants who perceived that modern technology had influenced their journey toward a decision to homeschool, analysis showed that the internet and the web primarily were perceived to have provided some participants with a point of entry or recognition. As one participant commented, it was through the internet that she became aware of homeschooling:

Reading an article from the Web was really the catalyst for me in deciding to homeschool. I don’t even remember the name of it or who wrote it, but it was this piece that was all about, you know, a day in the life of this particular family, and I was just so struck by it. Who knows what would have happened had I not accessed that particular article. It might have taken me much longer to come to the same ideas and decision. But that
was really it. I can point to it and say that changed my view of what it was about (FG4, HS2).

During the final focus group session, a participant who worked part-time from home described how she became aware of homeschooling through the internet:

I learned about homeschooling from the internet also. I was on a bulletin board. I was home with my little kids with no money. I didn't have a car. I lived on Long Island, which is like the Republican capital of the world. So I was really surrounded by people that I didn't relate to. We had the internet, so I would just go and learn about something I wanted to learn about. That’s how I learned about homeschooling, and it resonated for me (FG5, HS4).

The discovery of a larger and more diverse homeschool community than expected through access to and use of the internet reflected a dimension of raised awareness described by several participants across the focus group interviews. A participant from the fifth focus group commented:

I think it’s the way I found out about homeschooling to begin with. One of the ways was the internet. I found so many people who were doing it. I didn't realize. There were discussion groups about other things, like home birthing or whatever. But to discover that there were all these people that were doing it was a surprise (FG5, HS2).
During a one-on-one interview, a participant remarked that she became aware of homeschooling through the internet and subsequently had to modify her initial misconceptions about it:

It was through the internet that I became aware of homeschooling and where I learned that homeschooling wasn’t this freaky thing. There were people like me doing it and that it wasn’t just some religious thing (INT4, HS3).

During the fourth focus group interview, one participant explained that technology had influenced their decision to homeschool because it helped her recognize that she would not be alone if she made the leap to homeschooling:

I think it provides a lot of awareness. Before you go looking on the internet, you think there is just this small, you know, a group here, a group there, and you’re oblivious to the fact that it’s everywhere. So, you go online and you get this awareness that homeschooling is everywhere and it’s in all facets of life. It’s not, you know, religious necessarily. It’s not for one reason in particular. I think it provides an awareness because nobody wants to do something like this alone (FG4, HS4).

*Technology Did Not Influence the Decision to Homeschool*

However, participants were not united in their perceptions that modern technology had influenced their respective decisions to homeschool. Some
participants felt that the decision to homeschool was based primarily on a philosophical predisposition or personal motivation to seek educational alternatives. During the fourth focus group interview, a participant suggested that perhaps a dispositional willingness to go against the mainstream was a necessary character trait for individuals who would consider homeschooling as an educational option:

I think it also depends on how comfortable you are going against the mainstream. You know, people who have always sort of done things differently. When you make this decision to homeschool, you’ve already done a lot of things differently. And so I think that you’ve already started looking at the world from a different perspective. You’re not taking all this information out there (FG4, HS6).

The perception that an ideological disposition influenced their decision to homeschool was echoed by a number of participants across the focus group discussions, who felt they would have decided to homeschool without access to technology. The following comment from one participant illustrated a contrasting point of view:

I was just thinking, in the past there wasn’t any of this technology. So many people just homeschooled and did stuff that they had to do where they lived and the way life was. So I just think it’s a little odd to just make the assumption that it’s because of technology that we can homeschool. Not many people are going to base their decision on the physical existence of technology (FG5, HS3).
Expanding the point, a participant from the same focus interview added the following comment:

I don't even remember when we went online. But for us, this whole online thing just became something I only recently realized. I use the computer a lot to research, or look for a book, or what’s on this topic that we’re interested in. And then I go to Amazon to see if it’s in the library, and do like that kind of a thing. But it had zero, no bearing at all. The choice was made for other reasons (FG5, HS5).

*Technology Makes Homeschooling Easier*

The analysis of the questionnaire, focus group and one-on-one interview data showed that communication and communication technology was situated primarily within the process of deliberation for some of the more tech-reliant and tech-savvy participants. Although perceptions about the role of technology as it applied to participants’ inclination to homeschool varied across the focus group interviews, results showed that participants were unified in the perception that modern technology had impacted their capacity to homeschool once they decided to do so. The sense that modern technologies had made the implementation and practice of homeschooling easier was a recurring theme heard across all five focus group interviews:

1. I’m not saying that I would stop homeschooling without technology, but I would be lying if I underestimated it, because I think sometimes we don’t think how much we use it. I actually do use computer technology an awfully lot, more so for myself I think than for my daughter (FG1, HS1).
2. Technology makes homeschooling much easier, but I would say that it isn't the reason I do it. But it is an aid, and a good one (FG3, HS3).

3. I'm getting the sense that we would all have homeschooled, even if it weren’t for technology and the internet. But I can say absolutely, for myself anyway, if we had to teach all of the high school courses, whether it’s Spanish or advanced mathematics, or chemistry, or biology, and do all of them for all of our children, our life would be vastly different (FG3, HS2).

When I asked an especially committed and ideologically motivated participant if she could homeschool without technology during a follow-up one-on-one interview, she conceded that technology made some aspects of homeschooling easier:

I'd homeschool no matter how hard it is. I mean, I am that committed to it. With or without the technology, I’d find a way. The technology certainly makes it a lot easier for me to do some things (INT6, HS6).

Despite the commonly held sense that technology had made homeschooling easier, the results revealed an apparent discrepancy between some participants’ perceptions of the role of technology on their inclination and capacity to homeschool and the degree that participants reported that they actually relied on it. As discussed previously, without sufficient scaffolding, participants did not mention technology as having any sort of influence on their decision to homeschool. In addition, when technology was introduced into the conversation, some participants downplayed or challenged the idea that computers or various media and communication technologies had enabled them in some way to arrive at the decision to homeschool. Yet, the results of
the technology profile showed that participants relied on a range of technologies on a fairly regular basis.

I pursued this apparent anomaly further during the one-on-one interviews with participants from each focus group. Selected participants were asked to comment on the gap between the perceived lack of influence of technology expressed by some participants and self-reports of moderate to heavy reliance on technology.

A common pattern of response voiced across the one-on-one interviews was that computer and communication technology might have become such a ubiquitous part of everyday life that people might perceive modern technologies, like the internet, as a mundane household utility, rather than as an empowering or enabling tool. As one participant speculated, “the distinctions between the appliance and the apparatus might have blurred” (INT4, HS5). Another participant elaborated on the ubiquity issue in the following excerpt:

It’s like the people who say money is not important are people who usually have it. I think there’s an element of that with technology, where I don’t know what we’d miss, because we’re not missing it. What I think you’re going to find is that people don’t stop long enough to think about how technology has impacted their homeschooling. I mean, would I still homeschool without a car? I think I would. But my life would be radically different, and my daughter would not have had nearly the same experiences she’s had without it (INT1, HS1).

Highlighting the topic of technological and media ubiquity, another participant identified a potential methodological issue in her response:
Technology is just such central part of everyday life. How do you tease out the aspect of our lives that are not technology related? I mean, even if I said that I rather talk to people than use the technology, the people I talk to may have used technology to get their information. All the books I read, I’d have to think about all the technology what went into getting that information to me (INT2, HS2).

An alternative perspective was voiced by a former homeschool participant who summed up the ubiquity issue as one of proximity. In her case, her husband ran a business from home, which involved maintaining several networked computers with high speed connections. For her, reliance on technology was a matter of convenient and ready access. In her words, “our use of technology amounted to using it because it was there” (INT3, HS2). As the results of the questionnaire showed, the proximity of high-end computer technologies may have been close at hand in many participant households, especially in households where one parent worked at home at least part of the time.

Initial Perceptions of Computer and Communication Technology

Besides raising awareness, participants who felt modern technologies had influenced their inclination and decision to homeschool perceived that computer and communication technologies helped them acquire sufficient levels of intellectual and emotional capital during the process of deliberation. According to one participant, “Getting on the net, seeing other people doing homeschooling kind of gives them that emotional capital that they need to really believe they can and take the plunge. And once they do that, they’re in (FG4, HS5).” Some participants also revealed that access to and
use of modern technologies, typically the internet, had influenced their decision to homeschool by lowering various barriers of entry.

*Lowered Interpersonal Barriers*

Across all the focus groups, the capacity of modern technology (e.g. email, message boards, national lists, blogs, and various web-based forums and networks) to connect prospective homeschool parents to the larger homeschooling community was arguably the most readily observed theme concerning perceptions of technology’s influence on the decision to homeschool. The view that computer and communication technology had enabled participants to seek, find, and compare a range of homeschooling models at the local and national level, network with prospective and experienced homeschool parents, and generally orient themselves to the realm of homeschooling practices and ideas was critical to the process of deciding to homeschool for some participants:

For me, when deciding to homeschool it was really important to connect with other homeschoolers, because I didn't really know anyone else in the beginning. I was sending out inquiries to national lists and other groups of people that were not anywhere in my local area and who were very good resources to me. They were extremely helpful to me in making my decision and helping me to feel like I could actually do it, like giving me the logistics of it. Even accessing the policies, accessing curriculum ideas, and reviews (FG1, HS1).

The capacity to source nationally in search of niche groups or individuals with similar interests, strengths, or unique circumstances was perceived by some participants
as a critical type of connection-making afforded by modern technology. In the third focus group interview, a participant described how she perceived that the internet had lowered interpersonal barriers in her case:

The internet's been a lifesaver to us. We were encouraged to make the jump because of knowing about our local group, and the co-ops, and things at our church. But when we actually got out of the public schools, we found that they just weren’t meeting our needs. So for my boys, we have to source nationally to find peers. Allowed by the internet, having certain specialized educational programs and certain gifted lists that we could get on, puts those very few people scattered around the country in contact with each other. It allows the boys to take online classes with a couple of people from around the world, that kind of thing. And we couldn't have done that without the internet. So we made the jump, knowing it was there, and not realizing how much we'd need it. It's made all the difference because that's the only place they could find peers (FG3, HS2).

Lowered Informational Barriers

Being able to easily access information and resources, like books, articles, models, curriculum, and testimonials about homeschooling acquired via the internet was perceived by some participants as a key part of the deliberative process leading up the decision to homeschool:

For me, it did help make the decision. Before we even pulled the kids out of school, I found homeschoolers, people that were in a situation similar to
what I would be dealing with, and got that reassurance that, yeah, you can
teach the kids, and here are some of the resources and things to get you
started. So I think it does facilitate the decision. You can get online and do
a search on Google for homeschooling, and you're gonna get however
many pages of lists. So it answers those questions (FG3, HS5).

*Lowered Instructional Barriers*

A third barrier of entry discussed by participants who felt technology had
influenced their initial deliberations about homeschooling involved anticipating and
addressing concerns about curriculum and instruction. Participants who perceived
initially that they lacked the confidence or skills to teach certain subjects (particularly at
the upper grade levels) felt that modern technology provided some reassurance that they
would be able find appropriate instructors, courses, and instructional support online to fill
in potential gaps in the child’s homeschool program. During the second focus group
interview, a former homeschool parent commented that easy access to outside
instructional resources would influence her decision to return to homeschooling:

> If either of my sons came to me today and said, “I really want to
homeschool next year because I want to do this,” I know I could do it.
The technology would definitely influence that. I mean if I had to picture,
especially being in grad school, me sitting down at a table every day with
a bunch of textbooks, or them sitting down at a table every day with a
bunch of textbooks, I don’t think I would be so inclined to say, “We can
make that work.” But because I know that there are really good online,
live-feed, interactive programs available, we could (FG2, HS1).
Lowered Psychological Barriers

Some participants believed modern technologies influenced their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), confidence, and in some instances authority as they considered the decision to homeschool. Technology was perceived to have helped ameliorate participants’ sense of self-doubt or trepidation about making the jump to homeschooling. The feeling that technology had helped some participants bolster their sense of self-efficacy reinforced the perception that access to local and national networks of practitioners who had already made the leap was available at the click of a mouse:

I think most parents are very capable, qualified, and able to homeschool. I think it's a confidence thing, because of what society and the education system tries to say. But I think the internet, or these technologies, have just given them more confidence to recognize, you know what, this'll help me (FG3, HS2).

Easy access to information seemed to help lower psychological barriers experienced by some participants as well. Web-based access to information appeared to provide some participants with a measure of confidence that sufficient resources were available to draw from, and fall back on:

Technology wasn’t a scale tipper for me. But, boy I know today, some people who are going into homeschooling are like, they wanted to do it, but they didn't feel competent because they didn't have a lot at their fingertips. There's so much more curriculum now. I mean when I started, our homeschool group was like 30 people, and now it's about 170. That was 10 or 11 years ago. People are more able to do that now because they
have this and they're more confident. So they're, like, yeah, I can do this (FG3, HS3).

Preferences for Traditional Information and Interpersonal Outlets

Participants who perceived that modern technology had little if any impact on their decision to homeschool described a process that involved reliance on relatively conventional media sources, like books and magazine articles acquired from brick-and-mortar outlets like local libraries and bookstores. In a few instances, the technologically averse and the admitted late adopters of technology in the group seemed to hold this view.

The results showed that several participants genuinely preferred visiting the library and reading books to surfing the web to explore homeschooling as an educational option. As one participant remarked, “I had some predictions about what I wanted to do. And so I did it. The majority of the stuff I was using when I started was books” (FG3, HS3).

Participants who did not perceive technology was embedded within the deliberative process also expressed a preference for talking and interacting with practicing homeschoolers face-to-face. Again, this perspective did not appear to reflect a general rejection of technology as a matter of principle in most cases, but rather a preference for the natural and familiar give-and-take of human interaction and conversation.

The following excerpt from a former homeschool parent highlighted her preference for face-to-face interactions as she considered the decision to homeschool. The passage reinforced the observation that both tech-averse and tech-reliant participants
perceived similar informational, interpersonal, instructional, and psychological barriers of entry while weighing the decision to homeschooling:

When I was a homeschooler, I would talk more with people and find out what they had tried. I was nervous about being able to stimulate them enough and provide an education. So, it was more talking with people face-to-face and seeing the trial and error and actually seeing the child and seeing how they adapted and what they learned and stuff like that that put me at peace. I really sought those personal interactions out. When I started homeschooling, it was, you know, how many people can I gather up; where do I go; who do I need; what’s going on? It became more of a social thing (FG4, HS5).

Uses and Applications of Computer and Communication Technology

Regardless of whether participants perceived that computer and communication technologies influenced their awareness or inclination to homeschool, virtually all participants were united in their view that technology facilitated their capacity to do so in practice. Borrowing from the organizational management literature, the results of the analysis showed that participants used computer and communication technologies to support and sustain homeschooling by cultivating communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

Communities of practice are characterized generally as “groups of self-selected people informally bound by a shared expertise and a passion for joint enterprise” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139). As an organizational form, communities of practice
are “self-organizing; they set their own agendas; and they establish their own leadership” (p. 142). Originally proposed as a social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998), the communities of practice model has been expanded into an explanatory framework for understanding how informal networks of people are created (or developed), function, and are sustained.

The narratives reinforced results indicating that the large majority of participants (n = 24) had sought and depended on an affiliation with a homeschool group or organization once they put homeschooling into practice. The results of the focus group interviews indicate that homeschooling provides a technologically-enabled model of communities of practice theory in action.

**Shared Networks**

Once participants had committed to the decision to homeschool, internet and web technologies were used to help participants seek and associate with like-minded and similarly motivated individuals and groups at a regional, national, and international level. Whether or not technology was initially perceived to lower interpersonal barriers of entry, participants across the sample described how they had adopted and integrated email, message boards, online forums, and other networking technologies to minimize social as well as ideological or pedagogical isolation. Borrowing Wenger’s (1998) terminology, participants used communication technologies to facilitate the process of “becoming” (p. 5) part of the larger homeschool community:

I think the technology is critical to connecting to homeschoolers. You don’t seem like such a small population when you can connect with people
internationally. I mean, that’s the reality is you can connect internationally (FG1, HS1).

Another participant from the third focus interview reinforced the idea that technology made it easier for her to seek and associate with like-minded homeschool parents:

I think the technology makes it easier to communicate with other homeschoolers and find out about what resources are out there. Before all the computers, and the Internet and all that, you would hear from people in your little group or whatever. But if your thoughts are different, or your child's needs are different or something like that, you might not necessarily find out about some great program. And now, there are groups to fit just about any type of homeschooler, and you can find that niche and find out about the resources (FG3, HS3).

Shared Knowledge and Information

Participants across the focus group interviews described how computer and communication technology had facilitated their capacity to access, synthesize, and share a broad range of information and instructional materials in their efforts to put homeschooling into practice from day-to-day. Here again, differing perceptions about technology’s role in the decision to homeschool eroded when participants discussed how they had infused technology into their homeschooling activities.

Participants tended to employ modern technologies to expedite and facilitate information gathering and processing activities related to researching curriculum, sampling, testing, and purchasing instructional materials, and seeking instructional and
homeschooling models. Participants described how they acquired and shared that information within and beyond their homeschool networks. Having wide and easy access to instructional materials and resources, traditionally reserved for information gatekeepers such as certified school officials and teachers, was perceived to have had an empowering and equalizing effect for some participants:

As I homeschool, I find staying connected to homeschoolers, researching curriculum, even things like the accessing video feeds and programs that I have access to as an educator that teachers have access to too is helpful. I get a lot of that through access to other homeschoolers across the country (FG1, HS1).

Within the descriptions of how technology was used in practice to facilitate the process of finding information and sharing knowledge to support their respective approaches to homeschooling, the theme of self-efficacy re-emerged. An exchange between two participants during the fourth focus group session illustrated how technology-afforded access to information provided a sense of reassurance and confidence once they had become practicing homeschool parents:

HS3: It’s like a safety net. You know, I never really had an issue with being confident that I could teach my kids, or that I could do a good job. But all the other things, like finding the curriculum, I didn’t want to go with the single in-a-box curriculum. I wanted to be able to research and figure out what I like the best for this and what I thought would be best for them on different topics. I was able to, you know, collect my resources from different areas. So, by doing that research, it gives you a lot of
confidence that if you’re looking for something, you’re going to be able to
find it. All you have to do is take a few minutes to look.

HS1: Not only did the internet assist me or support me in becoming a
homeschooler, it also feels like sort of a backup system. If everything we
chose to teach our daughter, the curriculum, the methods, if they all start
to fall apart, the very first place I would go would be the internet. I feel
confident that there are so many different resources available there that
there’s something for us no matter what. It keeps me from feeling like
there’s even a possibility of failure, unless it’s my lack of motivation. It
won’t be lack of materials or resources.

Shared Enterprise

In connection with shared networks and shared expertise, using technology also
helped some participants sustain a sense of connection to a larger community, and
perhaps to a common cause. Confirming previous study and commentary (Apple, 2000;
Basham et al., 2007; Bauman, 2005; Lines, 2003; Ray, 2005b), the decision to
homeschool reflected a set of values and beliefs about a range of issues including
lifestyle, parenting, education, and work, among others. Technology enabled some
participants to feel that their values extended well beyond themselves and were shared by
the homeschool community, a community that was larger than many participants initially
expected:

Well, my initial thought on technology had very little to do with
curriculum or coursework and more to do with exposure to different ideas
that are universal. Whether there are homeschoolers in China, Albany,
Schenectady or anyplace else in the world, you can now type in the word homeschooling and can know so many things. There’s too much information. So now we can think outside of the box very easily (FG4, HS1).

In line with the questionnaire results, not all participants registered an affiliation with an existing homeschool group or organization. The analysis of the focus group interviews indicated that some participants approached and implemented homeschooling somewhat as independent educational project or design managers, who would cherry-pick certain resources and activate a range of social networks and connections as needed in a rather holistic fashion.

Other participants described their affiliations with homeschooling groups and networks as nominal. For instance, a participant might belong to one homeschool group as an active regular member (e.g. by attending meetings, participating in group planning and policy sessions, offering to teach classes, etc.) and simultaneously maintain less obligatory affiliations to other groups who have an internet presence or website. Nevertheless, all but a few participants indicated that they had sought and depended on one or more communities of practice to sustain homeschooling in some way, and many participants used technology to help them do so.

**Supports Instruction**

In practice, participants used a wide variety of computer, media, communication, and digital technologies to access and activate a full spectrum of administrative, managerial, and pedagogical activities related to the enterprise of education. As the questionnaire analysis showed, participants identified and infused digital technologies
ranging from the internet to MP3 players and digital cameras to support instruction. Computers and an internet connection enabled some of the participants to access and enroll their children in online courses, find tutors and instructors, and access specialized information to enrich the child’s curricular program and supplement parent-directed instruction, particularly as the child aged and took advanced subject matter.

Results of the focus group analysis revealed that some participants perceived that technology had helped them pursue higher-order instructional goals that involved more than direct access to instructors and information. For example, several participants perceived that technology helped them individualize and tailor instruction. Others felt that computer and communication technology helped them animate an instructional agenda aimed at fostering independent learning. The sense that technology had broadened the range of instructional choices available resonated for several participants as well.

*Enhances Sense of Authority*

In connection with results indicating that computer and communication technology helped boost self-efficacy and confidence, several participants perceived that direct access to information, resources, and experts and instructors of their choosing had helped level the educational field for them. As one participant put it during the fourth focus group discussion, technology had helped empower homeschool parents to “remove the cult of expert” (FG4, HS6):

Well, I think that the internet removes the cult of the expert. When you go looking for information, you had to go to an authority, whether it was the school psychologist or the administrator or someone who is going to guide you to find a career or the choice or whatever. And all of sudden, you can
go and find out a lot of stuff yourself. So now, you don’t have to necessarily tap resource people. You might do that ultimately with the internet to go and find a person who might solve a particular problem for you. It provides this access, and you no longer have to have the expert regarding choices.

During the first focus group interview, a participant described how wide access to information and networks of homeschool parents helped her overcome an enculturated sense that schools, rather than parents, had the final word on how to educate her own children:

I do remember early on thinking we had this engrained feeling that only experts can teach. I remember thinking loosely along the lines, “Well, I have the internet, so I really have access to those experts. If I have a textbook in front of me that the kids are using, and I don't understand something (which at the elementary level I would hope I do and most of the time I do), it’s fairly easy for me to find a website, even if I have to check a few, that are going to explain it in such a way that I get it, and I can re-explain it to them. It’s really not an issue for me now. I have access to varied minds and many websites (FG1, HS4).

**Allows Parent to Work from Home**

The results of the focus group analysis further informed findings from the questionnaire that indicated that many of the participants, their spouses, or both the participant and a spouse, worked from home. A snapshot of the working lives of the participants in the group suggested that they had configured and organized their working
lives in a variety of ways. The focus group analysis indicated that a number of homeschool participants felt that computer and communication technology had helped enable them do so:

For several participants, the capacity to use technology to work from home was perceived to afford families a measure of logistical, instructional, and financial flexibility to make homeschooling work for them day to day. For others, the capacity to work from home was perceived as a necessary condition, as participants from two different groups pointed out in the following passages:

For us, the technology is critical in that it’s my job. The only situation where I’d consider sending my kids to school is if I had to go and get a job and couldn’t be home with them. The fact that I can stay home and work is totally critical to our homeschooling. If I couldn’t do that I would have to send my kids to school (FG5, HS2).

Likewise, a participant who ran a small business and homeschooled their child with his wife (who also worked full-time) highlighted the centrality of technology in their capacity to homeschool:

The number one reason why I can homeschool is because of technology. It allows me and my whole staff to work in their homes. So ya, I hadn’t actually thought of it that way. But that’s the biggest use for technology in our lives is that it keeps me home (FG4, HS2).

Tradeoffs

Participants were sensitive to some of the practical, instructional, and ideological tradeoffs they encountered as they discussed their use of computer and communication
technology. Across the focus groups, participants qualified some of the discussion strands on the benefits of technology with the idea that technology was a tool that could support, or limit, one’s capacity to sustain homeschooling depending on how it was designed and implemented. One participant remarked, “It’s a tool. Like a knife, you can use it to do surgery, or you can use it to hurt people” (FG4, HS4). In other words, participants perceived that technology could be used to broaden or narrow social networks; it could enrich or impoverish educational experience; it could save or waste time; or it could expand or reduce the range of choices available.

Reconciling what Gitlin (2001) characterized as a “media torrent” (p. 12), the problem of information overload was raised as a concern. As one participant remarked during the first focus group interview, “There is a downside. I think there’s an element of too much information, too many resources, too much time taken with certain things” (HS1). In contrast with themes that highlighted technology’s capacity to facilitate access to information and resources presumably making homeschooling easier, participants also sensed that abundant and ready access to information was something that required management.

Other tradeoffs, not necessarily unique to the homeschool community, involved actively tracking the time potentially wasted answering email and surfing the web for information. Several participants described how they continually assessed the risks and rewards associated with computer use, television, video games, and other forms of media and media appliances.

Concerns about the potential for technology to stand-in for or de-authenticate instruction were heard as a tradeoff during the first and fifth focus group sessions in
particular. The perception that poorly managed or implemented technology could
dehumanize instruction was illustrated in the following excerpt:

I would get really upset if my kids were in public schools, and I knew that
instead of the teacher teaching them something in science, just threw a
video in front of them. I would much rather pay another human being to
sit down and teach him something than almost anything. I just felt that that
value of communication, questions and asking back and forth and
inspiring was just invaluable. There should be a conversation there. There
should be a raising their hand and asking questions (FG5, HS5).

In addition, loss of parental control and the risk of exploitation were identified as
tradeoffs experienced by some of the participants. Easy access to information and
resources meant that information and content providers (e.g. the producers and regulators
of the information) now had access to participants as well. A few participants pointed out
that homeschool parents represented a new market at risk of being exploited by
educational producers, who had co-opted modern technologies. In an age where modern
technology enables anyone with a computer and an internet hook-up to produce and
distribute content, concerns about the unregulated nature of the internet were raised as a
related concern:

Technology removes the local experts, which is a good thing in a lot of
cases. It’s not such a good thing in other cases. There are fringe groups
that are able to spread their influence. If you want to teach your kids a
white supremacist curriculum, you can find it on the internet. You know,
I’ve seen some pretty scary curricula out there, if you go poking around
the edges. There’s no gatekeeper. There’s nobody to tell you if you wander in the front door, it’s a library with no librarian and every book in the world, and nobody telling you which ones are full of lies and which ones are good (FG4, HS4).

Evolution of Perceptions

Changes in participants’ attitudes or perceptions of computer and communication technologies did not surface as a main topic during analysis of the focus group interview data. Citing the rapid turnover and ubiquity of digital and media technologies, a few participants described how they had come to incorporate technology into the design of their child’s overall curricular and instructional program as one change that they had observed over time, especially in regard to educating their older children. Highlighting the advances in modern communication technologies, one former homeschool parent commented that she would infuse interactive technologies into her program now:

When we were homeschooling we used computer-based workbooks when the kids were in 4th grade. I wouldn’t do that now. It was more of a drill and kill kind of experience for them. I’d use a lot more of the interactive technologies, like interactive websites, to get them working with other students and things like that. I’ve changed. I’d be a lot more wary of the off-the-shelf curriculum now (INT2, HS2).

Several participants sensed that they had become more comfortable using computer technology over time, despite what their perceptions might have been initially. In the following excerpt, a participant who moderated the list service for her group
described how parents in her network had become increasingly facile and comfortable using technology:

As list moderator, I was basically holding their hand to get them to be able to use it. There were several families that refused to have it at all, which was fine, mostly fine. But it was really interesting to me that some of us were very comfortable with it and other people were so against it. It was almost like an ethical thing. They just didn’t want the media in their life. It’s changed a lot in the last three years. I’d say now that everyone in our group is actually online. Nobody seems to be having problems anymore. I think the general technology has just become so incredible that people are more comfortable (FG5, HS4).

In contrast, a few participants seemed to have maintained generally ambivalent, neutral, or in some cases negative views toward technology.

We use DVDs and videos, but really not very much, and every couple months we do watch something. I borrow a video and then we don’t get to watch them, and then they go back. The materials that are available to us online, I don't take advantage of them. The streaming videos, the cool things, I don't actually use them. I use the computer for our groups’ communication, but I don't necessarily use it more so now. There are spurts of time, but not for our normal, everyday use (FG1, HS2).
Influence of Independence and Control on the Decision to Homeschool

Perhaps the most unifying theme observed across the focus group and one-on-one interviews was that modern technologies were used to energize ideologies of choice, individualism, and parental authority.

Choice

As one participant put it during the fourth session, “I think we’re all kind of talking about that technology energizes a choice. It just provides more energy and motivation. It just provides you with that backdrop to really go and be able to make the choices” (HS4). In connection with perceptions that the parents are predisposed philosophically or emotionally to homeschooling, the participant elaborated on the centrality of choice to his homeschooling practices and lifestyle.

The notion that what we’re doing in life is we’re consciously making our choices. I think you might find some interesting things if you look at things like the rise of people choosing organic foods and the slow foods movement, and a number of these social movements that all seem based around the idea that we don’t have to take the choices that were presented to us. We can go out and make our own choices. Our family does a lot of that. We go to the farm. You know, we joined the CSA\(^1\). We buy our meat from the local farmers and you know, we talk to the kids about our choices of food, the same way we talk to them about our choices in education. And it’s all a piece of it for us.

\[^1\text{CSA is an acronym for Community Supported Agriculture.}\]
Individualism

Embedded as a topic within participants’ discussions about their dissatisfactions with conventional schooling were concerns and some resentment about the lack of individualized educational experience and instruction afforded to children in typical school settings. From one perspective, this ideology of individualism manifested as a rejection of the pedagogically homogenous and impersonal design of mass education perceived by some participants:

It’s kind of full circle. I mean, we’re all homeschoolers. I’m sure we’re all familiar with the history of public education. It was started to feed people in the factories. There were a lot of reformers, a lot of idealistic people. And now, it’s being dragged back to what it was. It’s almost the McDonald’s-izing of it. You go to a McDonald’s everywhere you get mediocre, but predictable food. And if you worked at McDonald’s and you were Wolfgang Puck, they would still want you to make McDonald’s burgers because people expect McDonald’s burgers. Coming out of school, they don’t want Wolfgang Puck. They want everybody to be a McDonald’s burger. And if you don’t want your kids to be a McDonald’s burger, you don’t want them in public school (FG4, HS4).

Besides a preference for a genuinely differentiated student-centered instruction, results showed that the decision to homeschool was driven in part by a participant’s politics of individualism. Some participants rejected what they perceived as the undemocratic elements of the mass education system – a system perceived by some to
lock the majority of families into a one-size fits-all approach to learning. From this view, homeschooling was perceived as somewhat of a social and economic equalizer:

We are watching a classist society form. Do you think that the three percent of the people that own most of the workings of our country send their kids to public school and take these bloody tests? No. This is not how they’re educating their kids. They’re educating their kids completely differently because you can’t take leadership roles when you get out of a school like that because it totally subverts your own ability to think, plan, and put into action anything that’s going to make a difference in the world. So, I think we’re watching a real subversion of our right to the democratic process (FG4, HS3).

Parental Authority

Results indicated that many participants felt it was their place as the child’s parent to have an executive influence over the curricular and instructional decisions and practices. Somewhat bristling at the disempowered character of the parent-school relationship, one participant remarked:

I personally get bothered by the school having such an impact in your personal life. It irritates me. I’m very private about a lot of things. And the fact that I have to go to a parent-teacher conference and have someone act like the expert for my child bugs me. Someone to tell me what my child should be doing and when she should be doing it bugs me (FG1, HS1).

Technology-afforded homeschooling was perceived by many participants as providing them with an enhanced level of control and choices. Again, wresting control
from the state over what are perceived to be family matters surfaced within the category of choice:

I think it's a parental choice then. The technology gives a much bigger menu of parental choice, whether you're Jewish, or you're Christian. You can pick. I mean you have the opportunity to supervise. And I think too much now the government's view is those children are our children. They're not your children. We will decide what we will teach them. And so I think it's given us, it's given me, a freedom of choice (FG3, HS5).

Reinforcing the point about parental authority, a participant from the same group added the following comment:

They don't trust parents to parent. If they could find a way to take them all away from us and do what they will with them, they would do that too. They don't trust us to teach about drugs. They don't trust us to teach about bike safety. Obviously, they don't trust us to vaccinate our children or not. They have to get involved and say, okay, now you have to have the Varicella$^2$ and you have to have the Gardasil, and you have to have whatever. Because as a parent, you're too stupid to make that decision for yourself. We're gonna take that decision out of your hands. We're gonna decide how you should raise your children. And I think that's wrong (FG3, HS3).

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$^2$ Varicella is a commonly used vaccine for chicken pox. Gardacil is an FDA approved vaccine developed by Merck against the two types of HPV or Human Papillomavirus that cause most cervical cancers. (Source: Center for Disease Control)
Reclaiming control and authority over education from the corporate world highlighted another aspect of the ideology of choice voiced by some participants as they discussed their decision to homeschool:

For me, and I suspect this for a lot of people, we have kind of a desire to fight this global sort of corporate takeover of our entire lives. Like we don't want to eat the bread that they make that’s full of corn syrup, or we don’t want to watch the horrible TV that they pump through the air. I mean, that’s me. I want to be in control, and I want my kids to be really critical thinkers. So I don't want them pumped full of all this stuff that’s getting fed to them in school. I want them to question. I don't want them to know how to get in line in an orderly way. It’s fine with me if they don’t know that (FG5, HS6).

The topic of parental responsibility surfaced within the context of broader conversations about the role that choice might have played in the decision to homeschool. When asked what made them different from conventional school parents (who also have access to and use the same range of modern technologies), several participants said that they had accepted and taken responsibility for their child’s education. As perceived by participants, taking on the responsibility involved extending their role as hands-on and actively engaged parent/educators:

It’s that we take on the responsibility. We know that the buck stops with us. If you can handle your kid and not deal with that and, say, well, they didn’t learn math because their teachers didn’t teach them. You might spend a little time doing it, but you haven’t picked the curriculum. I mean,
you can just hand it over. So, it’s just a responsibility of making sure that your hope for them is to learn (FG4, HS5).

Social, Political, Cultural Forces on the Growth of Homeschooling

During each of the focus group interviews, participants identified and discussed a range of social, political, economic, and cultural forces that they perceived coincidentally or distinctly influenced the growth of homeschooling. Within their speculations and perceptions, some of the participants believed that forces other than technology explained the growth of homeschooling. On balance, modern technology was perceived by most participants as a rather complementary or confluent force to be considered along with other possibilities. The alternative forces listed below were identified and elaborated upon by at least one participant during the course of the five focus group or one-on-one interviews. Although beyond the scope of the research, the list of prospective forces provided as a basis for further inquiry.

1. Growing dissatisfaction with the mission and quality of conventional private and public schools

2. Increased centralization, federalization of education (e.g. No Child Left Behind, expansion of compulsory education laws, loss of neighborhood schools)

3. Erosion of local communities

4. New culture of global competition
5. Increasingly corporate influence on society and school policy

6. Change in the nature of work

7. Change in the role of women

8. Successful campaign for school choice and homeschooling by religious conservatives

9. Cultural shift toward the individual (e.g. atomization of society)

10. Increasingly well-educated population of parents

11. Shifting attitudes toward family (e.g. putting family first, family as the primary social institution)

12. Political shift toward privatized education

Participant Interactions

Results of the interactional analysis indicated that participants felt the focus group interviews were generally engaging and worthwhile. Review of the video recordings of the focus group discussions, combined with analysis of field notes and transcripts from the one-on-one telephone interviews indicated that the design and facilitation of the research afforded participants with multiple opportunities to express their views and ideas about homeschooling. Results of the one-on-one interviews indicated that the focus group interviews were perceived to have been conducted fairly and openly. Upon review of a summary outlining the preliminary findings and observations of the focus group
interviews, all of the participants who were interviewed one-on-one said that the preliminary analysis seemed to align with their recollections of the ideas and perspectives expressed during the focus group session.

Follow-up interviews did reveal some interactional tension during one focus group session. During a one-on-one interview, a participant revealed that she felt some tension with other participants in the group during a sequence in which participants were discussing differences between religiously and non-religiously motivated homeschool parents.

When asked about her apparent discomfort during the one-on-one interview, the participant remarked that the sequence reflected more of a deference to and respect of an opposing perspective on her part during that one sequence, rather than a general reluctance to participate. The participant added that she might have said more about her religious reasons for homeschooling, but didn’t want to offend other participants in the group. Follow-up interactional analysis of the video recording and transcript of the focus group session indicated that once the discussion moved on, the participant contributed regularly and substantively to the conversation.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

The overarching purpose of the research was to deepen understanding of the growth of homeschooling observed in the U.S. over the past three decades. As a means toward that end, the research was fielded to explore the possibility that the advent and wide-scale spread of computer and communication technologies, like the internet, should be considered and built into an explanatory framework of global forces that have facilitated and perhaps fuelled the modern homeschool phenomenon. Thus, the study was supported by two essential questions: Have modern computer and communication technologies facilitated the growth of homeschooling in the U.S? And if so, what is the nature of that relationship?

In answer to the former, the results indicated that computer and communication technologies should be considered as one of several confluent social, political, and economic forces that have helped enable the growth of homeschooling. For the latter, results showed that the increasingly deep penetration of modern computer and media technologies into households across the country should be conceived of as proximal and coincidental dimensions of the modern homeschool movement. The research suggested that the diffusion and adoption of modern technologies have helped enable parents, with an inclination and ability to do so, to consider homeschooling as a viable educational option for their children and as a lifestyle for their families.

Not all participants agreed with the idea that the growth of homeschooling (or their capacity to homeschool) and the spread of modern technologies might be linked. The results showed that understanding the homeschooling phenomenon should also take
into account shifts in social, cultural, and political forces. A broadening dissatisfaction with conventional public and private schools, the changing role of work and women, the corporatization and federalization of education, and the atomization of society, among others, were identified as alternative or contributing explanations for the growth of homeschooling.

The Homeschool Journey

Confirming previous research (Kingston & Medlin, 2006; VanGalen, 1991), the rationales for homeschooling outlined by participants tended to evolve from rather personal and practical reasons to increasingly philosophical and ideological justifications over time. For many participants, the journey from the practical to the ideological involved a five-stage process: Predisposition, recognition, deliberation, identification, and expansion. The results of the research showed that the diffusion, adoption, and increasing ubiquity of modern computer and communication technologies were situated throughout this process.

A predisposition to look beyond conventional public and private education characterized the first stage of the homeschool journey for most participants. A preference for educational choice, a sense that conventional schooling was developmentally, socially, or intellectually inappropriate for the child, or a belief that the family is the natural and central institution in the child’s life tended to predispose some participants toward a recognition of homeschooling as a viable alternative.

The second stage of the journey involved recognizing or becoming aware of homeschooling as a possibility. For some participants, recognition occurred while surfing the web for educational resources and information. Books or magazine articles on home
education caught the predisposed eye of other participants. In other cases, chance
encounters with practicing homeschoolers triggered awareness to homeschooling.

Once recognition of homeschooling had occurred, participants described how they
and their spouses deliberated over homeschooling as a choice for their family. As part of
the deliberative process, participants cultivated personal networks and gathered
information to orient them to the complex legal, social, philosophical, and cultural realm
of homeschooling.

Since all participants were practicing or former homeschool parents, the
deliberation stage culminated with a decision to homeschool. After participants had
committed to it however, coming to terms with a new identity as a homeschool parent
became an issue for many of them to resolve. Several of the women interviewed
abandoned or decelerated successful careers in order to homeschool their children. Other
participants described how they had reconciled and come to accept the voluntary cultural
marginalization involved in becoming a homeschool family.

Illustrating the fifth stage of the homeschool journey, thoughtful and well-
articulated justifications for homeschooling were generated by participants across all of
the focus group interviews. What began for many participants as a solution to practical or
personal issues related to conventional schooling ultimately expanded into deeper
understandings of the political, philosophical, and social tradeoffs that homeschooling
held for them, their children, and society.

*Saliency of Technology*

A somewhat unexpected finding was that no participant identified computer or
communication technology as having any bearing on the decision to homeschool, nor was
technology mentioned as having any influence on participants’ motivation to homeschool until it was made salient to the conversation. However, once the focus group discussions were seeded with questions concerning the role that computer and media technology might have had on participants’ inclination or capacity to homeschool, participants readily shared their views and perspectives on the topic. Follow up one-on-one interviews with selected participants revealed that computer and communication technologies, like the internet, might not have been mentioned as an influential component of the broader homeschooling phenomenon because of its virtual ubiquity in participants’ everyday lives.

Echoing Zittrain (2008) on the future of the internet, participants speculated that as modern media and communication technologies are perceived as increasingly easy-to-use appliances or standard household utilities with inner complexities buried deep under the hood, some individuals might not have viewed them as unique or profoundly relevant innovations. No participant mentioned modern and ubiquitous technologies like the automobile, electricity, or the telephone as innovations influencing their ability to homeschool. Yet, putting homeschooling into practice without them would limit a participant’s capacity to do so.

*Technology and the Decision to Homeschool*

A number of participants said they became aware of homeschooling as an educational option through internet-based technologies like email and the web. Other participants perceived that access to and use of modern technologies played a role in their inclination to homeschool once they were aware of it. These participants used modern technologies to seek like-minded peers and models of homeschooling nationally, and
collect information from a diverse range of public and private resources. Several participants noted that they might not have discovered homeschooling without internet or web access.

Some participants challenged the idea that modern technology might have influenced their decision to homeschool. For example, several participants suggested that the research questions that guided the research were overstated. As motivated responsible parents, they believed that they would have decided to homeschool without access to technology. A few of the former and more experienced participants, whose homeschool stories began about or slightly before the internet boom of the mid-1990’s, described how they became homeschool parents without a computer or internet access.

*Initial Perceptions*

Across all of the focus group interviews, participants identified a range of informational, interpersonal, institutional, instructional, and psychological barriers of entry to be overcome as they considered homeschooling. Some participants felt initially that they lacked the training or authority to teach their children at home. Others worried they would not be able to find sufficient support and resources. Overcoming the feeling of social and informational isolation was commonly heard as especially daunting barriers of entry for many participants.

Although participants experienced these barriers of entry differently, the decision to homeschool for most of them ultimately involved ramping up sufficient levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) before making the leap. To varying degrees, the process of ginning up sufficient emotional and intellectual capital was shared by most of the participants as they considered homeschooling. Many participants relied on internet-
based technologies, like the web, listservs, email, and online forums as mechanisms of reassurance that helped lower the various barriers of entry. In contrast, several participants sought distinctly offline approaches to lower the barriers they experienced, like going to brick and mortar bookstores and talking to local homeschool parents face-to-face.

Technology Use

Regardless of whether participants perceived that computer and communication technologies had influenced their awareness of homeschooling or their inclination to do it, participants were united by the view that modern technology made homeschooling easier. The research indicated that all participants, including the self-described light and late adopters of technology (Horrigan, 2007), were using a computer, the internet, and other technologies to facilitate and sustain homeschooling.

The results suggested that use of computer and communication technologies had helped participants seek, create, engage, or sustain communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000) while deliberating and ultimately activating the idea of homeschooling. Characterized loosely as “groups of self-selected people informally bound by a shared expertise and a passion for joint enterprise” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139), the communities of practice model aptly described how participants with a disposition to homeschool employed modern technologies to align and organize with like-minded individuals and groups.

As practitioners of homeschooling, participants used an array of modern technologies to create and seek social networks, generate and distribute knowledge, and share a sense of common enterprise with a sometimes larger than expected population of
similarly motivated individuals. Participants implemented a variety of computer and media technologies to support the full range of managerial, administrative, and instructional activities related to the homeschooling enterprise. Access to computers and web-based connections enabled parents to enroll their children in online courses, recruit tutors and instructors, and find or create specialized curriculum to supplement instruction, especially for participants with older children.

The research indicated that participants also employed modern media and digital technologies to animate higher-order instructional goals. As a group, participants tended to prefer individualized and differentiated curricular and instructional designs. Access to and use of computer and communication technologies helped them provide it.

Several participants explained that access to the computer and the internet coupled with the capacity to work from home were vital to their capacity sustain homeschooling. These participants perceived that technology provided them (and their spouses) an added measure of logistical, instructional, and financial flexibility to make homeschooling manageable from day to day.

*Change in Perceptions*

Changes in participants’ attitudes toward computer and communication technology did not surface as a main topic of discussion during the focus group interviews. However, the characterization of technology as a tool emerged as a salient change in participants’ collective attitudes about computer and communication technology. When pursued explicitly during the one-on-one interviews, a few participants registered a degree of surprise and pride as they described how they had learned to incorporate technology into the design of the child’s curricular and instructional program.
While participants readily discussed how modern technologies had facilitated and enabled their capacity to homeschool, participants also identified some of the tradeoffs associated with their consideration and use of technology. The sheer volume of information and media available felt overwhelming to several participants. The perception that using email and the web had created yet another tech-based opportunity to waste time was raised by some participants as well. A lack of regulation or appropriate vetting of the information available, from the internet in particular, emerged as a topic of concern in one of the focus group discussions. During another focus group session, participants worried about the potential for technology to de-humanize personal relationships and its capacity to be used inappropriately as a stand-in for meaningful teacher-student interactions.

An understanding that modern technology could raise barriers of entry, as well as lower them seemed to overarch the concerns of participants across each of the focus group interviews. Participants were sensitive to the potential for marketers, corporations, or state agencies to co-opt web technologies to track them or their activities online. Participants were similarly mindful of the possibility that changes in the regulatory status of homeschooling or internet and media technologies might limit their ability to homeschool.

Influence of Ideology

A key finding was that modern technology had enabled participants to energize an ideology of choice, individualism, and parental authority. For this group of participants, having choices and options mattered – not only as it applied to education, but as a core principle for achieving a suitable lifestyle. No matter how participants arrived at the
decision to homeschool, or the degree to which they might have been predisposed to it as an educational option, or how they arranged their working and family lives to subsidize it, or the degree to which they were motivated (or not) by religion, an abiding ideology of choice seemed to bind participants’ narratives across the sample.

In connection with results indicating that computer and communication technology helped boost self-efficacy and confidence, the idea that technology had enabled participants to bypass or transcend what they perceived as the “cult of the expert” was expressed. Several participants perceived that direct access to information, networks, and instructors of their choosing had helped level the educational field between parents and the conventional state-supported school system.

Highlighting a streak of individualism, participants to varying degrees rejected the homogenous, one-size-fits-all organization of conventional schooling (Tyack, 1974) as socially unnatural and intellectually artificial. Many participants leaned toward rather progressive conceptions of learning and sought differentiated educational experiences tailored to suit the potentials, interests, and needs of the individual child.

From a political perspective, some participants believed that state-sponsored education had, in effect, locked them into an increasingly undemocratic and classist educational social system. To some extent, technology-enabled homeschooling was perceived as an educational equalizer affording participants a heightened level of autonomy and control over decisions and experiences involving the education of their children. The idea that home education amounted to private school for the middle and working class pervaded much of the dialogue concerning choice.
With an empowered commitment to reclaim control of their families, some participants described how they overcame an enculturated sense that schools, rather than parents, should determine and oversee the education of their child. During each of the focus group interviews, participants talked passionately about wresting control from the state and the need to resist the steady encroachment of corporate influences over educational and family matters.

**Characteristics and Departures**

With some slight variations, the demographics of the participants reflected much of what is known about the general characteristics of the homeschooling community. The average participant had about six years of homeschooling experience, with most participants starting around the year 2000 or after. In all but one case, participants were married and headed a two-parent household. With an average of about two children per household, family size was consistent with the larger population of homeschoolers. Unless a child had not reached or was beyond compulsory school age, former and practicing participants had educated all their children at home.

The instructional arrangements described by participants also mirrored the typical homeschool household. Mothers in the sample group tended to shoulder the bulk of the instructional responsibilities. Fathers and an aggregate of extended family members, teachers, tutors, and coaches were commonly recruited to round out the child’s educational program, especially in families with more than one child or older children. In households with older children, some participants folded online educators and courses into the instructional mix as well.
The results revealed that the racial, religious, socio-economic, and educational profiles of the participants departed slightly from generalized and stereotypical models of homeschooling. All but one of the participants described themselves as White, non-Hispanic. Given that participants were self-selected and recruited from a larger sample of homeschoolers with a racial profile figured nationally at 85% white and 15% minorities (Ray, 2005a), the slight racial variance of the sample was not especially surprising or problematic.

The educational attainment and socio-economic status per participant household were slightly higher than the general homeschool population, though not overwhelming so. As a small, urban region with a rather dense concentration of cultural, educational, state, and corporate resources, one would expect to find a relatively higher cost of living and correspondingly elevated educational and income levels per capita in Albany, NY than with group of homeschool parents recruited primarily from a town located in the deep South or rural Midwest, for example.

In what also might be viewed as a departure from common characterizations of the homeschool community, a large minority of participants labeled themselves as secular and said that religion played no part in their home or educational lives. Again, the slight demographic variations observed during the research likely reflected recruitment and access issues. The distribution of devout religious conservatives found in Albany, NY is likely to be relatively low compared to rural southern and mid-western regions.

Besides the relative marginalization of religion as a prominent group characteristic, the arrangement of the participants’ professional lives further challenged common depictions of the modern homeschool family. In the majority of participant
households, both parents worked, with at least one parent working from home at least part of the time.

Like other departures from the typical profile of homeschoolers, this finding might in part spotlight sampling issues. Nevertheless, the image of two gainfully employed parents in the majority of homeschool households somewhat upended characterizations of homeschoolers as civic or social isolationists (Apple, 2000; Lubienski, 2000). As far as the working arrangements of homeschool families were concerned, the professional lives of participants seemed more like than unlike parents of conventionally schooled children.

**Technology Profile**

The results of the research indicated that the technology profile of participants was not an especially distinguishing characteristic. Although all participants relied on a range of computer, communication, and media technologies to support their homeschooling plans and practices, the diffusion of modern technology appeared to reflect national technology trends (Horrigan, 2006; Macgill, 2007), rather than characteristics unique to homeschool families.

Results of a recently released report by the Pew Internet and Life Project showed the 94% of parents and 93% of youth in the U.S. are now online and use the internet regularly (Macgill, 2007). Despite some early evidence that homeschoolers might tend to be earlier adopters of new technologies than parents of other-schooled children (Ray, 1997), the research revealed that the technology profile of the participants in this study seems to align with the general population. The results suggested that early indications that homeschool households might have been equipped with computers and various
internet devices slightly before households of conventionally schooled children were likely due to variances in the socio-economic profile of homeschoolers, rather than attitudes about technology.

There was some indication in the research that, as a group, participants might be warier and somewhat more selective of media technology than the general population of non-homeschool parents. While all participants uniformly relied on computers and an internet hookup to gather information and connect with homeschool networks and resources, many participants also restricted or flatly rejected use of other mass media technologies like video games, television, and web-based adventure games. Television was identified as an especially pernicious and manipulative technology by several participants.

For a few participants, a desire to counterbalance and control the influence of mass media on their children was identified as a primary motivation to homeschool. The results suggested that at least some of the parents felt that limiting exposure to media mattered just as much as monitoring the appropriateness of its content. Still, U.S. Census Bureau figures suggest that parental concerns about media exposure and influence appear to have mounted in the general population (Edwards, 2007). I would argue that any participant wariness of media technology reflected a matter of degree, rather than distinction.

Motivations for Homeschooling

Like their counterparts from the larger homeschool population, participants were motivated to homeschool for a variety of reasons and purposes that aligned with their values and addressed their family’s unique circumstances. On balance, motivations for
homeschooling voiced by participants fell into various pedagogical, ideological, and socio-relational categories identified by the larger population of homeschool parents in previous studies (Kingston & Medlin, 2006; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 2005b). Concerns about school safety, the social and intellectual climate in schools, and a desire to cultivate stronger family ties were heard as recurring topics of discussion during the research.

The results seemed to capture a gathering and perhaps intensifying dissatisfaction with the modern mass education system. Dissatisfaction with school practices and policies appeared to unite the religious and non-religious participants in the group. Participants commonly ranked their various concerns and grievances with conventional education at the top of the list of motivations for homeschooling.

Practical Implications

One of the outcomes of the research was that it put some research-based teeth into the idea that the new age of computer and communication technology qualifies as a global force that has helped facilitate the growth of the modern homeschool movement. The study was motivated in part to elevate statements linking the internet era to the growth of homeschooling beyond speculation and opinion to a level of verifiable plausibility. The research represented a small but substantive step toward understanding why homeschooling has re-emerged and grown in the U.S. as it has; how technology has helped facilitate its growth; and what the modern homeschool phenomenon represents as a social and political phenomenon.

My impression is that whether parents with school-aged children decide to homeschool or not, all families can expect greater levels of technology-based mediation
in their educational lives in years to come. The digital and media technology genies are out of the bottle. As communication and media technologies become simpler, cheaper, and increasingly portable and flexible for a broader range of the population in all regions, particularly individuals in rural areas, its capacity to lower barriers of entry, sustain communities of practice, and energize ideologies of choice are likely to make homeschooling easier for parents with an inclination and capacity to do so.

As computing shifts from the desktop computer and costly proprietary software to the web, access to resources and information will become easier and cheaper ("When Clouds Collide," 2008). The capacity for people to create and sustain social networks will become easier as new technologies like mobile broadband, collective web technologies, and mashups become increasingly available and are absorbed and adopted by the general population (Nagel, 2008). As these and advancing collective intelligence and social operating systems become available, the capacity to homeschool is going to get easier, not harder, for a broader range of families. Conventional school systems will have an increasingly difficult time acting as educational intermediaries for families who want more options or control over their child’s education.

If computer and communication technologies like the internet remain relatively open, unregulated, consumer-driven instruments of production and distribution at the individual level, then I expect that prospective and practicing homeschool parents will increasingly perceive of and use them as educational equalizers – as technologies that have recalibrated and favorably tipped the balance of power between the state, the church, and the corporation toward the family. Because of increasingly speedy, cheap, and portable technologies, those who are currently practicing homeschooling might be
able to stay with it longer, placing increased pressure on schools to fulfill enrollment quotas. Assuming that technology maintains its present accelerating course and homeschooling regulations remain relatively stable, I expect that the homeschooling will continue to grow along with other choice-based alternatives.

Theoretical Implications

The diffusionary and developmental futures of computer and communication technologies are far from fixed. As participants pointed out, modern technologies are tools that can be used to raise or lower barriers of entry for prospective and practicing homeschool parents. The results suggested that the significance of a computer or communication technology was not so much about the technology itself, but how participants used and implemented them to energize their ideologies of choice.

It is unclear whether or how long the ever-expanding diffusion of computer and communication technology observed to date might be considered as an enabling force for homeschool parents. Should policies toward increased state regulation of computer and communication technologies like network neutrality (Zittrain, 2008) gain traction, a shift toward greater centralized control of the internet and other media technologies might occur. As a result, the relatively unimpeded and inexpensive access to information and social networks experienced by practicing and prospective homeschool parents might be compromised. In such a scenario, the internet and digital technologies might be perceived as little more than immutable appliances that in effect bind homeschoolers closer to state regulated curricula, policies, and practices. Parents in this research wanted less regulation and intervention from the state, not more.
In the event that computer and communication technologies become technologically impenetrable or state controlled mediums, I expect that the growth of homeschooling might stagnate or drop. The results suggested that modern technology played a much more instrumental role in participants’ capacity to homeschool than some of them may have realized. Not only because of what technology has afforded participants in terms of facilitating homeschooling, but because of technology’s larger global impact on the nature of work and the production and distribution of knowledge and information in all facets of modern social life.

Broader Context

Speculation about the role of technology and the future growth of homeschooling should be put in context. No matter what kind of technology emerges, homeschooling is not going to supplant conventional education systems any time soon (Hill, 2000a). Mass state-supported schooling has become deeply embedded as the default educational model in our cultural and political consciousness. In my view, technology on its own does not provide sufficient social, political, rhetorical, practical, or ideological leverage to support the spread of home education throughout the general population. For the foreseeable future, the vast majority of parents will continue to rely on conventional public and private schools to educate their children no matter how powerful, affordable, or accessible modern technology becomes.

Nevertheless, larger issues concerning educational choice and access for parents seeking alternatives to conventional schooling will likely intensify. If dissatisfaction with conventional schooling mounts among other-school parents, I expect that a growing number of parents will continue to pressure reformers and state legislatures for the
changes they seek. If such reforms are perceived as inaccessible or slow in coming, an increasing number of technology-enabled parents might consider and create ways of opting out. As new technologies are developed and become available, I expect an increase in the number of technology-based educational hybrids between home and school to emerge as a new avenue of educational reform.

Upon completion of the research, I was left with the lingering impression, that for these participants, homeschooling is as much about politics as it is about education. Families with the socio-economic and logistical wherewithal to consider homeschooling from a practical standpoint were likely to possess the tools and technologies needed to empower the personal and political motivation to do so. In other words, participants chose to homeschool not only because they were inclined to, but because they were economically and politically able.

Homeschooling has not been accessible to parents without sufficient socio-economic and technological resources. That will continue to be the case for some time. Age, education level, and race still somewhat distinguish the modern technology haves from the have-nots (Fox, 2005). Overwhelmingly, participants from the study fell squarely on the have side of the digital divide. If the cost of modern technologies spikes or access to the internet and information becomes increasingly restricted, through time stamping content or tighter copyright laws, homeschooling is likely to become less of an option for working class and dispossessed populations.

With time, the digital divide is likely to continue to close across all groups (Cooper & Gallagher, 2004; Horrigan, 2006; Macgill, 2007). Depending on the arc of regulatory and developmental policies concerning the future of computer and
communication technologies, I expect the digital divide for homeschool parents will become less about costs, connectivity, and access speed, and more about the accessibility and control of content and educational policy. Broadly conceived, technology has facilitated the spread of ideas, techniques, and the free association and development of new forms of social educational organizations at the grassroots level. It is political power that homeschoolers want. A speedy internet connection may provide students with added levels of educational portability and informational access. Yet, technology-enabled distance education and virtual learning programs, do not afford parents or learners any added control or power to choose, modify, or actively participate in the educational process.

Looking beyond the results of this particular study, the capacity for technology to influence the modern homeschool phenomenon will depend on how political, economic, technological, and social forces shift education toward (or away from) privatization (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). As Apple (2006) observes, understanding the homeschooling phenomenon requires consideration of the social, political, and cultural forces that tend to influence the goals, as well as the shape and character of education reform in the U.S. While the research identified the increasing ubiquity of computer and communication technology as a global force that has influenced the growth of homeschooling in the U.S., the results showed that technology is only one of several forces in play.

It is hard to imagine that over 1.1 million children nationwide would be homeschooled today were it not for changes in state laws that have reduced or eliminated some of the disincentives. Where parents are locked into closed educational systems, as they are in Germany and China, homeschooling tends to be an especially rare and is
viewed as a subversive enterprise, regardless of a parent’s socio-economic status, political, pedagogical or religious ideology, or their technological access and proclivities. Here in the U.S., the modern homeschool movement remained at the extreme outer limits of social life well into the early 1980’s, and was illegal in some states until the early 1990’s.

Computer and communication technologies have helped lower barriers of entry and increased participants’ capacity to energize percolating or latent ideologies of choice within the confines of larger economic, political, and social systems. Whether the information age and its attendant technologies influenced political and economic systems in the U.S. toward privatization or helped expand choices for disempowered populations and minorities is beyond the scope of this research. I suspect to some degree it has. I agree with the principle mentioned earlier in this document that social systems tend to mimic the prevailing technologies of the time (Davidson & Rees-Moog, 1997). The modern homeschool movement appears to have provided the research community with an illustrative and instructive example of this theory in action.

General Conclusions

The research concludes with a sense that casting the homeschool movement as a social and political phenomenon facilitated and perhaps fuelled by a confluence of national and global forces provides an appropriate theoretical model to seek deeper understanding of the growth of homeschooling in the U.S. The advent of modern computer and communication technologies emerged as one component among several global forces that appear to have influenced the growth of home education in the U.S.
During a telephone interview, one participant succinctly assessed the relationship between modern technology as a global force and the growth of homeschooling:

Two social trends happen to be coinciding. One is the increasing tendency for parents to perceive schools as unsafe, morally and ethically lacking, and educationally inferior, and the other which is ever-growing computer literacy. With the internet, not only is information readily accessible thus enabling confident and successful homeschools. But it eliminates the isolation that pioneering homeschoolers experienced. We network at the click of a mouse. The motivation to provide a safe and enriching education for our kids and the means for doing so have pretty much crashed into each other (FG1, HS4).

The research reinforced and refreshed the notion that the decision to homeschool involves sufficiently satisfying some preexisting social and economic household conditions. Families who are inclined to homeschool tend to be relatively well educated and socially and financially stable. A capacity for at least one parent to work from home at least part of the time emerged as a potential force that can lower barriers of entry for prospective homeschool parents. Access to modern computer and communication technologies from home helped enable some sufficiently motivated parents the gain enough emotional and intellectual capital to make and maintain the leap to homeschooling.

My conversations with parents during the development and fielding of this research seemed to affirm the idea that tech-supported homeschooling had afforded them something previously available only to elite and affluent families (Nemer, 2002a). That
is, the opportunity and means to seek, access, and coordinate enriching and essentially private, educative experiences for their children. The research suggested that modern computer and communication technologies were used in part to minimize the state’s capacity to intervene in what are perceived to be family matters by many participants. In effect, the advent and diffusion of modern technology helped enable participants to become independent educational servers for their children.

The research closes with the updated sense that homeschool families are not especially different from families who choose to send their children to conventional schools. It would be naïve to think that as group participants were any more or any less religious, political, or civic-minded than conventionally schooled families, or care any more or less about their children’s education and future. Homeschooling is not racist, isolationist, or exclusionary. Quite the opposite. It unites parents who want more choices, opportunities, and freedom across all socio-economic levels to pursue and provide the educational experiences they see fit for their children. Despite the well intentioned goal of providing education to all children, state systems that inadvertently lock privileged, middle class, or dispossessed children into schools or programs parents don’t like or want borders on educational fascism.

What was unique about the parents who participated in the research is that they are motivated by a choice-oriented ideology based on principles of parental and educational individualism and sovereignty. That, plus a willingness and sense of urgency to take on the responsibility of raising and educating their children themselves, when adequate alternatives are unwanted, unavailable, inaccessible, or slow in coming separated this group of participants from other-school parents. Participating homeschool
parents have co-opted modern technologies to energize an ideology of choice and individualism within a broader political and economic framework that highlights the political tensions at the national and international levels between the privatization and centralization movements in education.

Recommendations for Further Research

As an exploratory study, the results of the research generated more questions than answers. Yet, the findings illuminated several paths of inquiry researchers might consider to deepen understanding of the homeschooling phenomenon.

Validation

In an effort to refine understanding of the role that modern technology on the growth of homeschooling might be playing, the scope of the research should be extended to include a larger percentage of ethnic and racial minorities. In similar spirit, the study should be expanded to incorporate a larger representation of homeschool parents from rural populations. Further validation of the research might involve the recruitment of non-homeschool parents, as a peer group of adopters of modern technologies who have not and would not educate their children at home.

Trend Analysis

Researchers should continue to track and monitor the demographics of homeschool families to determine if the departures on race, socio-economic status, and education observed in this research are local or reflect larger trends in the homeschool population. Beyond this research, there is some suggestion that the face of homeschooling is changing. Traditionally marginalized non-White populations who are dissatisfied with current educational systems and frustrated by ineffective reforms appear
to be considering homeschooling in growing numbers (Apple, 2006; Princiotta et al., 2006; Taylor, 2005). A report from the U.S. Department of Education expected to be released during the Spring of 2008 promises to provide updated figures on the growth of homeschooling nationwide, as well as a fresh look at how the demographics of the homeschooling population might be changing.

Further research should also be conducted to inform the placement of homeschooling within the broader context of choice-based reform. Much political effort and expense has been expended to motivate school choice reforms like charter schools and voucher programs. Some of these choices have involved access to virtual schools and various forms of distance and e-learning. No doubt, such reforms have expanded options for parents in areas where school choice has taken hold.

Based on participant narratives, such reforms may not go far enough. By and large, the school choices remain state-based choices. Whether it is a charter school or public virtual school, a parent’s power to influence and control curriculum, instruction, or policy ends at the schoolhouse door once a child has been enrolled. When a parent enrolls their child in a public school, they forfeit most of their right to influence the content and character of their child’s education while the child is in school. While many homeschoolers might laud the movement toward increased choice, many of them are not likely to opt for such choices because it involves ceding parental control to the state. Reforms such as expanding open enrollment policies or offering home-based online programs are likely to be seen as false choices by many homeschool parents.
**Concept Development**

Although it has become somewhat of a cliché, globalization is a reality that has had implications for all fields, including education (Apple et al., 2005; Barbules & Torres, 2000; Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). Findings from the research suggested that the scope of the research should be expanded beyond consideration of technology and folded into a broader exploration of potential global forces that might be influencing the modern homeschool phenomenon.

Further, if an ideology of choice, individualism, and parental sovereignty are primary motivators behind the decision to homeschool, then future investigations should consider whether and how such ideologies might be diffusing across the population as a predictor of growth in homeschooling. To date, tracking the growth of homeschooling has involved calculating and projecting best estimates based on practicing homeschool parents willing to be identified as such. Future research might move beyond the counting of heads to involve the assessment of the hearts and minds of prospective parents. Gauging shifts in political, pedagogical, and religious ideologies at the local, regional, and national level might inform the future trajectory of homeschooling.

**Limitations**

The results of the focus group and interview analysis were limited in that they reflected perceptual tendencies rather than behavioral or experiential absolutes. For example, a participant who perceived that the internet had helped her connect with other homeschool parents as she considered the decision to homeschool does not imply necessarily that she did not seek or engage in any face-to-face conversations with practicing homeschoolers as part of the deliberative process. Likewise, a participant who
might have perceived that technology had no influence on his decision to homeschool
does not imply necessarily that he did not surf the web on occasion for articles on
homeschooling.

The research was limited by the recruitment of self-selected participants who
were willing to volunteer. Although sufficient levels of thematic saturation were achieved
to satisfy the scope of the study, the research would have benefited from higher racial and
ethnic representation.

The research was limited somewhat by gender and region. The majority of
participants were women who were the primary homeschooling parent. The study would
have benefited from a greater infusion of perspectives from male spouses and (although
rare) full-time stay-at-home fathers or fathers who are primary homeschool providers.
The study was also limited by the spare access to homeschool parents who lived in rural
areas.
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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions

Please take a few minutes to complete the following questions. The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide some basic information to the researcher about you as a home educator.

Your responses to the questionnaire will be confidential and will not be shared with other participants in the study. Questionnaires and your individual responses will be destroyed upon completion of the research. Thank you for your time and participation.

Section I: Participant Profile

1. Are you currently affiliated with a homeschool group?
   - Yes
   - No

2. What is your status as home educator?
   - Currently practicing home educator
   - Former home educator

3. If you currently are a member of a homeschool group, please write the name of your group below.
   ______________________________________________________

4. How many years were you or have you been a home educator? ___________

5. How many children live in your household? ___________

6. How many of your children were/are being educated at home? ___________

7. How would you describe where you live?
   - Urban
   - Suburban
   - Rural

8. What is your estimated total annual household income?
   - Below $25,000
   - $25,000-$50,000
   - $50,000-$75,000
   - $75,000-$100,000
   - $100,000-$250,000
9. How would you characterize your household?
   - Single parent household
   - Two parent household
   - Other (Please specify) ________________________________

10. What is your relationship to the child/children being educated at home?
    - Mother
    - Father
    - Guardian
    - Grandparent
    - Other (Please specify) ________________________________

11. What is your employment status?
    - Work full-time
    - Work full-time (occasionally at home)
    - Work full-time (at home)
    - Work part-time
    - Work part-time (at home)
    - Unemployed; full-time mom, dad, grandparent, partner, or guardian

12. If applicable, what is the employment status of your spouse, partner, or the
    grandparent, second guardian, or care provider in the household?
    - Works full-time
    - Works full-time (occasionally at home)
    - Works full-time (at home)
    - Works part-time
    - Works part-time (at home)
    - Unemployed; full-time mom, dad, grandparent, partner, or guardian

13. What is your race / ethnicity?
    - Non-white Hispanic
    - African American
    - Caucasian
    - Asian
    - Native American
14. Who is/are the primary home education coordinator(s) and planner(s) in your household? (Check all that apply)
   - Mother
   - Father
   - Grandparents
   - Guardian
   - Non-family, education/care providers (e.g. nannies, undergraduate or graduate students, education arrangements with other adults, etc.)
   - Siblings
   - Community members (e.g. private teachers, tutors, mentors, coaches, etc.)
   - Group members (adults from homeschool group)
   - School or district-based planners and officials
   - Other (Please specify) _________________________________________

15. Who are the primary home education instructors for your child/children? (Check all that apply).
   - Mother
   - Father
   - Grandparents
   - Adult family members (e.g. aunt’s, uncles, etc.)
   - Non-family education/care providers (e.g. nannies, undergraduate or graduate students, education arrangements with other adults, etc.)
   - Guardian
   - Siblings and peers
   - Community members (e.g. private teachers, tutors, mentors, coaches, etc.)
   - School-based educators
   - Other (Please specify) _________________________________________

16. What is your highest attained educational level?
   - Some high school
   - High school diploma
   - High school diploma, plus some college education
   - Undergraduate degree
   - Undergraduate degree, plus additional coursework or educational training
   - Master’s level degree
17. If applicable, what is the highest attained educational level of your spouse, partner, or the grandparent, second guardian, or education/care provider in the household?
- Some high school
- High school diploma
- High school diploma, plus some college education
- Undergraduate degree
- Undergraduate degree, plus additional coursework or educational training
- Master’s level degree
- Advanced graduate degree (e.g. PhD, MD, CAGS, etc.)

18. Describe the centrality of religion in your family and homeschool life.
- Secular: religion is not part of our family or homeschool life
- Nominal: religion is part of family life, but not taught explicitly as part of the child’s homeschool curriculum
- Practicing: religion is an important part of family life; some religious instruction is incorporated into homeschooling curriculum
- Active: religion is central to family life; religion is taught as a fundamental part of the child’s curriculum

19. List three reasons you and your family ultimately decided to educate your child/children at home?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Section II: Technology Profile

20. To what extent do you and your family rely on computer and communication technologies (e.g. computers, the internet, mobile phones, email, media, etc.) to support, facilitate, enable, or sustain homeschooling in your household?
- Heavily; We could not homeschool without it; we use a range of technologies virtually every day to support our version of homeschooling
21. Which of the following computer and/or communication technologies do you use to support, facilitate, or enable your capacity to homeschool? (Check all that apply)

- Internet / World Wide Web (information search and retrieval)
- Email
- PDA’s (Blackberry, Trio, etc.)
- Message boards
- Web logs (blogs)
- Wiki technologies
- Cell phone (voice)
- Cell phone (text messaging)
- Cell phone (imaging)
- Educational software
- Productivity software (e.g. word processing, spreadsheets, etc.)
- Instant messaging (text) (e.g. AOLIM, MSN, Yahoo chat etc.)
- Instant messaging (video chat)
- Imaging and design software (e.g. Photoshop, Illustrator, etc.)
- Broadcast / cable / satellite TV
- Videos / DVD’s
- Streamed media (audio, video)
- MP3 / podcasting
- Other (Please specify) _________________________________________

22. In what ways do you tend to use computer and/or communication technologies? (Check all that apply)

- Network with other home educators and groups
○ General administration (e.g. planning, organizing materials, tracking lessons & activities, etc.)
○ To access educational materials, information, and resources
○ To assess and/or evaluate child’s progress
○ Curriculum development
○ Professional development (support for further training or learning for you as a home educator, like taking online courses, attending online conferences and workshops, etc.)
○ Facilitate and/or complement instruction
○ Deepen learning and understanding
○ Create, modify, or use online or digital tools
○ Access online courses and/or instruction (for your child)
○ Access instructors, mentors, tutors (for your child)
○ Access local, state, or federal regulatory or legal agencies and organizations concerning home education
○ Access local, state, and/or federal standards, exams, tests, etc.
○ Seek and access on-going feedback from peers and/or instructors on child’s learning
○ Collaborate and/or co-develop activities, lessons, or projects with other homeschool parents and community members
○ Collaborate and/or co-develop activities, lessons, or projects with local school teachers and curriculum officials
○ Communicate with school officials
○ Cultivate and support child’s social networks and interactions
○ Other applications (Please specify) _______________________________

23. How much do you estimate you spend on computer and/or communication technologies each year to support homeschooling (including cell phones, computer hardware and software, maintenance and upgrades, internet service subscriptions, digital cameras, etc.)? Note: If you use a technology at all for homeschooling, even if you use it for other things, include it in your estimate.
○ 0 - $500
○ $500 - $1000
○ $1000 - $3000
○ $3000 - $5000
○ $5000 - $10,000
○ More than $10,000
APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The focus group protocol was designed to explore participants’ views on the idea that the rise in homeschooling might have been enabled by the advent and wide-scale diffusion of computer and communication technologies. Focus group participants discussed their perceptions of the affordances and disaffordances of the computer and communication technologies that they used to support or facilitate homeschooling. Participants were asked to discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of using computer and communication technologies as social, political, and pedagogical tools.

1. Describe the process you went through leading up to your decision to homeschool? What were the events or circumstances that ultimately brought you and your family to the decision to homeschool?

2. What kinds of opportunities and benefits, as well as obstacles and barriers, do you recall anticipating as you considered your decision to homeschool? What were your hopes? What concerned or worried you about homeschooling?

3. In what ways (if any) did computer and communication technologies influence or figure into the process of deciding to homeschool? What did you expect that access and use of computer and communication technologies might afford (and disafford) in terms of addressing your hopes and concerns about homeschooling?

4. Once you decided to homeschool, which technologies did you actually use (or consider using) initially? In what ways did you use or re-invent them?

5. Based on your experiences, how have your perceptions and use of computer and communication technologies evolved in terms of your sense of their relative advantages and disadvantages in practice?

6. What are your reactions to the idea that technology might have had an enabling influence on the rise of homeschooling here in the U.S., and abroad? What strikes you as especially intriguing or problematic about such an idea? In what ways does the proposition resonate or conflict with your experiences as home educators?

7. Besides technology, what sorts of underlying social, political, or economic forces would you propose might driving the rise in homeschooling here in the U.S.?

8. How would respond to the idea that computer and communication technologies might be creating new levels of educational control, autonomy, and freedom, and perhaps taking us back to an era of family-based approaches to education?
APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP REFLECTION PROTOCOL

Instructions:
Please take a moment to think about and reflect on the focus group discussion and the ideas and issues raised by the group. Record any additional thoughts, comments, concerns, or questions you might have in the spaces provided below. Once again, thank you for your perspectives and contributions to the research project.

1. What ideas, themes, or issues struck you during the discussion?

2. What puzzles, new questions, or concerns occurred to you?

3. Identify and discuss further any ideas, perspectives, issues that you believe were overstated, under-explored, distorted, or perhaps neglected and overlooked?

Additional comments:
APPENDIX D: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What are your impressions of the preliminary analysis of the study? Do the preliminary findings resonate with your recollection and perceptions of the discussion? In what ways do the findings raise questions or concerns?

2. How do you respond to the observation that some participants would continue to homeschool without access to computer and communication technology?

3. How would homeschooling change for you without access to computer and communication technology? In what ways are you surprised by your use of modern technology to sustain homeschooling?

4. What was your sense of the discussion? Did you feel your perspectives and ideas were heard?

5. What were your impressions of the social dynamics of the discussion? Did you sense or observe underlying tensions that prevented or inspired you or others from contributing to the discussion?
APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This research has been approved by the Ohio University Institutional Review Board. Approval of this research only signifies that the procedures adequately protect the rights and welfare of the participants. Federal and university regulations require consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent by signing your name on the line provided at the end of this form. If you do not want to provide consent, simply return the form to the researcher.

Explanation of Study

The purpose of this research is to understand the relationship between computer and communication technologies and the rise in the number of children who are educated at home. Your participation will involve completing a brief questionnaire and discussing your views on home education with other formerly and/or currently practicing home educators during a focus group interview. Focus group interviews are expected to last between 60-90 minutes. The focus group interview also will be audio and video recorded. After the focus group interviews have been completed, one or two individuals from each of the focus groups will be invited to participate in a one-on-one interview conducted by the researcher.

Risks and Discomforts

The risks associated with participation in this study are expected to be minimal. Individuals must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate. Participants may refuse to answer any question(s) on the questionnaire or questions posed by the researcher or other participants at any time during the focus group interviews.

Benefits

The potential benefit of participating in this study is the shared exploration of ideas and perhaps the achievement of a deeper understanding about how broader global forces, like the advent and wide-scale diffusion of computer and communication technologies, might have created opportunities for parents to consider and sustain homeschooling as a viable educational alternative to conventional public and private schooling.

Confidentiality and Records

Absolute anonymity will not be guaranteed due to the presence of other participants in the focus groups, which can compromise the confidentiality of the research. Responses and contributions to focus group and one-on-one interviews will be confidential. Documents generated during the recruitment stage of the project will be accessible only to the researcher and will be destroyed at the completion of the project.
Participants will be addressed by first names or pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality during the audio and video recorded focus group sessions. Participants will not be identified by name or by group in any subsequently published reports, articles, or presentations. An alias will be assigned to individual participants or groups mentioned or discussed in published reports or presentations. Any records or documentation with identifying information about individual participants, including digital recordings, transcripts, and taped interviews will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

Compensation

Participation in the research is voluntary. Individuals will not receive any form of compensation for participation.

Contact

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the principal investigator Albert G. Andrade by email at aa104000@ohio.edu or by telephone. Questions about the study also may be directed to faculty advisor Dr. Teresa Franklin at Ohio University by email at franklit@ohio.edu or by telephone at 740 593 4561. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University at 740 593-0664.

I certify that I am at least 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Name: ___________________________________

Date: ___________________________________
APPENDIX F: CODING CATEGORIES

Item 19 Questionnaire

*List three reasons you and your family ultimately decided to educate your child/children at home?*

Institutional: Responses coded as institutional reflected an array of general and specific dissatisfactions with conventional school practices or policies. Data illustrating that a participant perceived a lack of acceptable educational options or sensed that the child’s needs were not or could not be met by conventional schooling were coded as Institutional.

Pedagogical: Reasons coded as pedagogical tended to reflect a participant’s abiding philosophy of education, conceptions of learning, or beliefs about the appropriateness of school curricula. Preferences for (or rejection of) instructional methods were coded as Pedagogical.

Social: Reasons that fell into the social category tended to highlight a participant’s commitment to strengthening family ties and relationships. Socially motivated participants identified an abiding preference for the lifestyle afforded by homeschooling (e.g. flexibility in planning and implementing family events, activities, travel, field trips, or vacations).

Ideological: Perceptions that the moral or ethical principles cultivated in conventional schools are inappropriate or ineffective or that the home is the appropriate place to teach and cultivate moral values were coded as ideological. As defined for the research, the analysis of the ideological motivations extended beyond religion and included participants’ concerns about the political or cultural principles and beliefs perceived to be cultivated in schools.

Journey Analysis

Predisposition: a sensitivity or openness to alternative education
- personal
- past educational experiences
- developmental (child’s or parent’s readiness for conventional school)
- practical (concerns or dissatisfactions with conventional education)
- ideological

Recognition: awareness of homeschooling as an educational option
- process of achieving awareness of homeschooling
- proximity / exposure to homeschool models
Deliberation: process of deciding to homeschool
  developing self-efficacy
  developing sufficient sense of authority, mastery
  consideration with spouse, family; overcoming resistance
  self-efficacy; developing homeschool “voice”, articulation of perspectives

Identification: reconciling new identity as homeschool parent and educator
  social, professional marginalization
  self-doubt
  recalibrating role as parent / educator
  seeking validation

Expansion: developing refined conceptions of education, learning, family, etc.
  philosophy of education
  educational mission
  beliefs about nature of learning, instruction (e.g. diversity of perspectives)
  individualized, self-regulated instruction
  socio-political rationales
  socio-cultural rationales
  pedagogical rationales

Focus Group Categories by Research Question

*In what ways did computer and communication technology enable parents’ decision to homeschool their child or children?*
  Participants perceived that technology influenced decision to homeschool.
  Participants perceived that technology did not influence decision to homeschool.
  Participants challenged the thesis and generated alternative explanations.

*How did homeschool families initially perceive of the potential affordances and disaffordances of computer and communication technology as they considered the decision to homeschool?*
  Relative advantages:
    lowered interpersonal barriers
    lowered instructional barriers
    lowered informational barriers
    lowered psychological or emotional barriers
    lowered practical / logistical barriers

  Relative disadvantages:
    cost
    preferred non-technology information and social resources
    potential for inappropriate implementation, overuse
How did families use and depend on computer and communication technologies to enable, facilitate, or sustain homeschooling?

Relative advantages:
- shared networks
- shared knowledge
- shared enterprise
- supports instruction
  - individualization
  - access to courses, instructors, curriculum
  - minimize social and instructional isolation
- lowered practical barriers
  - administration, reporting
  - lowered cost
  - enabled participant to work from home
- saved time (instant access to information, individuals, groups)

Relative disadvantages:
- information overload
- time waster
- stand-in for instruction
- lack of regulation, vetting
- threat to independence
- socially isolating
- deskilling

How have parents’ perceptions and use of computer and communication technology evolved since deciding to homeschool?

Changes:
- technology becomes part of homeschool curriculum and instruction
- technology used to individualize education
- overcome initial resistance to technology over time

No changes:
- limited use of technology over time

In what ways did a desire for greater educational control, autonomy, or freedom enter into a family’s decision to homeschool?

To a great extent:
- choice
- individualism
- parental control
- responsibility
APPENDIX G: SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

Transcripts were generated from audio and video recordings taken from each of the five focus group interviews. Full transcripts will be provided upon request.

Focus Group 1: Interview Data
Participants: HS1, HS2, HS3, HS4
Pages 1 - 35

R: Okay. What I’d like to do is to, first of all – which one of you mentioned it – the reason – the reasoning part behind homeschooling. I’d like to get that done. You mentioned on the questionnaire the reasons initially don’t align. Say more. You want to –

HS4: I think at the beginning it was more money, financial consideration. We lived in the city, and I didn't really like my options. I didn't really want to go the Catholic school route. I wasn’t crazy about what I saw in the Albany public schools, and I sort of felt like it’s just kindergarten, how badly could I screw up kindergarten. We thought we would move to a suburb. We’ll just plan over the next year move to Guilderland or somewhere that has a good public school system.

And then I met other people doing it and I enjoyed it. I liked the time with my son. I liked not putting him on – it always seemed such a foreign thought to me to just put him on the bus everyday. He’s fine. Bye, have a good day.

And it kind of just turned into a lifestyle. So I guess initially it was more a money consideration, and the private – the couple private schools that we liked were too expensive. So it was more money and convenience, not really being ready to part with him, feeling like he was really too young to be away from me for so long everyday.

And I’d say in the last six years it’s turned into more – I’ve had a lot of time to reflect over my experience in school mainly because when I’m teaching them I just think, “Oh my gosh, I know I learned this stuff.” But I think I was so zoned out from just being drained and droned at and sitting in the classroom and looking outside and wishing I was out there that I don't – I think that learning became more of a chore than a thing I enjoyed.

And I remember if my mom took me to a museum outside of school or something being like, “Oh my gosh,” because it was an educational thing, and I just was so- that was boring to me. I do that in school. That’s the
only time I have to do that. I don't have to do it with you. Now is
playtime, and that’s not an attitude that I want my kids to have. So I wrote
down first that it’s to – more to instill an idea or feeling that learning is fun
and it’s an enjoyable thing, not boring and something that people cram
down your throat primarily.

Secondarily, because I want the kids – I want my family to be close, and
my kids are very close. They have great relationships with each other, and
I’m convinced that if they were in school that wouldn’t be the case, and I –
I think in today’s day and age it’s very important to have great
relationships with your family.

The last thing was that I don't particularly like the ethics and the morals
that I see in schools now. I want to give my kids a foundation that’s
stronger than what I see being fostered in the public schools and seems –
to me just seems to be getting worse every year. I hear the way kids talk
to adults, and I don’t – I don't want that for the kids.

So it’s turned into that from experience over the last six years and –

[Crosstalk]

R: You both said similar things. Your reasons have changed. Your reasons
have evolved. How so?

HS1: It’s interesting when I wrote down - the answers I wrote down are kind of
why we started homeschooling, but if I were to look now there are
certainly other benefits I hadn’t thought about as much.

For example, interestingly I’m one of those people who decided I would
homeschool in the 1980’s. So almost 20 years or at least 17 years before I
had a child when I was a student, a very good student who loved school,
loved my teachers, but always had this issue with loving to learn and
hating the testing because I always felt highly stressed. I felt that I had to
be a good performer, had to get A’s, and I felt like it took away from my
learning, that all I was doing was learning what the teacher wanted,
spitting it out and not getting – and I would dream of just being able to
read for the joy of reading and learn for the joy of learning.

And when I read at some point in the 1980’s or early ‘80s about
homeschooling and it just totally resonated with me. So 17 years before I
had a child I knew that’s what I would like to do. What’s interesting to
me is how much it fits for my daughter. I think it fits a lot of kids, but I
think it fits her extremely well. So I knew all along that’s what I wanted
to do.
So I’ve learned that it’s – she’s different than a lot of her female traditionally schooled or conventionally schooled peers in her self-esteem issues and her view of women’s contributions to the world because of the way I teach her and the fact that that’s a really important subject to me, and that’s part of – it’s a big part of why we homeschool interestingly.

I also feel like homeschooling has preserved her spirit as it more naturally is. She tends to be sort of a magical thinker in the sense of her imagination, her – not feeling a need to grow up too fast, not feeling that need to bend to peer pressure, not feeling – it seems to support her growing and developing at a much more natural pace than feeling like there’s somehow something wrong with her that she’s not interested in boys at ten or interested – you know.

R: Right.

HS1: But I think my initial reasons haven’t really changed, they’ve just broadened. And I think to be able to provide – for me it’s that experiential education. It’s one thing to sit and read a textbook about the Revolutionary War. It’s another to go to Boston and walk the same trails, to visit the homes, to experience it.

It’s one thing to sit in an art classroom for 20 minutes a week. It’s another to sit I think a potter in her studio. It’s one thing to talk about writing. It’s another to work with a writer. I mean, I wanted her life to be more real and deep and less artificial. I didn't want her limited to same aged peers all the time. I feel that’s very limiting socially and educationally.
APPENDIX H: RECRUITMENT LETTER

I relied primarily on email, homeschool group websites, and telephone technologies to initiate contact with prospective participants. Initial contact and correspondence with prospective homeschool group leaders and individuals was anticipated to vary slightly depending on the nature and social context of the interaction (e.g. an unsolicited letter of introduction sent to a leader of a homeschool group vs. correspondence sent to an individual homeschool parent I met through a mutual friend or colleague). Despite some minor variance in formality, initial contact with prospective participants abided generally by the content of following letter of introduction.

Dear [Name of Home Education Contact],

My name is Al Andrade. I am a doctoral candidate in the Instructional Technology Program at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. I am writing to inquire if you would be interested in participating in a research project on home education.

The purpose of the study I am conducting is to understand the relationship between computer and communication technologies and the rise in the number of children who are educated at home. Participation will involve a willingness to discuss and share your views with a small group of former or currently practicing home educators on how new technologies may be influencing a family’s capacity and inclination to homeschool.

The group interview is expected to last between 60-90 minutes, and it will be audio and video recorded. Once the group interview has been completed, one or two individuals from the group will be invited to participate in a second follow-up, one-on-one interview. Your participation is voluntary. Volunteers to will not receive any form of compensation for participation.

My hope and goal for the discussion is to explore and generate ideas with you and other homeschool parents about how broader global forces, like the advent and wide-scale diffusion of computer and communication technologies, might be creating opportunities for a growing number of families to opt for and sustain homeschooling as a viable alternative to conventional state-sponsored public and private education.

If you have any questions about me or the study, please let me know. I can be reached by email at aa104000@ohio.edu. Also, you may contact my faculty advisor Dr. Teresa Franklin at Ohio University by email at franklit@ohio.edu or by telephone at 740 593 4561.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Albert G. Andrade
Ohio University
Email: aa104000@ohio.edu