Deep in the Heart: Homeschooling in the Lone Star State

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 1980s 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 Settles places 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 interviews
- Process and analyze qualitative data

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

- Literature review
- "There were other moms like me, just throwing out questions like, 'What does that look like? You know? What does the state require?'
- "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 homeschooled moms'."
- "We just have one income, my husband works, I mean I work as a character artist and 3D modeling, but it doesn't pay much. It's mainly just for me to have a break from the kiddos."
- "I'm keeping my toes in enough professional, 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 it, not me."

03. Findings

#1 Homeschool moms are working moms.

- In homeschooling circles, hunger and pressure, 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 maintain social status.
- Often, finding ways to monetize experience as homeschool educators.

Group 2
- Part to full time in chosen career field.
- For supplemental to primary income, as well as to stay relevant in their profession.

- These mothers utilized Sharon Hay's ideology of intensive mothering (2) in their narration of homeschooling 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 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 then 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 it, not me'."

- "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'."

Related literature
5) Multitasking mom' art by Lily Senderling

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