

Deep in the Heart: Homeschooling in the Lone Star State

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Homeschooling is a growing educational format that has more than doubled in size since the COVID-19 pandemic. This pilot study takes an ethnographic look at the motivations and practices of homeschoolers in the DFW area and how they differ from traditional schooling as well as from each other.

01. INTRODUCTION

- Homeschooling is an educational form that has existed in the U.S. since before the signing of the constitution
- An organized homeschooling movement began in the 1960s and by the 1990s homeschooling became legal nationwide with varying levels of regulation by state (1).
- Texas is one of the least regulated states, making it a safe haven and hub for homeschoolers.
- Homeschooling has thrived under neoliberalism as the "most radical manifestation of [School choice policies] in which education moves into the private realm of the family home" (2).
- Homeschoolers are a hard to study population as the lack of regulation makes them virtually invisible to the state. Further, homeschoolers are wary of outsider interaction due to the former deviance of the practice.
- Academic Scholarship has placed homeschoolers into two categories along ideological lines with a growing number of practical homeschoolers, who homeschool because it makes sense for their family at the time. Not because of a commitment to the practice.
- An experimental survey from the U.S. Census bureau in 2021 found that the COVID-19 Pandemic has more than doubled the amount of homeschoolers in Texas and nationwide.

02. METHODOLOGY

Literature review

Social media marketing

Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Process and analyze qualitative data

Set google alerts to track homeschooling in local and national news as well as new scholarship. The key sources for this study were "The Homeschool choice: Parents and the Privatization of Education" by Kate Henley Averett and "Homeschool: an American History" by Milton Gaither.

Applied to join over 30 Facebook groups for DFW homeschoolers and was accepted to 10. Shared promotional flyer with details of the study. Reached out to interested parents through Facebook messenger and scheduled interviews through doodle.com.

13 Interviews were conducted virtually over zoom lasting approximately one hour. Questionnaire covered 1) background and demographics 2) homeschooling practices and 3) external factors.

Edit automatic transcription provided by zoom. Input data into Nvivo and code for themes.

03. FINDINGS

Respondent characteristics

Participant	Household Income	Educational Attainment	Educational Attainment of Secondary Parent (P2)	Homeschool Educator in Paid Labor force	Family Race & Ethnicity	religious affiliation	Number of Children	Start Year	Disabilities in Family	Second Generation Homeschooling
Amy	\$100,000	Some college	Some College	Yes	White	Non-denominational Christian	4	2004	Dyslexia, ADHD, autism	no
Christie	\$100,000	Associate Degree	Post Graduate Degree	Yes	White	Non-denominational Christian	1	2020	Not Applicable	no
Ellen	\$200,000	HS diploma or GED	Post Graduate Degree	Yes	P1 White, P2 Black	Non-denominational Christian	2	2020	Not Applicable	no
Jen	170,000	Post Graduate Degree	Post Graduate Degree	Yes	P1 Mexican Lebanese P2 Mexican	Catholic	3	2021	Not Applicable	no
Cindy	\$50-100,000	less than HS	HS diploma or GED	Yes	White	Messianic Christian	3	2017	Not Applicable	no
Katherine	\$55-60,000	Post Graduate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	White	Christian	2	2022	Not Applicable	yes
Amanda	≤ \$600,000	Some college	Bachelor's Degree	No	White	Evangelical Christian	8	2008	Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, heart transplant	no
Monica	\$75-120,000	Bachelor's Degree	Post Graduate Degree	Yes	White	Pagan, P2 Agnostic	4	2014	autism, neurodiverse, autism	yes
Rebecca	\$75-85,000	Bachelor's Degree	Post Graduate Degree	Yes	Brazilian American	Messianic Christian	4	2011	stath dyslexia	yes
Rachel	\$150,000	Associate Degree	HS diploma or GED	Yes	White	Non-denominational Christian	1 (2 grandkids)	1999	Add, depression	yes
Susie	\$30-90,000	Post Graduate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	White	Non-denominational Christian	4	1996	Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, audio processing deficiency	no
Tamra	\$100,000	Post Graduate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	White	Methodist	4	2021	speech delay, behavioral issues, ADHD	no

The participants in this study shine a light into the diversity within the homeschooling community and are not intended to represent the entire DFW homeschooling community. Within the 15+ hours of content far more data was generated than was able to be analyzed within the scope of this poster. Included below are the two major findings this project adds to the literature that have not yet been substantively addressed.

#1 Homeschool moms are working moms.

- In homeschooling scholarship and pop culture, homeschooling parents are portrayed as stay-at-home mothers.
- Yet, in this study, 11/12 participants had participated in the paid labor force at some point during their tenure as homeschool educators.

Group 1

- Participate in the gig economy
- For extra income, but primarily to meet **social needs**.
- Often, finding ways to monetize experience as homeschool educators.

"We just have one income, my husband works. I mean I work at a church, but it doesn't pay much. It's mainly to just for me to have a break from the kiddos."

Group 2

- Part to **full time** in chosen career field.
- For supplemental to primary income, as well as to **stay relevant in their profession**.

"I'm keeping my toes in enough that I'm not like irrelevant to this field. But I'm not pouring myself into that wholly right now"

- These mothers utilized Sharon Hay's ideology of intensive nothing(2) in their narratives. They feel as though they can and *should* be able to meet their children's needs through their roles as not only worker and mother but also as educator.
- They manage these competing demands through meticulous scheduling and prioritization of needs deemed 'most important'.

"Every hour of my week basically is accounted for, so I can see where my time is going. Where are the little gaps in my schedule? How can I multitask and do two things at once? I'm just not the type of person that's like. "Oh, I can't. There's just no way to get it done. So I just won't." I'm just like, how can I make this work, like there is a way. There's always a way to do the things that you want to do. and you just have to figure out a way to do them and to fit it into your schedule and to make it work. So that's that's kinda how I do everything."

#2 Digital Spaces are increasingly important for Post COVID homeschoolers.

"I started joining all these Facebook groups, city Facebook groups, even like DFW Metroplex Facebook groups and started reading anything I could get my hands on. And from there that's how I was able to learn the lingo. Learn this underground network of homeschoolers that you're never aware of until you're actually diving in and trying to find it. Getting into all the discussions and asking questions and posting anxieties. And hopefully, you're getting responses of people who have been through the same thing and say, 'hey, don't worry about it. It's a lot easier than you're making it out to be. You're going to be fine' and getting that confidence, I think, as a new home schooling mom. And you know, I feel like, really confident at this point where I can now do the same thing for others. I'm still on the Facebook groups, but I'm the one going, 'Don't worry about it. Work from home. You're still okay. Full time work. You're worried about balancing? It's okay,' like, here's my experience and just sharing all that."

- 'Veteran' homeschoolers cited homeschool book fairs and the library as key avenues to learn about homeschooling. For the five post covid homeschoolers interviewed, digital spaces were central to learning about the practice, building confidence and deciding what learning mediums to employ.
- Specifically, there are over 60 Facebook groups for homeschoolers in DFW organized around; geography, identity, special interests, education stage and style.
- These specialized groups allow homeschoolers on the margins to center their voices and experiences. Providing an important source of community in a post COVID world.

"First I went to just like Facebook, and started finding, like homeschool mom pages that you can go on and ask questions. I wanted to find perspectives that weren't just religious based. But like what does that look like for you know all sorts of families that homeschool, you know. Because you can get a very one-sided approach from (I would say,) like the church homeschool moms"

"There were other moms like me, just throwing out questions like. What does that look like? You know? What does the state require? You know what curriculum options are out there."

Related literature

- Gaither Milton. Homeschool : An American History. Revised second edition Revised second ed. Palgrave Macmillan 2017.
- Averett Kate Henley. The Homeschool Choice : Parents and the Privatization of Education. New York University Press 2021.
- Levinson Bradley A. U et al. Schooling the Symbolic Animal : Social and Cultural Dimensions of Education. Rowman & Littlefield 2000.
- <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/homeschooling-on-the-rise-during-covid-19-pande-mic.html>
- This data from the census that details the growth of homeschooling in the wake of COVID-19 crucial to understanding.
- 'Multitasking mom' art by Lily Senderling

