The Choice Cycle:

Homeschooling in Conversations about School Choice

Lily Thompson

Vassar College Education Department

Spring 2022

Thesis Advisor: Christopher Bjork

Second Reader: Andrew Davison

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

in Educational Studies

For my family, professors, and fellow homeschoolers

Acknowledgements

To my thesis advisor, Chris Bjork, thank you for your support throughout these past four year and this process; your consistent positive encouragement helped me move forward. To my second reader, Andy Davison, I am immensely grateful for your caring comments and pushing me to think beyond the page. I would also like to thank my major advisors, Maria Hantzopolous and Leah Haus for their unwavering support throughout my time at Vassar College and for their thoughtful input throughout the topic selection process. Thank you to Jaime Del Razo for the literature review and methodology workshops, helping me when I had no idea where to start. And finally, I would like to thank Erin McCloskey for supporting me throughout this year: as an additional set of eyes on this project and steadfast confidante.

To my mother, thank you for your ongoing encouragement and help to give me perspective when I began running in circles, taking time to read through many, many pages and converse with me about the topic in more depth. To my father, thank you for reading over multiple iterations of my thesis and giving me the confidence to keep going. I also would like to thank my friends for their ability to make me laugh and relax when things get tough. Finally, I would like to thank my participants, including my sister, for their openness and trust in me to share their stories.

Introduction

No longer does my childhood dining room hold a large table strewn with half-completed notebooks, 6-sided dice, and an old-fashioned typewriter. But it used to be a mix of a half-baked idea and a home-cooked meal, a math worksheet and a trip to the grocery store, an experiment and a game of scrabble: the cross-section of home and school. For a large portion of my life, the differentiation between learning at home and learning at school did not exist. My parents, both educators, encouraged me to follow my passions while simultaneously pushing me to discover outside of my comfort zone. A typical day would be incomplete without a book-on-tape, a math workbook, and a walk to the local grocery store. Some days we would drive to homeschooling co-ops (groups of families who homeschooled), while other days we would focus on our own studies, whether that was playing the guitar or exploring the woods. That room still houses the relics of the past science corner equipped with a microscope and many dried plants, the calendars of past adventures, and a map of my years as a homeschooler.

This is the homeschooling story coated in nostalgia that I told my peers in high school and my professors in college, determined to establish the validity of my experience. I was convinced that I needed to justify my socialization and academic experience to those around me so that they would not think I had a non-rigorous background. While growing up, I consistently thought of my experience as better and unique from other homeschooling experiences— that my own choices had given me the opportunities or grades that I was so fortunate to receive. Retrospectively, I had to contend with the way my background was privileged over others and what may have seemed like choices were only possible given my circumstances and influences. In other words, I was able to achieve my goals through my educational journey due to the affordances given to me by the people and system around me. As a student of politics and

education, I am convinced that the opportunities (educational or otherwise) that one has is

heavily influenced by their situation. For example, I chose to play the guitar, but it was also

heavily encouraged by my parents. The choice to attend public school —as opposed to a private

school or homeschooling— was at the time conceptualized as my decision. However, thinking

back, the decision to attend public school was less of my choice than how I framed it when

growing up. My parents encouraged me to look at diversity— an aspect of my environment that

at the time was less important to me— which influenced me to focus on community in

education over, say, the music program of the private school I considered. This new way of

thinking about my homeschooling and educational journey formulated my initial research

questions, which focused on child-centredness and autonomy in education. I wanted to

investigate whether other homeschooling graduates felt like they had as much choice in their

education as I did and whether, retrospectively, they had the same realization about systems and

parental influence that certainly impacted my experience— for better or for worse.

Here are the interwoven stories of 9 homeschooling graduates and their experiences with

choice in homeschooling. Through a critical lens, I unpack themes of freedom, mobility, state

control, and well-being in these participants' experiences. I consider how these homeschoolers

conceptualize choice as paradoxically having and not having freedom, while contending with

social mobility and state control. Student well-being appeared through social interactions, which

were satisfactory and unsatisfactory for different participants. Moreover, the goal of

achievement in the form of college admission or work appeared to influence the choices of

many participants. The choice to homeschool, and the options available within the

homeschooling day itself, were simultaneously freeing for some, and constrained by external

factors for others. Where my homeschooling table was cluttered with half-completed notebooks

and 6-sided dice, for these participants it provided moments of choice, uncontrollable factors,

and opportunity.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

This thesis questions how students understand their experiences with homeschooling in the context of school choice. The opening section considers the historical underpinnings of child-centered philosophy. Using child-centredness to conceptualize school choice and homeschooling, the second section expands upon 3 central themes in the literature review. The first looks at the theme of freedom in school choice and homeschooling. The second looks at the theme of alternativity. The third considers resistance and safety as driving forces for school choice and homeschooling. In each section, and throughout this thesis, I attempt to bring in different perspectives and also try to fill the gap with what perspectives are not represented. Through a review of the literature about homeschooling's intersection with school choice, and homeschooling alone, it is clear that there is minimal representation of student voices despite the vast publications about students and their achievements. Thus, my research question looks to fill this gap in the literature by pondering: how do homeschooling graduates conceptualize homeschooling as it fits into conversations about school choice?

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on critical theory and my own positionality. Critical theory looks to liberate individuals from the power structures that bind them. Freire (2018) posited that what he called the "banking model" of education —where the child is a consumer of knowledge and the teacher is the producer — as dehumanizing. "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information"(Freire, 2018, p. 79). He viewed what he called "problem-posing education" as a way to humanize. Inspired by Freire, this work relies on the underlying presupposition that education is for the co-construction of knowledge. Pulling from this

framework, I recognize that homeschooling —especially as it connects to my own positionality — is based in large part on the theory that the traditional "banking model" of education inhibits the ability of students to raise their consciousness (Freire, 2018, p. 72). Homeschooling is a way to raise consciousness through the co-construction of knowledge. As can be seen throughout this literature review and analysis, homeschooling — with its themes of freedom, alternatives, and physical and intellectual safety — features children at the center of the learning. Indeed, some of the themes that arose from initial data collection considered how homeschooling students were able to take control of their own learning in combination with their parents in a "co-intentional education" (Freire, 2018, p. 69). Yet, homeschooling can simultaneously be used to indoctrinate students into a certain type of mentality which aligns the student as a consumer. Being homeschooled can be inaccessible and inequitable. As a school choice option, it can perpetuate inequality by allowing some students to gain individualized attention in line with Rousseau's (1905) conceptualization of child-centredness while others are left underserved by an unequal system. This critical lens informed the way I thought about and constructed this project, employed my research methods, and presented the data.

Furthermore, the bulk of this research is based on my own experience having homeschooled and attended an alternative public school in Portland, Maine. As a female, Asian-American child homeschooled by two white middle-class parents in a largely white state, I was sheltered in many ways but also had to contend with racially-driven bias from others. However, for the formative years of my life, the color of my skin felt more normal in homeschooling than in public, as I had little else to compare it to. Entering high school, I was fortunate enough to have a choice between schools and once again, I followed an alternative route of education. Here, how I conceptualized my placement as a minority changed

considerably to contend with the fact that I could not blend in among my white peers. While I

still excelled in an academic environment, there were social and emotional drawbacks that came

with appearing Chinese that were not as prevalent in the homeschooling experience. My family

was also not religious — to the point of actively practicing atheism at times — making it

difficult for me to conceptualize homeschooling religiously. I have included — conscious of my

positionality — aspects about religion's role in homeschooling, but it must be stated that I have

never had nor do I foresee myself having a religious schooling experience. I also was privy to

homeschooling preconceptions that disfavored unschooling, as unschooling was often equated

in my experience as lack-of-parent-supervision. With that said, I have taken a fresh look at

unschooling[1] and now see where there is overlap in my experience. I mention my unique lived

experience in alternative schooling, and underlying notions of different homeschooling

philosophies, to give context for the ways I actively frame homeschooling choice and freedom

in this work. Simply put, my needs as a youth were placed at the center of my upbringing and

learning. Even if I did not have freedom to make every decision, I conceptualized it that way at

the time: as a child considering options confined by my specific available educational choices.

The Child at the Center of Education

      At the forefront of American education and literature discussing secular homeschooling,

is the child. Secular homeschooling, the focus of this research, is hinged under the philosophical

underpinnings of the child as pure (Rousseau, 1905), with the role of education to develop this

well-rounded child. Religious education focuses more on the child as part of a family-unit

which bases education in morals and religion. Both draw on a child-centred notion, which can

---

[1] Unschooling is a practice of homeschooling where the curriculum is driven by the student. Originally promoted by John Holt.

be traced to Jean Jacques Rousseau's conceptualization of the child. Underlying

child-centredness is the ideal of autonomy and authenticity which is used to favor

homeschooling over other forms of schooling. Pulling from parts of child-centredness, John

Dewey's (1933) connection between learning and personal experience explores the relationship

between home and school at a preliminary level. Considering the background of schooling

philosophy, one may believe that children's voices would be included in literature about such

educational practices, yet they are minimally represented. This framing of American education

through the child allows for a more complete picture of education, particularly when referring to

the practice of homeschooling which can be unconventional.

Rousseau argued that children should learn to be their most authentic selves. *Emile, or

Treatise on Education*, first published in 1762, became a seminal piece in what would be the

backdrop for American education and later alternative education. Rousseau saw the child as an

example of the most pure person, uncorrupted by society: "We ought to teach him [the child] to

protect himself when he has become a man; to bear the blows of destiny; to have opulence and

misery; to live, if need be, amid the snows of Iceland or the burning rocks of Malta"(Rousseau,

pp. 9-10). Rousseau contended that the child should learn to be self-reliant, self-sufficient, and

consequently, autonomous. This is not to say that education ever fully can meet this philosophy,

but Rousseau saw this as the ideal: a child-centred approach.

Building on the work of Rousseau, John Dewey viewed school as a place to extend that

which is learned at home. Rather than center learning on the basis of topics, Dewey pointed out

that education must connect the social and home life. As he described in *My Pedagogic Creed*

(1933), "I believe that much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental

principle of the school as a form of community life [the idea that school should 'deepen and

extend… values bound up in… home life']" (Dewey, p. 4). Recognizing that children are influenced by home life and school, Dewey (1897) supported a connection of individual learning and societal understanding to produce the "right character" and specialization (p. 9). Scholars such as Michael Tiboris and Scot Danforth (2016) viewed this specialization as building students' autonomy and personal freedom by giving them the tools to operate in society beyond the classroom. However, Bevir (1999) viewed this construction of education clearly as being confined to the power of societal norms, and consequently saw it limit one's autonomy and child-centredness. Dewey is an important figure to mention in relation to child-centredness in education, given that homeschooling can have similar praxis in the home as the homeschool attempts to bridge the gap between values at home and educational practices: from practical familial cooking skills to traditional subject learning of science and math.

Autonomy and authenticity to and for the child are crucial to consider in this context of child-centredness. Autonomy is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the quality or state of being self-governing." In other words, it is the ability of something (often a country) or someone (a person) to make its own decisions regardless of external forces. In *Autonomy and Schooling*, Callan described this as "regulation of the will"(Callan, p. 26). Critically important to this discussion is the point that autonomy relates directly to freedom or the liberty to make one's own decisions. Throughout schooling literature, it is highlighted as a perceived good — something that schools and parents aspire to give to students (McCabe, 2021). Drawing from the work of Sarajlic (2019), homeschooling may, in fact, reduce a child's independence as parents push students to think and act in certain ways that match their goals and aspirations. Essentially, homeschooling and the choice to pursue homeschooling then become the prerogative of the parents over the child, detracting from child-centredness. The ways in which

students conceptualize this ability to have self-governance of their education is at the crux of this project. Just as Sarajlic (2019) points out that parents can have influence over the child, their and scholarly voices are more readily available in the literature about homeschooling and choice.

This research looks to expand this literature by considering the voices of children. By conceptualizing school choice and secular homeschooling through the lens of child-centredness, this points to the importance of highlighting students' voices in conversations about school choice.

Choice

Beyond the individual nature of schooling with child-centredness, autonomy, and connection, this section examines the ways in which choice is conceptualized in education. It follows scholarly and parent-focused views of the practice of education. The first topic raised in this section points to the theoretical underpinning of school choice through free-market economics. This idea is pulled from Milton Friedman's (1997) work on voucher systems. The second view posits that homeschooling can maximize efficiency by tailoring the education to the child's needs. Here, homeschooling can be viewed as an alternative in favor of positioning the child for higher achievement or esteemed values. The third points to the way homeschooling can be used reactively by families based on extenuating circumstances. Thus, homeschooling as a choice can be viewed through a child-centered lens reaching free-market, alternative, and reactive options.

Freedom

Favorability towards school choice in the United States is largely represented through conversations about free-markets in education. Beginning with Milton Friedman, the laissez-faire approach — removing the government from the economy—was applied to the education system. Previously, this free-market idea was an economic sensibility rooted in the work of Adam Smith (1776). For supporters of the free-market, like Friedman, the privatization of education was a clear step in the right direction, allowing for market-forces to drive educational efficiency. As he said, "In terms of effects, the denationalization of education would widen the range of choice available to parents. Given, as at present, that parents can send their children to government schools without special payment, very few can or will send them to other schools unless they too are subsidized" (Friedman, 1955, p. 4). Friedman favored school vouchers where parents would receive money from the government in order to send their children to private or alternative schools, thus privatizing education. Choice was expanded beyond just the educational sector during the Reagan and Bush Administrations that reduced government regulation and increased privatization of government funds. In the education sector, Friedman's laissez-faire perspective was further amplified under former Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan who gave a face to free-market competition in U.S. education (Waisanen, 2020), supporting charter schools with the Race to the Top. The Race to the Top — an educational reform policy put in place during the Obama Administration — favored school competition for funding (McGuinn, 2012). The growth of governmental support for school choice, not only by conservatives but also by more liberal factions, allowed for the development of further school choice and ultimately, homeschooling to expand in the national conversation.

The interplay between homeschooling and school choice is not necessarily debated, but rather is viewed differently among scholars and advocates of the topic. Kerry McDonald of the Cato Institute (2019) highlighted that homeschoolers need to support school choice in order to serve their own future interests. Here, homeschools can be viewed as separate from school choice. In fact, the homeschooling movement started in the 1970s, where the school choice movement was founded in the 1960s (Gaither, 2008). Moveover, private schools, vouchers, and charter schools are often lumped together into "school choice" (Koppe, 2017), but homeschooling is sometimes viewed as separate. For example, DeAngelis and Dills (2019) found that homeschooling attendance increases with the creation of voucher programs and decreases with the creation of charter schools. Others considered homeschooling to be a subset of school choice, like vouchers or charter schools. *EdChoice,* a prominent school choice nonprofit started by Milton and Rose Friedman lists homeschooling as a school choice option. Essentially, homeschooling can be viewed separately from school choice, but also can be seen as one of the school choice options.

While each state has its own laws governing homeschooling, there are clear legal overlaps between homeschooling and school choice. In some states, homeschools are considered private schools ("Homeschool Laws by State, 2022). In others, there is actual homeschooling regulation that governs homeschooling itself. Some homeschooled students also attend public schools for sports or extracurriculars, and even attend individual classes (Johnson, 2013). Other states ban homeschooled children from attending public school altogether (Parsons, 2019). Parsons (2019) argued that homeschooled students should be able to attend public schools, describing lack of access as a case of discrimination. On the other hand, some pointed out that allowing homeschoolers to attend public schools is preferential treatment

(Washington Post, 2012). Similarities between homeschoolers' interactions with public

institutions can be mirrored in school choice debates over charter school students playing sports

for the public schools they would otherwise attend (Cook, 2011).

Homeschooling itself comes in many different forms which can fulfill different parent

and student needs. Within this exists freedom to individualize instruction to what either the

family or the child would like. According to Rothbard, (1999, as cited in Oliveira & Barbosa

2017), "Parental instruction conforms to the ideal arrangement. It is, first of all, individualized

instruction, the teacher dealing directly with the unique child, and addressing himself to his

capabilities and interests. Second, what people can know the aptitudes and personality of the

child better than his own parents?"(Oliveira & Barbosa, p. 206). This individualized instruction

can come in a variety of forms which may not look the same to each family or situation.

Isenberg (2007) pointed out that homeschooling either falls under the thought category of

Rousseau or is exceedingly religious. Practical application of these schooling philosophies falls

generally under roughly 7 categories: Classical, Charlotte Mason, Montessori, Unschooling,

School-at-home, Unit Studies, or a mix of all ("Homeschooling: Which Model," 2016). Where

Classical methods often focus heavily on religion, unschooling has no set agenda and favors the

childs' interests in line with Rousseau's (1905) child-centred philosophy. The point here is that

the parents and children are able to make the decision to tailor the educational experience to

what arguably serves them best.

A range of homeschooling classifications built into the concept of child-centredness and

freedom of choice in schools is important to highlight, considering outside perceptions of the

practice of homeschooling. Where some may view it as one type of experience, others may

consider it vastly differently. Thus, the connection between school choice and homeschooling

may be viewed as merely an alternative to mainstream schools rather than an ideological

decision.

The Alternative

Instead of viewing the choice to homeschool through an ideological lens in favor of

child-centredness, homeschooling can also be viewed as an alternative to public school. Public

schools can be viewed through a deficit lens which offers school choice, and consequently

homeschooling, as the best alternatives. Goldberg (1996) summed it up, "America's schools are

failures because they systematically suppress children's interests, values, and idiosyncratic

potentials"(p. 26). Public education's further shortcomings are highlighted by way of

underfunded schools and poor teacher compensation (Macewan, 2020). School choice is cited

as an "educational opportunity" (*EdChoice*). As one parent commented, "I wanted something

that was going to be more educational for her, more cultural… I did apply and was able to get

her approved and accepted to Cathedral High School that has so many of those other options"

(*EdChoice*). Likewise, homeschooling can be seen as a good alternative to other school choice

options. As Gaither (2008) explained in reference to homeschooling, "By the 1980s young

Americans on both the left and the right had largely given up on building a better America,

hoping instead to build alternative institutions and create alternative families--- a separate,

authentic, parallel universe" (p. 95). Being fed up with the opportunities that existed in the

compulsory and public school landscape, homeschooling appeared as a school choice option

that supported hippie and religious movements (Gaither, 2008). Lois (2012) described the

appearance of this schooling choice through what she called "first-choice" and "second-choice"

homeschoolers: those who considered no options but homeschooling and those who chose

homeschooling because it was the best option.

Even though this work focuses on non-religious homeschooling, it is important to

highlight the way religion plays into some parents' choice to homeschool. Some non-religious

households still provide their students with religious curriculum. In fact, 77% of parents in 2013

were found to homeschool based on moral principles. Murphy (2012) contended how

homeschoolers are primarily Christian. In line with Lois (2012), these religious homeschoolers

tend to lean toward the 'first choice' model of homeschooling in that they do not consider other

schooling options. In fact, the roots of homeschooling can be traced back on the Conservative

agenda to the growing non-Christian or activist curriculum taught in schools (Gaither, 2008).

Religious leaders such as Mary Pride viewed it as both a woman's duty to be at home and give

children an Evangelical Christian upbringing (Gaither, 2008). Evangelical Christians make up

approximately 37 percent of the homeschooling population (Murphy, 2012, p. 23). Not only are

there online sites dedicated to homeschooling and God, conservative homeschoolers are

well-represented through lobbying efforts. The Home School Legal Defense Association

(HSLDA), a self-proclaimed Christian non-profit, is one of the most cited lobbying arms for

homeschoolers in the United States. While there is far less literature regarding other religions

and homeschooling, it was noted that there are a growing number of Muslim homeschoolers

(Murphy, 2012 and Seif-Amirhosseini, 2016). In some cases, homeschooling was viewed as the

best option to connect with religion.

Secular homeschooling plays on the child-centred approach to education. The far

extreme —unschooling—was put forth by John Holt, who brought the child-centred philosophy

of Rousseau to a whole new level, arguing that children should be able to decide what they

would like to learn. To Holt, compulsory schooling would limit this endeavor: "Education —

compulsory schooling, compulsory learning is a tyranny and a crime against the human mind

and spirit. Let all those escape it who can, any way they can"(Holt, p. 222). Others viewed

homeschooling with more structure. Dorothy and Raymond Moore, in spite of their evangelical

background, appealed to a wide array of homeschoolers with their formula for homeschooling

based on schooling, community work, and manual work ("Moore Formula," 2022). Gaither

(2017) highlighted how their legacy focused on child-directed learning. "Her 'Moore Formula'

emphasized remunerative labor, community service, and child-directed study"(Gaither, 2017).

Child-centredness, whether in religious or non-religious settings, permeates homeschooling

pedagogies.

Homeschooling is also promoted on the grounds that it improves student achievement,

which is one of the more greatly studied areas of homeschooling. While it is challenging to

empirically assess the impact of homeschooling given a lack of control variables, there exists

anecdotal evidence of homeschooling students' achievement (Murphy, 2012, p. 123). Schnoor

(2020) argued in favor of homeschooling citing his experience as an independent thinker,

learning at his own pace. McCabe et al. (2021) quoted from a student from their qualitative

interviews, "My mom… both with homeschooling and then even separate from that… sort of…

raised us to be independent… independent thinkers and independent action-takers" (p. 130).

Thus, from one of the few student perspectives I could find, homeschooling graduates' saw

homeschooling as building independence. Furthermore, Drenovsky and Cohen (2012) surveyed

185 college students finding that those with "homeschooled backgrounds are not only

well-adjusted psychologically, but they also report higher academic achievement in many

different college and university settings, ranging from private colleges to large public

universities" (p. 31). However, in spite of parent voices and some student survey data, student voices are largely underrepresented considering it is their own education (McCabe, 2021).

As this section suggests, homeschooling is viewed as an alternative to public, private, or other schools in favor of achievement and independence by homeschooling families and scholars. Conceptualizing homeschooling as an alternative option can be viewed as the best choice to other forms of schooling, but can also be viewed as the only choice for religious families. Here, it is important to note that the homeschooling focused on in this work — while including some aspects of religion — mostly focuses on that of "second choice homeschoolers" who play into the child-centred approach by individualizing the education of the children.

Resistance and Safety

As alluded to in previous sections, homeschooling — like school choice — can be viewed as resistance to state control. According to Cooper & Sureau (2007), "Homeschooling developed as a response to laws and policies in 50 states making it illegal to keep children home for their education under compulsory education laws" (p. 112). By 1918, all U.S. states had passed compulsory schooling laws, but their enforcement changed over time (Katz, 1976). For differing reasons, special interest groups of the far right and far left supported the privatization of education in the form of school choice and homeschooling (Gaither, 2008). On the far right, conservative — especially religious groups — favored homeschooling given the state was imposing certain non-religious curriculum standards like sex education (Gaither, 2008, p. 107 and Dwyer, 2019, p. 87). On the far left, people favored self-sufficiency and commune-living (Gaither, 2008). This "disenchantment with the state"(Gaither, 2008, p. 89) also aligned with the sentiment of the school choice movement.

The historical context of racial resistance in the school choice movement bears similarities to some arguments for homeschooling. Field-Smith (2020) contended that homeschooling is "resistance to racism, discrimination, prejudice, injustice, or inequality experienced within or outside of traditional schools"(p. 143). For some families homeschooling is viewed as a way to provide a more culturally sensitive or relevant curriculum. This was further reflected in the work of Seif-Amirhosseini (2016) who pointed out that Muslim homeschoolers tend to homeschool for cultural and security related reasons. This sentiment was mirrored in the liberal argument in favor of school choice — that underserved students should be able to choose better education. According to Stephanie R. Logan (2018),

> Paralleling Friedman's conservative ideas, the modern school choice movement also has roots in liberal education movements, the civil rights movement, and Black Nationalism of the 1960s. Instead of focusing on marketplace school reform efforts, liberals saw the need for school choice to promote educational opportunity for poor children and children of color, primarily African American or Black children (p. 3).

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in schools was unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*, leading to the creation of a series of schools such as the Mississippi Freedom Schools, which primarily served black students. These summer-based schools were the precursor to other institutions such as the free schools (which can be viewed as the first charter schools) (Logan, 2018). Other scholars mainly focused on the effects of school choice on student achievement. Carpenter & Kafer (2012) cited the well-known Milwaukee voucher system as an example of school choice's positive impact on academic achievement for low-income and minority students. School choice and homeschooling thus provide resistance to inequality in public schools.

In other situations, school choice and consequently, homeschooling can be viewed as perpetuating inequality. *EdChoice*, a prominent school choice foundation started by Milton and Rose Friedman described school choice as something which, "allows public education funds to follow students to the schools or services that best fit their needs — whether that's to a public school, private school, charter school, home school or any other learning environment families choose" ("Our Legacy"). The model of school choice sounds like it would serve everyone; every family, including those with low socio-economic status, should be able to have individualized attention in line with John Dewey's model of education. What can be difficult to grasp is that the reality of school choice has served some students well, but the system has not alleviated the startling inequality that it purports to fix (Scmidtz & Brighouse, p. 171). Viteritti pointed out, "What is apparent under the present arrangement is that some parents enjoy the opportunity to choose the schools their children attend, and some children get assigned to schools whether or not their parents want them there. It is also clear that the difference between those who have choice and those who do not is associated with race and class"(Viteritti, 2003, p. 19). In other words, parents from lower socio-economic or minority backgrounds may encounter barriers to entry through additional paperwork or unreasonable travel distance. Sarajlic (2019) argued that homeschooling, as a school choice option, can reproduce ideologies based on parent interest making it difficult for students to be their authentic selves. This could reproduce class structures as well, especially given that homeschoolers tend to be middle to upper-middle class families and have high educational attainment.

The immediate physical and emotional well-being of the child also drives parents to homeschool. Some 91% of parents in 2013 had concern for the "environment in other schools" (Noel, et al, 2013, p. 4). Sabol (2018) cited bullying and drugs as some of the concerns that may

prohibit parents from choosing to send their children to public or private schools (p. 14).

Furthermore, prior negative experiences of parents in public schools has also been found to

push parents towards homeschooling their children (Collom, 2005, p. 310). In essence, lived

experience for parents can directly affect the education of their children, in line with Sarajlic's

(2019) hypothesis that parents reduce homeschoolers' authenticity. Whether or not the students

carry the same negative perception of the public school is undetermined in these cases. This

differs from main parent motivations for sending children to private schools where the vast

majority of parents look for better educational attainment and experience ("Are we there yet?",

2018). It may also be connected to religious differences related to public or private schools and

the ability to tailor a child's education in homeschooling. In the context of homeschooling as a

school choice, reactive action to negative experience —whether that be in the student's or

parents' past — is instrumental for parents to decide to homeschool their children.

     Conceptualizing homeschooling in terms of resistance and safety suggests that

homeschooling in some ways allows either families or students to take back power from

institutions that may have previously been a disservice to them, but simultaneously

homeschooling can be connected to a school choice system that markedly perpetuates

inequality. When considering the ways in which people consider homeschooling in

conversations about school choice, this is important as students may conceptualize their

experiences individually without thinking about the broader system that allows or prevents them

from having certain access or opportunities.

     Considering this review of the literature about homeschooling in connection with school

choice, I conclude that, especially when focused on secular homeschooling, the child is at the

center of their educational experience. Homeschooling, when placed in conjunction with school

choice, can be viewed through the lens of freedom, alternatives, and resistance or safety. This informed my research by driving me to follow the child — given that the literature highlights children but had few student voices — by following the texture and lived experience of homeschooling graduates. Given the plethora of ways people conceptualized homeschooling in the literature, I took a conversational approach to semi-structured interviews, understanding that it would be impossible to condense anything into one singular story, and striving to capture the experiences of people with different trajectories. I tried to find people who had both college and non-college goals (since homeschooling at times framed college attainment as positively correlated). Drawing from critical theoretical underpinnings and a focus on the child, the methodology in the following chapter looked to expand upon, give substance to, and shape the themes highlighted in this review. This drew me to the sub-question of how do students conceptualize choice in homeschooling? And how did or does this conception actually play out in people's lived experience?
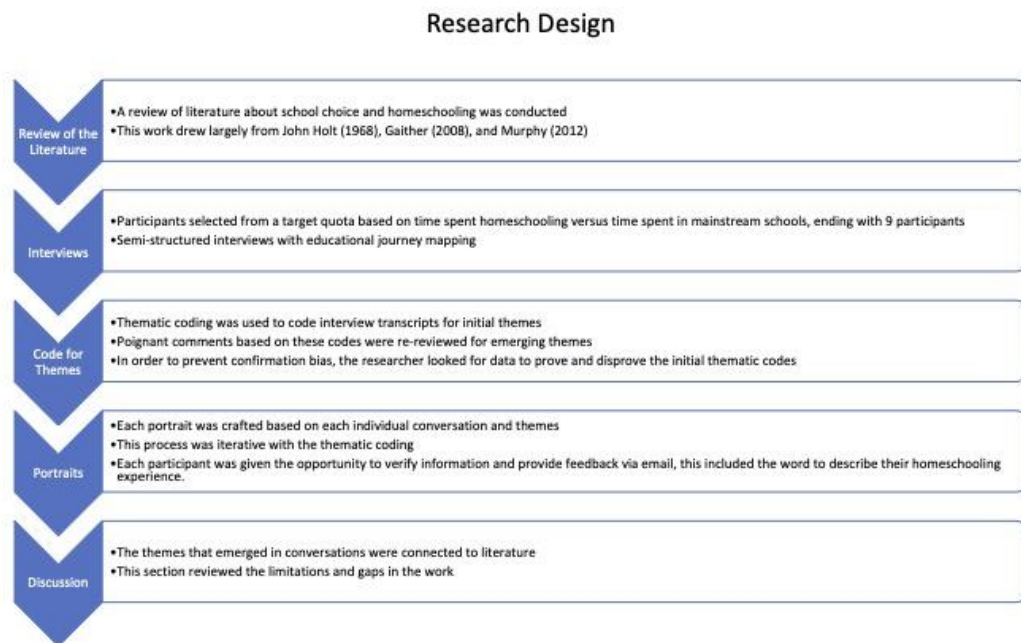
Chapter 2 Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approaches used in this study through semi-structured interviews and data analysis. Based on qualitative inquiry, this study focuses on the lived-experience and thoughts of homeschooling graduates. It serves to answer the research question: how do homeschooling graduates conceptualize homeschooling as it fits into conversations about school choice? Split into 4 sections, this chapter looks at the sample, methods, analysis, and possible limitations associated with this study. Participants were either college students or recent graduates from high school (<6 years) and were found through snowball sampling and personal connections. The methods for this work were based on Morrison et al's (2017) education-journey mapping and semi-structured interview approach. Inductive analysis was used to code for similar concepts and patterns.

Since quantitative research limits the ability of the investigator to directly understand the lived experience of participants, this research is qualitatively driven. While quantitative inquiry allows the researcher to compare and contrast numerical measures among populations, qualitative research encourages texture and experience in a topic (Patton, 1990). Pulling from elements of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2018; Morrison, 2017), this study rides on the presupposition that education is not limited in its form to how the current American education system exists. Instead, this work acknowledges the way students co-construct knowledge through learning. The methodology attempts to place the researcher and participant on equal footing and humanize the participant (Freire, 2018). Given that homeschooling exists in many different forms, it is challenging to pinpoint or generalize one singular trend in experiences among homeschoolers.

Murphy's (2012) *Homeschooling in America,* highlights the challenges and holes in the literature. Where quantitative research is crucial to assessing trends, it can run the risk of generalizing the experience of different populations. By taking a qualitative approach, it is possible to build upon existing quantitative trends by extrapolating more detailed experiences. In other words, this qualitative research design serves to bring the experiences of homeschoolers to life through text.

Research Design

Research Design

Review of the Literature
- A review of literature about school choice and homeschooling was conducted
- This work drew largely from John Holt (1968), Gaither (2008), and Murphy (2012)

Interviews
- Participants selected from a target quota based on time spent homeschooling versus time spent in mainstream schools, ending with 9 participants
- Semi-structured interviews with educational journey mapping

Code for Themes
- Thematic coding was used to code interview transcripts for initial themes
- Poignant comments based on these codes were re-reviewed for emerging themes
- In order to prevent confirmation bias, the researcher looked for data to prove and disprove the initial thematic codes

Portraits
- Each portrait was crafted based on each individual conversation and themes
- This process was iterative with the thematic coding
- Each participant was given the opportunity to verify information and provide feedback via email, this included the word to describe their homeschooling experience.

Discussion
- The themes that emerged in conversations were connected to literature
- This section reviewed the limitations and gaps in the work

Participants

In order to begin conducting research, an exemption request form was submitted to the IRB. Once approved, I began the process of finding participants using the snowball sampling and personal connections (Kirchherr, 2018). The target quota was at least 1 per group:

- Homeschoolers who were homeschooled in high school

- Homeschoolers who attended public/private school for the majority of their K-12 schooling experience

- Homeschoolers who were homeschooled for the majority, but not all, of their K-12 schooling experience

- Homeschoolers who did not attend college after homeschooling

Given that educational attainment and experience would likely impact the way that students viewed school choice, I sought to interview homeschooling graduates with a range of different backgrounds in order to gain an expansive understanding of students' perspectives. A proportional model based on homeschoolers' time spent in public/private school was not possible since the exact percentages of homeschoolers and their interactions with the school choice system (i.e. public schools or private schools) does not exist. In choosing the homeschooled graduate demographic instead of — for example —the parent demographic, it fills a gap in the literature where students' voices are difficult to come by. Graduates, as opposed to current homeschooled students, are not only more likely to have a better understanding of school systems but are also more easily accessible given their age. All names were changed to ensure anonymity.

Initial communications with potential participants in this research ranged from informal to formal, taking place via email and via text. This culminated in 9 participants. All participants filled out a consent form prior to engaging in the research and were asked if they had paper and writing utensils for the educational journey mapping activity. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled over a 1 month period. Each interview ran for approximately 1 hour. After each interview, I asked each participant to send their educational-journey map to me if they were comfortable. I reiterated that all personally identifiable information would be removed and

highlighted that I was looking to include their voices in the data representation, and left the

conversation open with them should they like to ask me questions in the future. All interviews

took place over Zoom and were recorded.

Methods

In order to represent student voices in the growing literature about secular

homeschooling, I chose to follow a narrative inquiry approach. While narrative inquiries can

exist in many different forms, this work focused on thematic narratives in order to elicit the

experiences of homeschooling graduates in the context of school choice. Thematic narratives

view individuals as living "storied lives" (Bhattacharya, 2017). Drawing from the work of

McCabe et al (2021) and Morrison et al (2017), this study followed a semi-structured interview

and story-mapping methodology. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to have a

prepared protocol, while allowing for unplanned conversations (Bhattacharya, 2017). Pulling

from Morrison et al's (2017) book *Critical Race Spatial Analysis* — drawing on critical

theoretical underpinnings — I drew from education-journey mapping to both humanize (Paris,

2011 as cited in Morrison et al, 2017) the research process and to allow for conversations about

where our paths intersected or diverged in real life and in experience. Morrison et al (2017)

explained that mapping allows for students to "discuss where our lives intersected and

diverged"(p. 49) and allowed space to gain a sense of "educational spaces, both internal and

external, as well as the space between"(p. 42). This aligned with Dewey's (1987)

conceptualization of home and school. In framing interviews through this connective lens, it

allowed homeschooling graduates to draw connections between homeschooling and school

choice.

Initial questions were opinion/value questions (Patton, 1990) that focused on homeschooling graduates' understandings of school choice and homeschooling terminology (see Appendix A for preliminary questions). "What does 'school choice' make you think of?" and "What does 'homeschooling' mean to you?" are examples. I followed these questions by inquiring about each participant's schooling context. These questions allowed me to gain an understanding as to how students understood the two terms, setting the stage for the story-mapping methodology. Morrison et al's (2017) method of education-journey mapping was reframed to ask homeschooling graduates to "map your education journey from when you started school to now including places where you encountered choice." In order to maintain transparency in line with Morrison et al (2017), I opened the conversation to my own experience with homeschooling. This allowed me to connect with participants on a more personal level and to bridge the gap between the researcher and the participants. Interviews ranged in length from 1-2 hours. I also maintained a research journal in order to make notes and reflect on initial themes that emerged.

Analysis

This research drew from an inductive analysis framework (Bhattacharaya, 2017 and Thomas, 2006). Interview transcription was hand-transcribed or transcribed via Zoom. After preliminarily looking at the data, I began the process of coding. The first step was to review my research journal notes to refresh my memory of each interview and see what preliminary themes emerged. My research journal not only served as a space to note initial themes and potential identifiable data, it also connected my own experience with homeschooling with the experiences of the participants. I followed the content analysis method put forth by Patton

(1990) to index "coding notes" with the initial interview data. I chunked data into analytic

chunks based on the themes of the questions (See Appendix A). I highlighted direct quotes in

relation to the coding schema. From the initial analytic chunks, I created sub-codes within each

analytic group based on [insert coding schema once I have collected data] (Bhattacharaya,

2017). All names were pseudonymized through a random name generator, unless the

participant had a preference of pseudonym. In order to limit confirmation bias, I looked for data

that proved and disproved my findings.

Elements of portraiture and thematic presentation were used in the analysis of these data.

Dixson et al (2005) cited Lawrence-Lightfoot, pointing out that portraiture can "(re)present the

research participant through the subjective, empathetic, and critical lens of the researcher"

(p.17). This process involves placing oneself in a relationship with the participant, drawing on

context and thematic (Travis, 2020). Thematic representation finds similarities or differences

among the data and categorizes them as such (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 181). As I created the

figurative portraits of participants and thematically organized the discussion, I was careful to

use participants' own words when possible to allow the reader to draw their own conclusions

from the data (Patton,1990). By using portraiture to outline a participant's experiences with

homeschooling in the context of choice, I was able to paint a fuller picture of the textured fabric

of their lives. The thematic representation following in the discussion allowed me to expand on

certain points from the conversations. Following the creation of each portrait, I emailed it to the

participant to verify the information and provide feedback at their discretion. Changes made

were based on factual error, not based on interpretation.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study: size, scope, and circumstances. Instead of focusing on trends or generalizable data, this study focused on the lived-experiences and reflection of 9 homeschoolers. Given the small sample size and the non-standardized method of inquiry, these findings cannot be used (nor should they be used) to generalize all homeschoolers. The goal of this work was instead, and as highlighted by Morrison et al (2017), to share the voices of homeschooling graduates in order to document their opinions and viewpoints. The second limitation was the scope of this project. This research included participants from varying geographic locations. Thus, findings could not be generalized on the grounds of region. Given that homeschooling experiences and legal requirements differ depending on the state, this research may have excluded regions that would be fascinating to include in further research. Moreover, the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic were preventative in some ways. During the 2 month period of time when interviews were to take place, there was a surge in coronavirus cases making it challenging to schedule times to meet. Analysis and interview methods were filtered and interpreted through my own perspective as a homeschooled student.

This methodology provided an overview of the sample and methods employed in this project. Participants were selected based on a diversity of time spent in mainstream schools. I used a semi-structured interview and educational-journey mapping approach to elicit homeschoolers' conceptualizations of their experiences with homeschooling and choice. Data analysis drew from inductive analysis by coding based on emerging themes. Presentation of the data was in the form of portraits — drawing from elements of portraiture — and portrait

summaries displayed in Chapters 3 and 4. This methodology elicited vibrant stories placing the

participant at the center of this work.

Chapter 3 Portraits

This chapter provides a snapshot of the rich fabric of participants' lives as

homeschoolers. As mentioned in the methodology, this research and interpretation is made

through my own lived experience and world view. All participants' names and locations were

given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Each participant brought forth a vastly different

perspective on how to understand homeschooling: and how or whether choice played into their

experience. Here, I look not only at their homeschooling curriculum and home environment but

participation in extracurriculars, interactions with school systems, and engagement with the

social climate that influenced and wove together their homeschooling experience. It is important

to note that each educational journey is unique, even the ones that parallel each other in many

ways. Even the similarities in homeschooling can be perceived in different ways, such as the

role of extracurriculars in curriculum. From the essence of these conversations, I have pulled

one word from each to encompass each vastly different experience.

Mikayla

Mikayla joined the Zoom call eating fruit with a plastic fork that obviously came from a

college dining hall. Within the first few minutes, she spit a bite out and declared it to be a weird

piece. She, unlike other interviewees, seemed to have the most comfort asking me about my

past — digging into why I am interested in homeschooling and school choice. Perhaps this was

because I framed the interview differently for her than I did for others, in that I explicitly asked

for her feedback about the conversation itself. The most obvious reason, however, was that she

is my sister. The comfort and ease of our interactions allowed for some conversation topics about homeschooling to go unsaid. In crafting Mikayla's portrait, I simultaneously embellish the parts missing from the interview as I attempt to layer our parallelling experiences together.

Mikayla was homeschooled until near the end of 7th grade when she attended a private school called Rylan (pseudonym) and then attended a public alternative school, 1 of 3 options in her district. When asked to describe the term "school-choice," she listed the neighboring high schools including a charter school. "What is [name of charter school in the area]?" I explained that it was a charter school. Her conceptualization of choice, like others, lived in the options that were allotted to her in her educational experience. This fit with the common perception that entering high school was a time to make the decision between high schools, with some people lumping [the charter school] into that equation. Until midway through middle school (middle school begins in 6th grade where she lived), school was at home. "For me, [homeschooling is] like not really actively going out and taking classes in another setting, it's just kind of all set in one spot," she reasoned, "you could take like a few classes somewhere else." But the majority of the homeschooling was at the house, with a mix of curriculum taught by our mother and father.

The curriculum in Mikayla's experience was not built on any one curriculum, but rather a conglomeration of different people teaching different subjects. "Our mom did most of the English part and the math part. But anything sciency we did with Baba [father, in Chinese]... we took a lot of trips to the beach and went on a lot of walks. You know, that kind of thing." Math came in the form of workbooks, mathematical games (Yahtzee, Farkle) while English took the form of many books. Mikayla and I reminisced about the books, "Oh, that was another big part — listening to so many audiobooks. I swear that was half of my childhood," she expounded.

The BFG by Roald Dahl and the *Harry Potter* series were some of the most common. Science, as Mikayla noted, was taught by our father with the subject delineated as part of the Friday curriculum as she reached middle school. She also remembered discussing science on many other occasions with our father, including a hike (where I was not present, much to her pleasure) where the conversation topic was about chromosomes. Here, it is important to differentiate between "homeschooling" and "the homeschooling experience" — a delineation that Mikayla brought up during a conversation in a loud restaurant when reflecting upon our prior conversation. Where the "homeschooling experience" included extracurriculars and day-to-day field trips, "homeschooling" is a nuanced term that encompasses either the strictly academic parts of the day *or* the period of time when Mikayla was homeschooled. The more fluid understanding of homeschooling, or as Mikayla explained "homeschooling experience" fell more in line with John Holt's conceptualization of learning as all-encompassing rather than a specific period of the day.

While there was a set curriculum, Mikayla's days also included time to explore activities that she expressed interest in. Some of the activities did not stay of interest, such as musical instruments.

I'm just not cut out for an instrument. I just can't do it. They did that parent thing. I said watching [a family friend] play the fiddle was cool once and then they were like, oh my gosh you should learn how to play it. And me being me, I was like ok. I didn't take into consideration the fact that you have to actually work to learn it. I thought it was one lesson and done and then I'm an expert, so that was my fault for not factoring that in. That was on me.

Even though the fiddle may not have been for her, she enjoyed other avenues to express herself creatively. "Art was a big thing, obviously I was always drawing and I was always given time to draw. I don't think I was ever told you can't draw right now… and also dance, that was a big thing." These activities may have been outside of the set "homeschooling" curriculum, but remained a part of the experience that Mikayla remembered.

"The homeschooling experience" as Mikayla put it, also included social groups. Memories of socialization, part of the homeschooling experience, were not built on co-ops or homeschooling groups, but in other settings. Living in a neighborhood allowed Mikayla and I to interact with children who attended the public school in the area.

> [We] played with the neighborhood kids after they got back from school. We would
>
> frickin' wait at the end of the road for them. We would play until it got dark out. From
>
> the moment they got out of school until it was dark…Or way after it was dark.

The children in the neighborhood varied in age and attended the local public school. Games were cell-phone free and involved a lot of running around the woods near the deadend of the street. As a testament to current times, Mikayla laughed "I swear we were like the last generation to play outside when we were younger. Oh my God, imagine all the kids that grow up never knowing what 'sharks and minnows' is." Mikayla added that socialization was, at some times, forced. "Don't even get me started on Chinese School," she added. Chinese School was a group of adoptive families that convened every Saturday to provide their adoptive children with cultural and linguistic connection. It included different components including Chinese language instruction and Chinese dance. "I thought it was like this weird forced thing that white parents were like, let's get all the Asian kids together and make them be friends. And I guess it kind of worked to a point where everyone didn't want to be there, so, then we started

to like each other." In spite of varying experiences, social interaction for Mikayla did not

preclude her from making friends with students from public school.

When Mikayla was at the end of 7th grade, her choice to continue homeschooling was

cut short. "At that point, I didn't really have a say in it so I ended up going to middle school,"

she explained, " I didn't want to go to middle school, I wanted to keep homeschooling. Because

I like staying home… because I could sleep in, and it was comfy, and I had more free time. But

it was good to get out of the house and stuff and learn new things." Retrospectively, Mikayla

accepted her lack of choice as beneficial. She contrasted her account of our parents making

choices for her with what she perceived to be mine. "See I'm not the same [as you]," she said,

"I would say that I don't like other people [making decisions for me], but like sometimes for me

it's helpful because I'm very indecisive. Like it's nice to have even if it's the wrong decision,

it's nice to just have someone be like this is what you're gonna do." This replication of parent

ideals connected back to Sarajlic's point that homeschooling can reduce student agency. But

here, unlike there, it was viewed positively — something I was not expecting as a researcher.

Mikayla viewed her need for structure in contrast with my need for self-governance, yet both

led us down similar paths.

Word to describe homeschooling experience: Familiar/Comfortable

Hana

Hana had only recently had her wisdom teeth removed and yet still found time to meet

with me. An English student at a Maine University, Hana had spent time at a small-liberal arts

institution before transferring during the pandemic. The last time I saw her was many years

previous, probably when we were still homeschooling. During that time, before we were

allowed to have technological devices, our correspondences had taken the form of old-fashioned

letter writing. In fact, for Hana, letter writing was part of her homeschooling curriculum. "My

mom would set aside specific time for me to do [writing] so like one thing was pen pals. I had a

lot of pen pals and I'd write letters. That was part of my curriculum because I just love to do it,

and so I [had] like four or five people that I would keep in touch with." Hana noted that

likewise, writing was a large part of her homeschooling experience--- something that she was

always given time to do. Writing to pen pals like myself allowed her to develop letter writing

skills and gain an interest in penmanship. Stories and narratives also played into her other

subjects as well: "the assignment that I would have every week for my history class was I would

write a story about the historical figures that I read about. And I drew little pictures and stuff

which I would like to see… now, but I remember loving that and I think that was like a really

creative thing that my mom did." Here, Hana's homeschooling drew parallels to unit studies and

Holt (1967) of the child as the natural learner by focusing on one topic in all subject areas and

following Hana's interests.

However, Hana's homeschooling experience was largely dependent on the

circumstances of extenuating factors and based largely in public education. She started

homeschooling in second grade because she needed a "change of scenery." The public school

that Hana attended prior to homeschooling was not fitting her needs. She noted that she was a

non traditional learner and homeschooling seemed like the better option. As a "second-choice"

homeschooler (Lois, 2012), Hana's experience was more about getting her out of the school

environment than about following the natural learner of the child or developing a

service/manual labor formula like the Moore's. Instead Hana described her experience as

"typical"--- and not in the sense of typical for a homeschooler, but rather for any child. "My

mom developed curriculum per subject so I was taking math and history, art [and] English. And

then my dad was supposed to be in charge of science, but it didn't really work out," she noted.

Unlike some participants, Hana's curriculum was largely the same while she was homeschooled

and when she attended public school.

Hana highlighted that her curriculum was largely based on what was accepted by the

Maine state standards. In Maine, homeschooled students either fall under "home-instruction" or

a "private-school" ([Compulsory attendance](#), 2021). Home instruction law, falling under Maine

Statute §5001, requires that parents or guardians must "provide instruction in the following

subject areas: English and language arts, math science, social studies, physical education, health

education, library skills, fine arts and, in at least one grade from grade 6 to 12, Maine studies"

([Compulsory attendance](#), 2021). Maine requires an annual assessment of the student's progress.

This can come in the form of a test, a certified teacher, or local advisory board made up of the

parents and an administrative employee. "There is some… homeschooling board I'm sure

you're familiar with where they approve your curriculum. So my mom had to go through that

and she worked with them to get textbooks for me and everything." Hana expanded on her prior

statement by highlighting that she used standard textbooks for fourth graders in her fourth grade

homeschooling year. Rather than try to escape the requirements put forth by the state, Hana's

home-instruction was based on it. "[My mom] took a lot of cues from public education, but like

was just at home. I don't know what fourth graders learn, but if it was like multiplication tables

that's what we would learn." Even though Hana's homeschooling experience mostly followed

what her family, particularly her mom, thought was in the curriculum taught in public schools

and taught in that way, some of the information was conveyed in less-traditional manners. Hana

used the Life of Fred, a non-traditional math workbook that follows a storyline of a character

named Fred Gauss (Life of Fred Mathematics, 2021). Hana also noted that her mother would

"tweak [the textbooks] a little bit]" when something was uninteresting. While it may have been

changed slightly, Hana's homeschooling was based on the public school and the state.
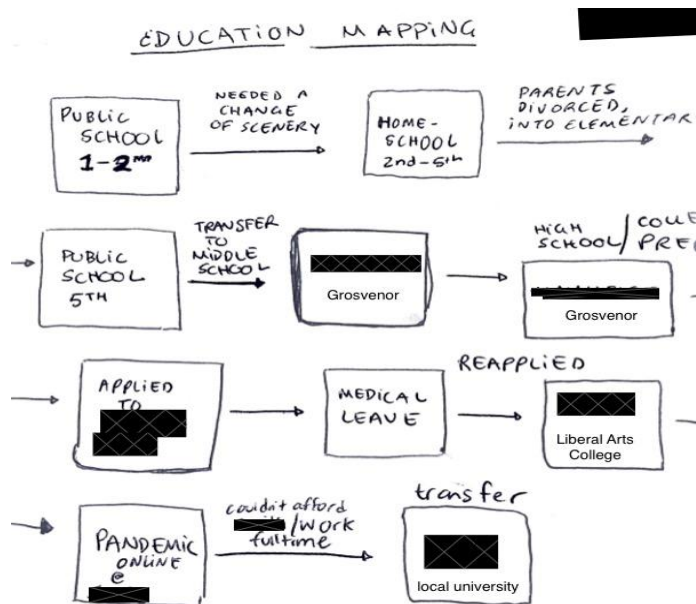
Hana's Education Journey Map

Mid-way through fifth grade, Hana started at the local public school due to family

changes and in combination, a resignation to be back in a traditional classroom. "It just didn't

really make sense anymore, and I think I was also preparing to go to middle school--- to be

around people my age, so it kind of just made sense." Just as she had started homeschooling, the

option that made the most sense for that period of her life, going back to school was

circumstantial. The transition between homeschooling and public school was challenging and

she only attended the public school for half a year before attending a private alternative school.

"I went to public school and then that school shut down... I transferred to Grosvenor [the

private school] for middle school and then I continued there, staying for the high school college

prep program. You know, this was like a rigorous school and they really drove home Ivy's and little Ivy's and that sort of thing so I applied to [a small-liberal arts school in Massachusetts] and went there." Here, she alluded back to her perception of how to define school choice in her life. "The majority of private schools are typically white middle class or upper class students… it depends on what school district you live in, where you can afford to live." The connection between class and opportunity--- attending a well-ranked university and having the resources to attend --- is an aspect of choice that Hana made clear. Her own experience lended her many affordances, but she also hinted at the pressure that being in such a high-stakes environment caused. This included entering into a college that did not fully meet her needs directly out of high school.

Word to describe the homeschooling experience: Experiment

Nola

"So I would wake up, read for a while, had… the same snack of a granola bar at like 10 o'clock and then do math and then usually go up to [the public middle school] for science. And then in the afternoons it was either cooking, going horseback riding, going to piano lessons… writing lessons." Being homeschooled for Nola was a transitional period: a year of what she called a "cobbled together" experience. It was in that year, some 9 years previous, that we had met in the hall of the public middle school, as two of the three students who were not required to attend the field trip to visit one of the local high schools, that we struck up a conversation. Homeschooling was a commonality, something that we carried with us as we entered into the same high school. Even though this was the moment that I remember first connecting with her,

it was not for Nola. How Nola conceptualized homeschooling was partially based on my

family--- as one of the few homeschoolers she knew of growing up. "Before I homeschooled,

one of the images I thought [of] was you and your sister and your dad in chorus." Toying with

public education in my fifth grade year, I had attended the local public school in order to gain a

sense of a different environment. As a Chinese child dragging along her Chinese sister and

white father in a sea of predominantly white elementary school children, no doubt we stood out.

But what she noted caught her attention was the freedom that she perceived us as

homeschoolers to have. "I was always really interested in homeschooling and I always thought

it seemed like the perfect thing because I didn't like being around other kids." In fact, Nola

emphasized that when she finally did end up homeschooling for a year, that was when she had

the most choice and ownership in her schooling.
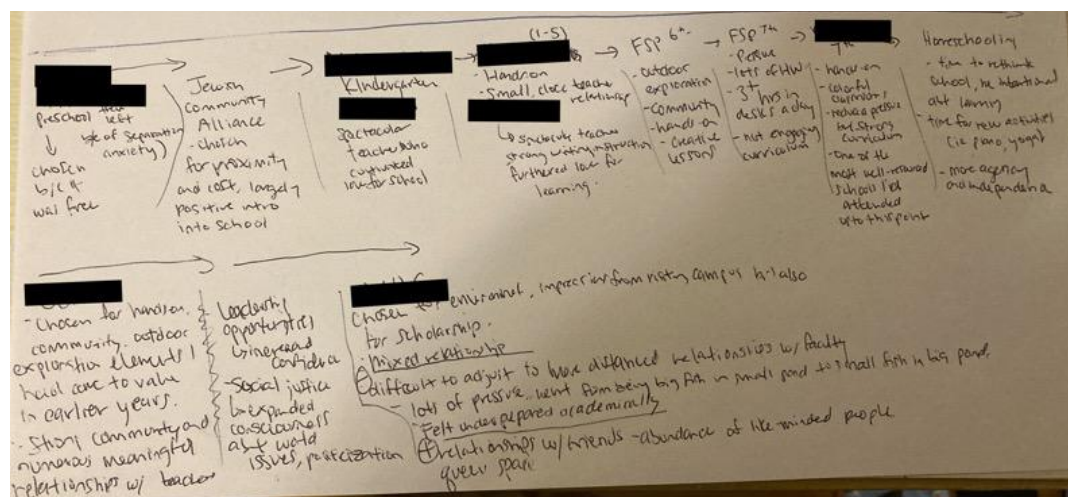
Nola's Education Journey Map

Nola attended public school until middle school. Even within the public school system

and within her individual school, there were ample tracks that Nola could choose from. Not

only were there multiple elementary schools, within the specific elementary school Nola

attended, there was a choice of an expeditionary learning curriculum or a traditional classroom

— like college-prep versus honors classes in high school. Expeditionary Learning (EL) is a project-based model where students focus on one topic through the lens of different subject areas. It began in 1991 as a collaboration between Harvard University and Outward Bound to create a new schooling model ("History," 2019). Through fifth grade, Nola attended this learning program at the local public school. As middle school began in 6th grade, Nola transferred to a private school where she had a dynamic and fulfilling experience until the next year when she mentioned a negative interaction with a teacher. At that time, she switched again to another private school in the area, but since her teacher was leaving, Nola's family decided she was better suited to enter public school, or homeschooling. In the end, she decided to homeschool where less time would be taken up by disciplinary issues or teacher problems. "I didn't want to go to [the public school] full time. We tried Keara school, we tried Rylan, Rylan was uncertain… and then it was like, hey we could do this. And then we had a friend… she had homeschooled her kids, and we talked with her, and it was like oh… the lack of requirements [in the State of Maine] for like, especially when you're not in high school … made it so easy [to homeschool] and she just was like yeah like this is what we did you can do whatever you want I'll sign off." Thus, Nola began her year of homeschooling — a "holistic" experience that included music, writing, reading, and cooking.

Despite having been unhappy with some of the circumstances in her private school experience, Nola noted that even having the opportunity to choose between schools is a privilege. "A lot of people don't have much school choice at all like thinking about my own self just having the privilege to even have like two or three choices and, like my middle school and high school like that is very incredible being in the U.S. and the vast majority of us don't have that." Nola was well-aware of the historical context of how school choice could perpetuate

inequality by pulling funds from public schools (Viteritti, 2003). Yet, as Nola alluded to, the area in which she grew up was known for its plethora of options including publicly-funded, privately-funded, and chartered institutions; thus, it was possible to take advantage of all types of schooling. Even for those who had remained in public education, there was some movement between schools where students from one elementary school would opt to attend a middle-school in a different district. For Nola, her less-than linear path included a year of homeschooling directly before high school.

When Nola entered 8th grade as a homeschooler, her curriculum was a mix of outside classes and at-home curriculum. She used *Key to Algebra,* a McGraw Hill powered 10-set series that covers everything from integers to systems of equations ("Key to Algebra," 2012). One of the largest educational publishing companies, McGraw Hill is used in public schools as well. One of their programs, Aleks, was later used in the math program at Nola's high school. Her social studies curriculum was based on reading different books about World War II and the Holocaust. She also attended the local public school for science classes. English was largely connected with a local nonprofit that worked with young writers. Beyond the traditional subjects, Nola's year of homeschooling allowed her to follow other interests such as horseback riding, piano, and pottery. "I really don't think that I would have been as active in high school had I not had eighth grade to like discover that I like doing things outside of school that were structured and planned. And so, like that really helped with getting into college." Picking and choosing what she wanted to do, including extracurriculars and core-subjects allowed Nola to take control of her education in a way she did not think she would have if she had not been homeschooled. "[I] had a higher, maybe slightly higher standard, of my education and a different perspective on it after homeschooling."

Even though Nola pointed out that she was generally satisfied with her homeschooling experience — so much so that she planned to pitch her parents an argument in favor of her being homeschooled after the first year of public high school — there were pain points. "The hardest part of the year [being homeschooled] was always constantly trying to create social… peer interactions. That was the only thing I noticed was lacking when I was [homeschooled]. I wasn't as bothered by it until… My parents let me get a Facebook when I was 13 so that I had a Facebook when I was homeschooling, and it was when everyone was using Facebook, I would see how people had a lot more seem like a lot more friends and I think I was judging it via social media." Here, she confronted the common stereotype of homeschoolers that they may lack socialization or social skills (Kunzman, 2021, p. 135). Coming from a public school environment with ample social interactions (some good, some not so good), Nola's experience being homeschooled as an only child was isolating. She mentioned attending one 5-week science co-op (a source of social interaction for some homeschooling children) but explained that she did not complete the entire program as the students were religiously oriented and the course material was not challenging.

Word to describe homeschooling experience: Cobbled

Maybelline
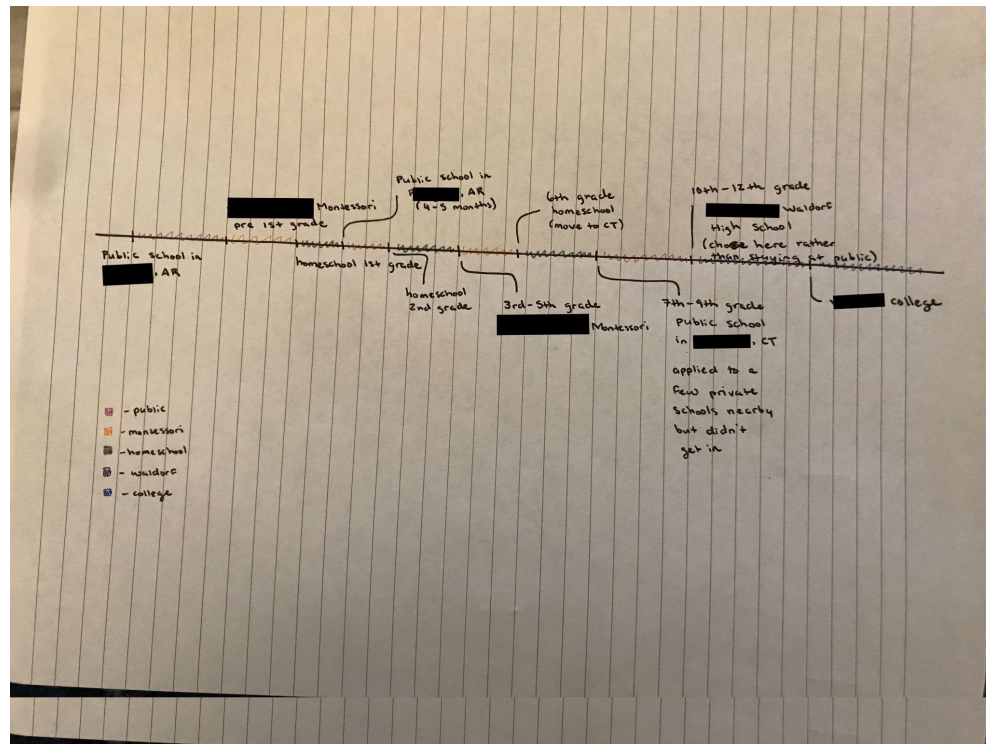
Maybelline's Education Journey Map

      Maybelline attends a small-liberal arts college and was on winter break when I

interviewed her. I had met her through extracurricular activities at college the semester prior and

our conversations had centered on music and the general college experience. This meant, unlike

some other interviews, I had very limited working knowledge of her background in

homeschooling. Maybelline is on the reserved side, calm and collected with a spunk that

becomes apparent as you talk to her. She was homeschooled during first, second, and sixth

grade. First and second grade consisted of some 'homeschooling group' learning a couple days

per week plus at-home study. "I don't remember what it was called. It was like a group of

homeschoolers and we did some science projects. And I had a couple of close friends who

homeschooled as well, and so they would like come over to my house I'd go to their house and

we'd do different stuff. I think we built some sort of mouse trap sort of thing." She highlighted

that her homeschooling experience was heavily influenced by Montessori education. Montessori

as an educational philosophy can be used in homeschooling and in classrooms — in

Maybelline's experience, it was both. Started by Maria Montessori in Italy, classrooms are built

on multi-age environments and student driven curriculum. Prior to homeschooling in first grade,

Maybelline attended a Montessori school in Arkansas and directly after her time homeschooling

she returned to the same school. While she briefly attended a public school in second grade, she

explained that she did not like it despite feeling like there was a lack of social interaction at

times in homeschooling. She explained that her mother was a teacher of Montessori education

and thus this influenced her homeschooling curriculum as well as her ability to attend the

Montessori school for a reduced cost. "[Homeschooling and Montessori schooling were]

definitely very connected, because my mom used a lot of Montessori materials with her

homeschooling."

Because she was moving from Arkansas to Connecticut in sixth grade, Maybelline

returned to homeschooling. Unlike first and second grade, she was homeschooled completely at

home. Her curriculum did not include out-of-house learning in homeschooling groups and

instead came from the direction of her parents. "I was using college biology textbooks that

had…videos and stuff about cell biology and going through different levels of organization.

And I used a lot of Khan Academy… for math." English was taught by her mother and her

father provided some economic and personal finance education. After the move that took place

during the academic year, Maybelline also began to get involved in her new community playing

softball and taking piano lessons. These activities, while separate from her homeschooling

experience, were influential in her future choices in education. She noted that the social aspect

of having made friends on the softball team encouraged her to attend the public school. Not

only was the public school in Connecticut easily accessible and had a good music program, Maybelline mentioned that it was generally well-regarded. "We were like, well yeah that sounds good. I think my parents still didn't really want me to go there. But I had a lot of friends who were going there, and I had like just made friends because we just moved--- on the softball team. So I really wanted to go there." Here, Maybelline expressed a difference of opinion between her parents and herself but still referred to the decision using the term "we" indicating that she felt like both parties had had a say in the final decision.

Ultimately, however, she returned to an alternative learning environment at a Waldorf school for high school under her parents' guidance. "In ninth grade, my parents decided that I should change schools so in eighth grade I was applying to some different schools around the area, like private schools, but I didn't get into them mostly because of financial reasons and then in ninth grade I applied to the Waldorf school and I was pretty resistant to going because I didn't want to leave my friends but I'm really glad I did." Like Mikayla, Maybelline was opposed to switching schooling environments, albeit for different reasons, but later on agreed it was the right choice for her. Waldorf educational philosophy, based on the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, are highly structured and experiential (Stehlik, 2019) and fall under the umbrella of progressive schooling. This differs greatly from the Montessori method that is much more unstructured. As Maybelline reflected upon her entire educational background, she noted that homeschooling helped her be more self motivated — creating her own structure. "I would write out my own schedule for myself and like what different things I would do during the day, and like how much time I spend on each of them. And then [my mom] would just glance at it… like yeah sounds good." Perhaps this served her well in the later years at Waldorf and certainly in college.

Word to describe homeschooling experience: Montessori

Indigo

"[After preschool at home, my parents] had three choices… they could either send me to public school, private school, or homeschool me. They chose to homeschool. And they could have chosen either like freeform homeschooling more like what you guys did or just like order a box online, so they just ordered a box." Indigo has a way of being blunt in the best way, telling it as it is with a touch of comic personality. She writes with the same gusto in her section of her family's Christmas card every year. I have known her since before I can remember, starting with weekend Chinese School and later homeschooling activities. While we never walked in the same crowds, we randomly will see each other after years and pick up the conversation where we left off. We attended the same homeschooling group for a short period of time, but it did not last given differing parenting styles and academic interests. Indigo explained, "No one's ever been able to give me a good concise explanation of why we homeschooled but we ordered a curriculum online." The Calvert Curriculum[2], one of the many homeschooling curriculum options, was the textbook for Indigo's education until third grade. Calvert is a fully immersive set that comes pre-packaged for at-home use. "One set… you know you would get readers… and they'd have multiple picture books in them. And so, you wouldn't have to order like a bunch of different supplementary books to have in your house, it just came--- like this is eight picture books in this reader, here are like 4 of them. Everything was laid out in the teacher's manual… like this many pages today, this many workbook things." Essentially, Indigo's curriculum — unlike that of anyone else I interviewed — was fully based in one packet.

---

[2] https://calverthomeschool.com/
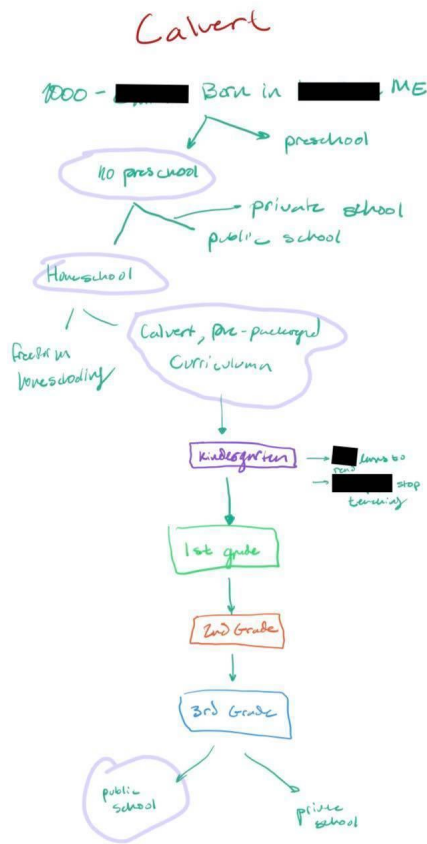
Indigo's Education Journey Map

Despite the structured curriculum, Indigo noted that she had a lot of control of her learning at the same time. "In kindergarten my parents taught me how to read and by the end I could read pretty fluidly and then after that they were busy, and they had, you know they kept ordering box sets of grades, and they'd just give me the teacher's manual and be like okay do your own thing. And if you pass the test at the end of the year you're good so that was kind of my experience — very self directed, but also with a very clear objective." Indigo explained that she would complete the required parts of the teacher's manual and then have free time for the remainder of the day. Occasionally she would do supplementary classes with other homeschoolers, but the vast majority of her time was spent in free time *after* she had completed her required list of academic activities. Some days, she would postpone her work to go on

vacation or add days of work on weekends. "Nobody would ever keep track. If I saw a day that had way too much stuff in there, that I like wasn't for I would just skip a few pages to the next day that had a shorter list and just do that one. I'd come back and do it later." While this might seem like a simple way to skip work, Indigo emphasized that she had to keep up with her assignments in order to do well on the test. The Calvert test would then be sent to the company that would then "grade it and send it back." According to Indigo, students who received all 4s (the highest grade possible) would receive a gold seal.

During the time when Indigo was homeschooling, she noted "it was like complete autonomy to no autonomy, and that totally tweaks me out." Not only was her time being homeschooled self-driven — she had additional time *outside* of course material to explore her interests.

I had so much free time as a kid and I had like my little iPod so I always was like listening to the very early days of podcasts. I listened to a lot of podcasts about the themed entertainment industry. I still listen to… this guy, he's got a master's in software engineering and a PhD in statistics and he wrote this really impressive program that can take all the wait times, like historical data from the theme park,... look at all the factors that have influenced it, synthesize that, and he can give you… up to 50 days in advance, predictions for what the wait times for each ride will be down to the minute. The theme park is a machine, basically it's like a human design machine, and because I was homeschooled I got into that and that's like what I'm doing.

What is important to note here is that the homeschooling — the Calvert curriculum in this case —was not what Indigo conceptualized as the cause of her interest in themed entertainment, but rather the time she was afforded given the Calvert curriculum. The additional time to explore

personal interests because of the homeschooling and not *as part* of the homeschooling (I make this differentiation because it differs between homeschooling graduates), was an important factor in Indigo's educational experience. She noted that she retained information differently when she had ample time to process it. "I have perfect memories up until I was about 12 or 13 on most things. Everything gets much fuzzier after I went from homeschooling to regular school, but before that I remember everything… Once you start going to public school and you're interacting with people all day, you don't bother saving all of it [memory]." What Indigo pointed out was the sheer time that homeschooling allowed.

The ample time that Indigo remembers from homeschooling was disrupted when she entered public school in third grade. Having moved to a new town, Indigo's parents expected her to enter the public school system. "My parents started kind of thinking maybe we wouldn't homeschool and I was very opposed to that, like, I wanted to keep homeschooling. I did not choose to stop homeschooling, like that was decided." One of the possible reasons she noted for this shift in parent mentality were the changing needs of her brother. Indigo's brother was stronger at math and science and thus, "it wasn't as convenient to homeschool [my brother] because he would have needed more help reading the teacher's manual." The district where Indigo had moved was known for a well-funded and high quality public education system. Still, the transition to a highly populated classroom from individual instruction was a challenge. Not only was the social environment overwhelming, Indigo's Calvert curriculum had taken her beyond the academic work of the public school. "They weren't learning anything, like that could have been done like 3 hours ago. No one ever told me, you know you're not supposed to talk in class, like you're not supposed to get up and leave. I don't think I actually adjusted until

like fifth or sixth grade." At that point, Indigo became more comfortable with the social norms

of a public school and was no longer ahead of the curriculum being taught.

Because she had largely attended public school, Indigo rarely interacted with school

choice options. While private school, for example, may have retroactively been an option as

needed, it was not an option considered at the time. "I don't think that was ever a possibility.

But you know, like you get to a liberal arts college and you meet all these people who have gone

to like all these different prep schools, like fancy high schools, and that never happened." She

knew of school choice because of the neighboring city with its ample options for school, but

ultimately never considered another route.

Word to describe homeschooling experience: Structured autonomy

Hendrix

"I think of homeschooling as a period of my life. You know, eight to eighteen basically.

That was kind of educational and social… Those kinds of aspects of my life were kind of

defined by homeschooling." Indeed, I had met Hendrix because of our shared background of

homeschooling. In the spring before college we had connected over Facebook messenger. We

maintained contact over the years, but never discussed our homeschooling experience in-depth

until 3 years later. Going into the interview, I had some understanding of his homeschooling

background, but limited knowledge about the specifics. Hendrix was raised in Florida, in an

area where he perceived most homeschoolers to be religiously affiliated. "Most of the

homeschool organizations in town were explicitly Christian." This led Hendrix to follow a

Christian curriculum for the majority of his homeschooling experience, until high school when

he entered dual-enrollment classes[3]: in this case, homeschooling and college classes. Until

middle school, he used PACES[4], Packets of Accelerated Christian Education. Accelerated

Christian Education focuses on Scripture and biblical principles. "That was a popular choice at

the time was the same one that my cousins used and yeah I didn't like it, I thought it was like it

seemed really old fashioned yeah and like a lot of repetition, and like rote memorization that

kind of thing." Despite working with a curriculum based on religion, Hendrix noted that his

education was not based on religion. He alluded to the differentiation between first and second

choice homeschoolers, highlighting how he was of the second category. "A lot of people

growing up, they'd decide we want our children exposed to this religious curriculum, we don't

want them to be exposed to like other elements in the public school. [Religion] was certainly an

influential part of my homeschooling, but I don't believe that it was like the biggest part or like

the overarching purpose if that makes sense."
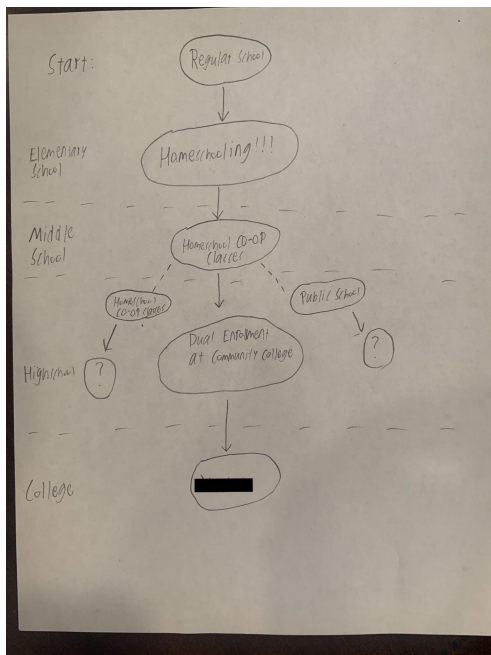
Hendrix's Education Journey Map

By middle school, Hendrix started to note that he and his family took more charge in their homeschooling curriculum as they switched to Classical Conversations, a Christian homeschooling community that mirrored a more traditional schooling environment. For Hendrix, it followed the structure of a homeschooling co-op. "They have everything kind of planned out like [there are] workbooks where you can do every subject, but instead of being like workbooks they licensed homeschool moms to be able to teach this curriculum… so that one day a week, each subject would be for an hour and then, of course, you'd have [a] lunch break and then time afterwards." Hendrix pointed out that he could attend his 8th grade classes, while his younger siblings could attend the equivalent in younger grades. This was where he met the majority of his friends, except for the public schooled children he met through fencing. In this way, the homeschooling co-op was not only an educational space but a social one. In addition to the day and curriculum being structured, Hendrix's family could choose to supplement and tailor his learning experience. "I opted out of the science for this program [the co-op]. And I just chose to do the one with the person who is really good because we thought this person taught science better, and so that was the kind of flexibility that you could have." Essentially, through until high school, Hendrix's curriculum allowed for him to focus on that to which he was interested.

"When I was in eighth grade I had the big decision to make because my parents [were] like you can go to public school if you want. There's a lot of homeschoolers [that] switch over in ninth grade and like schools in the area [were] very familiar with that. So I really kind of kicked that idea around." He knew that students in public school had a more defined route to college, and thus — even though he was not interested in public school — he considered the

option. In the end, Hendrix continued homeschooling, although he began taking dual-enrollment

classes in high school, as opposed to his previous curriculum of Classical Conversations.

During this time Hendrix had the difficult decision of choosing classes, like any college student.

But unlike college students, the driving factor of his decisions was which courses would prepare

him for college. "I think [my parents] trusted that I would pick good [classes]." Generally

speaking, Hendrix's parents supported his choices of classes but also encouraged him to take

classes that they thought would support his college experience. "I did not want to take an

oceanography class, I thought it was dumb. And they were like… if you do end up at any other

state Florida school you'll be so much better off." Even though Hendrix had plenty of say in his

curriculum--- and also noted that this freedom was overwhelming at times--- he did have

guidance from those around him.

Indeed, Hendrix highlighted that the guidance and decisions he made paved the way

toward the Florida State system and higher education. Having a family that had attended the

state system and being surrounded by other homeschooling families that had done the same,

Hendrix noted that he knew to stop one credit short of an associate's degree in order to gain the

best financial aid in the Florida State system. He also pointed out that his extracurriculars were

connected with his entrance into higher education. "So one of the things, these all come back to

Florida, the state of Florida gives scholarships to any student who reaches certain blanket

criteria and those two criteria are SAT/ACT scores and number of hours volunteered. So I

volunteered a lot at the local cat rescue… I spent a lot of time doing that, like you know

partially because I was encouraged by my grandmother." Hendrix's grandmother was involved

in cat rescue and wanted him to be a part of it as well. This work helped him complete the

volunteer hours in order to gain better scholarships in the state of Florida. In large part,

Hendrix's homeschooling experience was shaped in order to serve the future.

Word to describe the homeschooling experience: Co-op

Suede

"Learning through the school of life, other than the system, definitely made my thinking

different from the typical kid that grew up all through going to school." Suede joined the

interview from the comfort of her childhood bedroom. She lived in Spain for the past couple

years and recently returned to Maine, planning to start a new job at a local dispensary in the

upcoming months. It was the first time I had seen Suede since we were in elementary school,

when we had playdates set up for us by our mothers. Suede was homeschooled until the age of

12, when she had entered public school in 6th grade. She attended school briefly in first grade,

but returned to being homeschooled. "I was like one of those kids with separation anxiety being

away from my mom," she said. Returning to being homeschooled for the second half of 7th

grade, Suede highlighted that she then attended a private school from 8th until 11th grade. After

this, she returned home and attended an online school for high school graduation. She never felt

as though she did not have a say in the decision-making process, but rather her parents —

particularly her mother — would actively support her wants and needs. "[My parents] pretty

much gave me reign or control. Like they didn't pressure me into doing really anything. That's

why I switched around so much." Suede was able to follow what she wanted her educational

experience to look like.

Suede's homeschool curriculum generally fulfilled the core subjects in the morning, with ample free time in the afternoon. However, the mornings resembled what might be considered more traditional classwork, with some alternatives built in. "I went to [an] unschooling school in Lewiston and they had like this really small school that I went to from like age 7 — right after I tried first grade — [to] like eight or nine. We did a lot of art projects [and] we read, there was a whole little library. We led our own learning so we could really choose what we wanted to learn, and that's how it was homeschooling too" Like Nola, Suede used *Life of Fred* for math. Her mother helped pick out the math workbooks since Suede was less inclined toward that subject, but in English she would choose books that interested her. "[My mom would] sit down with me and we'd do workbooks, but then I could just read on my own." Afternoons — distinctly not part of Suede's homeschooling day — on the other hand, allowed Suede to wander museums, spend time creating movies and participating in extracurriculars such as dance and soccer. She also attended technology classes at Apple and attended a local dance company. She pointed out that some of her closest social circles were public school students."My best friend who went to public school, which is part of the reason I wanted to go, lived on my street and we would make stories with our dolls and edit them into movies." Because the creative subjects such as film and art were already interesting to her, Suede noted that these were never directly included in the homeschooling curriculum.

As a homeschooler, Suede noted, school choice had a specific connotation. "For homeschoolers, it would be more like charter schools or Waldorf schools, something like that. Something probably not [a] public school." Suede highlighted that in her experience, homeschoolers look for alternative learning environments even if they decide to return to a mainstream school. Despite this emphasis, Suede herself attended a public school in middle

school before switching to a private school for high school. In both transitions, Suede made the decision to switch learning environments with the support of her parents. "I had friends close by that went to public school and obviously I wanted to see them more so I was like, I want to try, like, I want to try being around kids I can see every day, not having to wait for them at 3pm to get out [of public school]." She noted that there was social pressure to attend public school given that most of her neighborhood friends went there. Thus, in 6th grade she made the transition to the local public school.

Just like her attendance at the private school in 8th grade, Suede explained that she found it difficult to contend with rules in a more traditional setting. "I can't remember what happened that made me want to leave public school, I think it was probably the rules were really strict, the teachers were just like…" at that point in the conversation, Suede shook her head in what I took to mean "not it." She also had to give up dancing since there were sports requirements. The way Suede described her private school experience bore similarities to the public school. "My private school was super strict. Actually my freshman and sophomore years were good… but then a new headmaster came that everyone did not like, even the parents would complain." That was when Suede returned back home to do online school. Despite this turn of events, Suede seemed to appreciate her time in public and private school. "I do well with structure, even though I don't really like it." She put this in contrast with her year of online school which allowed for very little structure. "It was easy to fall behind, but at the same time there [weren't] any late days. If you wanted to save it all, like to the last minute, you could." In the end, however, Suede emphasized that the choices she made at each interval of time were right for the time.

Suede pointed out that her unconventional schooling experience helped her structure her own path after high school. One assumption she broached in her experience is that "college is like something you have to go to or else you're just going to be working a nine to five your whole life. I definitely don't think that's true. I think that college is for some people and not for other people and there's nothing wrong with it." Suede attended a U.S. based college in Spain, but then decided to attend a smaller language school while living in the area. Because of her choices to homeschool, attend public school, private school, and online school at various points, Suede was able to think differently about what makes up schooling. She saw the "school of life" as "seeing different things that aren't in your hometown… like I'm learning little things that you're interested in rather than just following a system pre-written [of] what you should learn." Through ample choice in homeschooling, Suede applies similar lessons to her current work.

Word to describe homeschooling experience: School of Life

Marissa

"I feel like school was almost demonized in my house a little bit, it was like a threat or something. It would be like do you want to do this thing or do you want to go to school. And I… well, obviously I wanted to homeschool." Marissa explained that until she entered a charter school in freshman year of high school, the school system was daunting. Having never had experience in a school environment and having friends who attended school and complained about it, there was no reason for Marissa to try a more traditional environment. Prior to attending a charter school, she categorized her homeschooling experience as unschooling — a form of homeschooling championed by John Holt supporting child-driven learning. "[I] had this

privilege of being home and being able to explore my interests and having like my parents let

that happen and let it breathe, and let me be like the weirdest oddball at any point, and I did not

think twice about [it]." She noted that her experience allowed her to be herself, whether that was

crafting or creating plays with her younger siblings. Marissa did not follow any set curriculum,

but Marissa's mother would occasionally start teaching from a workbook. Yet, as Marissa

explained, "we'd do it for like a week and then we'd kind of fall off, but it's just that math

sheets are hard to get kids to sit down and do." Marissa emphasized that she would go through

"phases" or periodic interests about a certain topic or activity. These ranged from duct tape

crafting to a Wiccan phase — each lasting approximately 2 years. Consequently, Marissa's

experience of homeschooling was that of little structure, yet ample exploration.

     Around the age of thirteen, Marissa began to reconsider her homeschooling curriculum

and eventually settled on attending a local charter school in its first year of existence. "I feel like

at 13 I kind of hit a point where I was not socially satisfied and definitely not academically

satisfied… I was so nervous because my whole life I'd been like well I'm not going to do

school." With other friends going to the charter school for high school and feeling personally

ready for a change in her unschooling experience, Marissa began to prepare to attend a

traditional school environment. Understanding that core subjects such as math would be present

in the high school classroom, Marissa's last year of homeschooling entailed prepping for the

school environment in addition to the consistent unschooling experience. "I was doing stuff on

Khan Academy… like I did a little bit every day. I would just sit down and be like okay X

amount of time doing this thing and I wouldn't even pay much attention to it which I also think

was a product of having such a loose upbringing." In attempts to prepare for a classroom

environment, Marissa was intensely stressed over whether she would be able to meet the

expectations put forth moving into the charter school. "I didn't know how to like write an essay

or structure things properly… I was really behind in math and that was like a pressure point for

me, for some reason." Here, it is important to emphasize that for Marissa the transition to the

charter school environment was the driving focus in her homeschooling experience during the

last year of her time homeschooling.

In spite of the anticipation of attending school, Marissa described her one and half year

stint in the charter school as a fulfilling, yet challenging experience. Because the school was in

its first year of operation, Marissa explained that sometimes the structure of the classes or

activities were more or less similar to the unstructured nature of her homeschooling experience.

"It was like—alright kids you're gonna come into school, we're going to build furniture." She

laughed reminiscently. Fridays, also known as "flex Fridays," were dedicated to a long-term

student-driven project—often math or science related since it was a STEM (Science Technology

Engineering and Math) school. Some parts of the transition were challenging, including being at

different levels in certain subjects and being uninterested in the main curriculum. "I just had to

learn a lot really fast. I was really worried that I was not good and they were going to kick me

out or something." In the end, her fears were abated. Even though she did not enjoy math and

science, Marissa noted that there were ways she integrated her interest in art with the core

subjects. "I was mad I couldn't take only art classes…It's like I don't know — I can't do math,

but I can do trigonometry because I can draw. Not engineering but when we built structures, I

could do that. That was good." Marissa gained what she termed "basic skills" from her time at

the charter school. She learned to write an essay, do math, and interact in a more traditional

social setting. This blip in time was she needed to gain the academic information she felt was

necessary; thus, a year later her departure from the school gave her the time to kick start her

career.

Marissa left school as a teenager and has not returned. Having a homeschooling and

unschooling background, she explained that she felt comfortable taking risks and initiative for

herself.

I kind of got tired of [the school] and I was like I feel like I've gained what academic

stuff I need to know. Basic skills which [were] awesome and I was like okay, I feel

pretty confident and I'm kind of bored. I was able to leave and I ended up working on a

movie. I was doing special effects makeup like making up the zombies and I was like

15. Then I met this producer and got his contact, ended up connecting [with] him and

getting on a commercial and then I just started working in the industry.

Since Marissa was the oldest of her 4 siblings, she felt equipped to take care of herself. She

began working night shoots, waking up in the early morning and staying at filming until 2 am.

"My dad would come pick me up," she described how grateful she was that her parents

supported her career. Receiving the same support she had in her unschooling and charter school

days, Marissa was able to follow her interests; her parents allowed her the space to try different

projects and ideas. Thus, during the period between the ages of 15 and 18, when a typical high

school graduation would occur, she did not consider herself to be in school. Having had an

unstructured curriculum but being a naturally structured person allowed her to willingly put in

the time to learn needed skills for whatever job she took on. "I do this thing [where] I get really,

really into something and totally immerse myself and I educate myself really fully and then I

will drop it. But it always comes back full circle, like I'll always use the skill later." She

connected this back to her homeschooling background of taking action. With the goal of moving

out, Marissa began living on her own at 19, although she visits and supports her family

consistently.

Reflecting upon her experience with homeschooling, Marissa explained that her

background allowed her to connect with people. "I realized last year… I was thinking about my

three closest friends and I was like all three of my closest friends were not people I grew up

with but have a homeschool background. I wonder if there's a connection there." She explained

that she looks back at her early years of homeschooling as magical, a kind of carefree period

that exhibits similarities to what some would term an "old-fashioned childhood." Lemonade

stands, running around outside, and buying candy from the nearby corner shop were staples to

Marissa's younger days. She specifically remembered the summers and the warmer weather

waiting for public school students to arrive home from a day at school. "I was allowed to be a

kid for a very long time."

Word to describe homeschooling experience: Unschooled

Joe

After a bout of sickness, buying an ethernet cable to supplement spotty wifi, and

"kicking out" his brother from the childhood room that they share when he is home, Joe still

found time to talk with me. Given the limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic and internet access,

it was surprising to me that the interview was able to happen. Unlike other participants in this

project, I had never previously interacted with Joe but met him through a mutual friend at a

small liberal arts institution. He exhibited an enthusiastic fervor that continued well over the

estimated hour-long conversation as I gained an understanding of his experience and character.

Even though he was born in Australia, his mother's family was rooted in the United States.

When he returned to the United States at around the age of five, his family questioned where he

should attend school given the potential of moving back to Australia. Here, it is important to

note that unlike the literature highlighting how homeschoolers tend to be from middle class

backgrounds (Murphy, 2012), Joe pointed out that he is low-income — a demographic not

typically well represented in homeschooling statistics or literature. For Joe, the options were to

homeschool or to attend public school. He expanded, "the school system sucks, like the school

system in Rhode Island but also specifically… where I live. It's really ass, and my mom knows

that because she grew up in it." Thus, his mother— a trained educator—decided to try

homeschooling him herself. The initial decision stuck and he ultimately continued until college.
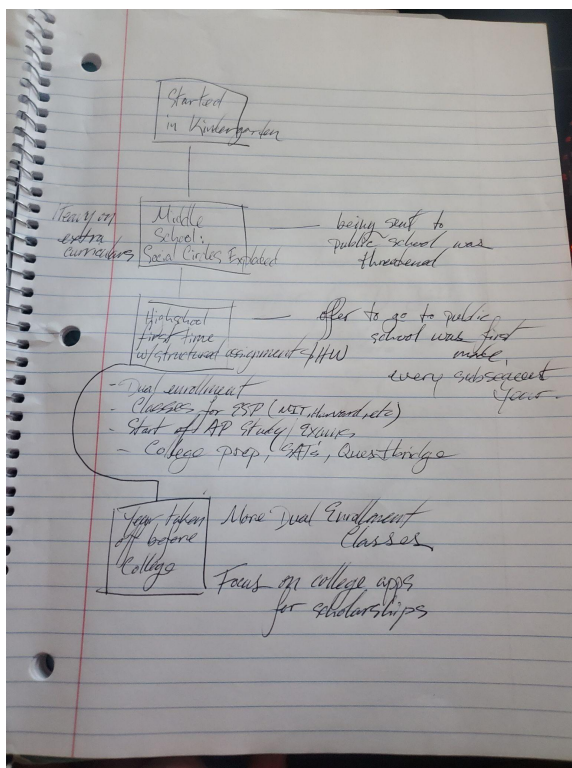
Joe's Education Journey Map

It was especially fascinating that Joe's homeschooling never included any mainstream school —public, private, or charter — prior to college. He was fully immersed in the homeschooling curriculum that his mother carefully developed. This included an at-home curriculum, co-op classes, and educational summer camps at MIT. "On any given day of the week, there was a fairly good chance that I'd be somewhere doing something. We used to have one of our communities back in grade school where we would go to a library about 40 minutes away and we just kind of spent the day there." For a few years, he maintained a similar type of schedule. But once he entered high school, he began taking dual-enrollment classes at local community colleges and a handful of Advanced Placement courses. He expounded upon the vast plethora of experiences he was afforded, including advanced classes, hefty extracurriculars, and shifting social circles. The way he put it, his mother was worried that he would miss out on an opportunity and thus signed him up for a multitude of activities. These activities, classes, and hard work all played into the expectation of going to college. "My mom was like yeah you're the kind of person who should be going to college and I was like okay. It didn't feel like a choice, it was just kind of like this is life, this is how you become successful: you do this thing, you follow the steps to get into a college, you pray that you get into a college."

Public school was phrased as a threat, rather than an option during middle school. Having never attended the public school but hearing horror stories from his cousins, Joe contemplated his options and ultimately decided to change his study habits and be self motivated in order to remain homeschooled. "There were a couple of times in middle school where you know, I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing and my parents gave me the choice to straighten up [or] you're going into the public school. So I kind of made the choice to

take school more seriously because I wanted to stay homeschooled." Staying on a schedule and

following the expectations of his mother, Joe continued homeschooling. He remembered his

assignments—previously taught by his mother with a more flexible curriculum, with the support

of 6-7 homeschooling communities— becoming more challenging in his last year of middle

school. What he termed "beefy homework assignments" required him to start self-motivating

more at home to get the work done, instead of merely following his mother's direction.

> Self motivation was really, really challenging for me. So I assume if anybody were able
>
> to overcome that and be structured in a non structured environment then they would
>
> have to develop a lot of intrinsic motivation… If you accomplished that [intrinsic
>
> motivation and attending a small liberal arts college] while being homeschooled. Damn.
>
> Like you, you were doing something right.

Intrinsic motivation and self-motivation are not only attributes that Joe had to learn quickly but

also expects from similarly placed homeschoolers.

"I imagine at any point in time I could have been like I want to go to public school and

[my parents] would have allowed me to. It never felt like I was forced at any point in time [to

stay homeschooled]." When Joe entered high school, he was given the choice to attend public

school every year. His mother pointed out that other students were attending public school and

that Joe might want to do so as well. Instead, Joe decided to remain homeschooled. He

commented on the social aspect of homeschooling. "Listening to my friends who sort of got

stuck in their one social circle at a public school or whatever… they're just like stuck in that and

that's your crew. No thanks." Joe felt like making the choice to continue homeschooling

allowed him to make friends with a variety of friend groups and people from different walks of

life, mostly age groups either older or younger than his own. "Some of my friends at one point

in time were like 30 and 40 year old men," he expounded. Even though he sometimes found it

difficult to know where he was in maturity, he highlighted that his experience allowed him to

blend in with any crowd. From college classes, MIT and Harvard camps, to AP studies as a

freshman in high school, Joe was committed to trying a bit of everything. Perhaps his

experience lacked many conventional choices, but it seemed as if he had opted for every choice

under the sun.

Word to describe homeschooling experience: Challenge-oriented

Chapter 4 Portrait Summaries

In spite of the varying contexts, understandings, and thoughts about their homeschooling experiences, participants in this project referred to recurring themes relating to homeschooling in the context of school choice. Student conceptualizations of freedom in homeschooling differed considerably along what I term a spectrum of freedom appearing in their experience. How participants viewed social interactions in their educational journeys similarly appeared throughout the conversations; some driving choice and others creating response. Beyond freedom and social themes, conceptualizing choice in homeschooling for many participants seemed to be linked to higher education or future endeavors. Through these three key themes arising from these participant interviews, homeschooling in the context of school choice can both be a choice and be a choice as a response to external factors.

Student Conceptualizations of Freedom in Homeschooling Choices

In its simplest form, homeschooling allows for some sense of freedom—whether that be for the purposes of religious education or the ability to tailor one's education to the student. The concept of liberty appears in the choice *to* homeschool but also in its very curriculum or lack thereof. Here, it may be helpful to view freedom on a spectrum: from freedom within the homeschooling and freedom driven by the homeschooling (see Figure A). This provides a picture of students' conceptualization of freedom and choice as it fits into their day-to-day, year-to-year, and current experience. This differs considerably from the spectrum that I initially drew in my mind from no freedom to total freedom within the homeschooling curriculum. While I do believe—as some participants alluded to—that some graduates had more choice in their experience than others, reframing the options as different types of freedom provides a

fuller picture of these particular participants and their inherent agency. As these participants

highlight, homeschooling allows for freedom of choice beyond merely the classroom and which

can affect future decisions.

Spectrum of Freedom in Homeschooling

Freedom By Homeschooling	Some Freedom In and Out of Homeschooling	Freedom In Homeschooling
• Homeschooling as a a certain portion of the day • Ample free time outside of the homeschooling day	• Some freedom in curriculum, some dictated • Some freedom outside of homeschooling	• Complete choice in activities • Unschooling
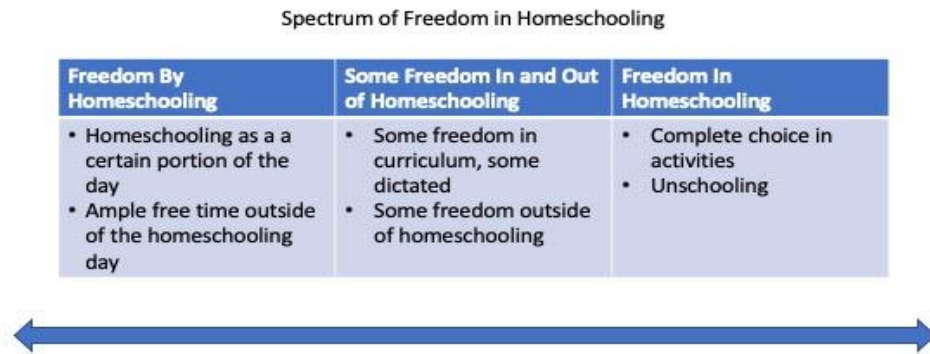
Figure A

　　　　Before explaining the ways in which the participants in this project described and made

sense of freedom in their own experience, it is crucial to highlight how homeschooling

graduates did not take their ability to stay at home for some portion of their lives for granted.

Homeschooling as a school choice means that some students have the privilege to attend and

some do not. Given that all the participants in this study were afforded the opportunity to

homeschool instead of other schooling settings, they sit on the side of having that choice. This is

certainly not to say that students who homeschool are all well-off, as Joe emphasized during his

interview, but there is a certain type of agency or freedom *to* homeschool which not everyone is

afforded. This type of agency differs from the freedoms allowed *within* the homeschooling

itself. Hana pointed out that school choice reminded her of "class privilege and wealth and you

know, like the majority of private schools are typically white middle class or upper class

students." Here, she described the privilege of attending alternative schools as something that

can be monetarily driven. In contrast, Nola contended that "a lot of people don't have much

school choice at all." She posited that the United States is privileged to have options in which to

choose. Indigo added to the conversation by highlighting how attending college made her

realize that there were far more options than even she knew about. Other affordances that

allowed for the freedom of choice for these participants centered around parent knowledge and

education. Three of the nine participants mentioned having parents who were educators by

training, which helped them meet state requirements. These graduates touched upon the inherent

challenges of gaining access to school choice options, but also acknowledged that they had

some affordances in monetary, locational, or parental forms that helped them gain access to the

freedom of homeschooling.

Even though homeschooling comes in many different forms as highlighted in the

portraits of Chapter 3, all participants pointed to some sense of agency during the

homeschooling period of their lives whether that was their personal agency or a collective effort

on the part of their family. In order to understand how participants may be placed on the

continuum between freedom in homeschooling or freedom *because of* homeschooling, it is first

crucial to outline the differing understandings of what constituted homeschooling. Take, for

example, Mikayla, who contended that "homeschooling" differed considerably from the

"homeschooling experience." In this sense, "homeschooling" was purely academic at home,

while the "homeschooling experience" encompassed the breadth of extracurriculars and

experiences Mikayla engaged in. Similarly, Indigo outlined that the Calvert Curriculum was the

"homeschooling experience" and anything outside of that "extracurricular." Alternatively,

Hendrix saw homeschooling as a period of time—in line with Mikayla's understanding of the

"homeschooling experience." Still others like Nola (and myself) saw homeschooling as holistic,

in line with the "homeschooling experience." On the other hand, Marissa viewed

homeschooling as very unstructured in line with unschooling. This is not to say that any one

way to conceptualize homeschooling is correct or incorrect but it provides the pretense for how

homeschooling graduates viewed homeschooling in order to differentiate their perceptions of

how freedom intersected with their experience.

The first, and perhaps most discussed type of freedom in homeschooling

literature—particularly secular homeschooling— is that of the curriculum. Mikayla described

her homeschooling experience, "Certain things definitely jumped out about what I was

interested in and then I was given the freedom to explore that more closely than I probably

would have been in school." Having personal academic interests nurtured was mentioned in 5 of

the 9 interviewees. These ranged from entrepreneurship to lemonade-stands or other small

businesses in the case of Marissa and writing cultivation in the case of Hana. Nola similarly

contended that she was able to choose what classes to take by cherry-picking among public

school and private tutoring classes. Even Joe, whose homeschooling curriculum was much more

structured, explained that he had a "degree of freedom" when he would attend book swaps and

choose some of the literature for his curriculum. "It was kind of nice to be able to have some

agency over what the curriculum looked like… it wasn't like slam a 70 year old textbook down

in front of me." For these participants, homeschooling curriculum allowed for freedom to

explore one's interests.

The second type of freedom was *because of* rather than *part of* participants'

homeschooling experiences. The most startling example was Indigo's experience with a rigid

curriculum and ample free time which eventually led to her current career prospects. As she described, she had complete autonomy and no autonomy at the same time meaning that once she had finished her couple hours of curriculum, she was able to follow her interests such as listening to podcasts that encouraged her to explore amusement park engineering. Likewise, Nola highlighted how she had additional time for extracurriculars because of homeschooling which allowed her to find passions to continue outside of school once she entered a public high school. "I don't think that I would have been as active in high school had I not had eighth grade to discover that I like doing things outside of school that were structured and planned," Nola explained. Rather than freedom afforded within the academic curriculum, the space of time that would typically be within school hours lended itself to academic discoveries outside of mere homeschooling.

Social Aspects

Socialization is an important part of any child's upbringing; various social interactions can help or hinder one's ability to learn. In the 21st century and in the midst of a global pandemic, socialization has also been driven online through social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram. While this research primarily focused on physical social interactions, one participant mentioned how the emergence of social media was a reason that homeschooling felt socially isolating. Three of the nine participants emphasized negative social interactions [with students and teachers] as a cause for turning to homeschooling following time in mainstream schools. Others viewed social interactions as a reason to return or enter a mainstream school environment. Being homeschooled seemed to be linked to a feeling of connection that spans far beyond the years of homeschooling itself.

Homeschooling can be a choice of response to negative social interactions. Hana reflected on her experience, "I was very sensitive in first grade—I mean, I'm still sensitive and I was kind of getting picked on at school, and I would just like cry every day. I had a really hard time making friends." Facing bullies and social pressures in the classroom drives some students to find alternative schooling options. In Hana's case, homeschooling was an alternative and possible solution to her predicament. Similarly, Nola and Hendrix had what Hendrix called a "negative teacher experience." Neither chose to enter into more detail and I did not press them further. Nola also mentioned the social interaction between the *other* students and the teachers as negatively impacting her own education. "I didn't like how much time was just being—in middle school—taken up by behavioral issues of the other students. I wasn't learning." At that point, Nola felt as though she had exhausted all her other options, before settling on homeschooling. Of the 5 participants that attended a mainstream school prior to homeschooling, 4 of them commented on the social life at school in a less-than-positive manner. Suede highlighted the rule-setting environment of her public school, "The kids were just too much." They seemed to allude to a somewhat chaotic space which included teasing, countless rules, and wasted time causing them to switch to homeschooling.

Alternatively, some homeschooling graduates viewed homeschoolers' social interactions at a deficit and thus wanted to attend mainstream schools in response to that deficit. As Maybelline explained, "I remember, like in first and second grade, I definitely wanted to homeschool for a while, but then there is a point where I wanted more social interaction." Having friends who attended a public school from a local softball team, Maybelline's decision to enter public school—despite the wishes of her parents— allowed for further socialization. It seemed, however, that Maybelline was closer to an exception rather than the rule. For Marissa

and Suede, the choice to attend a mainstream school (charter and public, respectively) was short lived as both returned back to a home environment: Marissa to working and Suede to online school from home. This was different from my own experience of wanting a bit more social interaction in a public school environment and remaining in that environment until college. While I wanted to leave the social environment by my senior year of high school, I did not feel as though I had a choice because I was so near the end of my time there and consequently remained in the school until graduation. Essentially, the social prospects of mainstream school may have seemed more enticing for some students than they actually were.

For others, homeschooling did not create a lack of social interaction but in fact developed a more holistic social education. Mikayla tackled the issue head on,

> I've heard so many adults… [socialization] is one of their concerns when they want to homeschool their kids. They're like oh they won't socialize enough, they'll become really weird. We were never really deprived of socialization. Also we got more of a variety too. We were around kids way younger than us, and then around adults.

Highlighting the time spent playing in the neighborhood and connecting with public school students at the Chinese School, Mikayla emphasized that she felt as though she had the opportunity to liaise with adults and children of all ages in a way that she felt other students did not. There is certainly no question that the proportion of time I spent with adults and younger children far outweighed the time that I spent with the same age groups after I entered a public high school. This perspective was reiterated in Hendrix's large network of homeschoolers, "basically all my friends, except the ones that I met through fencing were homeschooled." For Hendrix, homeschooling *created* his social network. Joe, like Mikayla, supported the idea that the variation of demographics in his social circles were beneficial for his ability to interact later

on. His background of having friends of different ages made it easy for Joe to communicate

with different groups of people. "Interacting with professors, interacting with administrators and

staff didn't feel terrifying the way that some of my friends thought it would be in freshman

[year of college]." This ability and comfort to interact with different age groups may not have

been a cause to *stay* being homeschooled, but it demonstrates that socialization in

homeschooling can positively impact students' perspective of the practice.

Even though homeschooling socialization was not initially something I was expecting to

talk about with participants, the topic arose in multiple conversations. Considering that my

interactions with my participants were based on the shared understanding that we had both been

homeschooled, it is unsurprising that social interaction in homeschooling ended up being a topic

of conversation. Some participants even noted that the practice of homeschooling directly

contributed to their feeling of connection with me and other homeschoolers. Marissa's point

about her closest friends being homeschooled resonated in Joe's closing remarks, "I can connect

with, I think, almost anybody because of a shared interest like my experience with things is so

diverse like just across the board." He noted, as did Mikayla, that the various social interactions

that homeschooling afforded ensured a sense of comfort in homeschooling such that neither

actively chose to attend public school (Joe never did and Mikayla finally attended in 7th grade).

Thus, socialization plays a key role in homeschoolers' choice to build what they deem to be a

safe space to learn through home education or mainstream attendance.

Contemplating the Future

How students are able to navigate the world as adults can be attributed to their

upbringing. Of the nine participants, seven attended universities or colleges at the time of the

interviews; eight had attended a higher education institution sometime after high school.

Despite some noted hardships, such as the pandemic or deciding which classes to take, all

seemed content with their current situations. Certain parts of their current placements and

abilities were perceived to have stemmed from their homeschooling days. Among most

participants, college seemed like an expectation—something that their choices were built to

adhere to— which went hand-in-hand with the need to exceed expectations or complete a

rigorous curriculum. Even though all participants mentioned some degree of freedom attributed

to homeschooling, this innate goal of meeting expectations was connected to state standards and

parental ideas (See Figure B). On the other hand, some participants used homeschooling to

think beyond traditional routes of "success" to carve their own path. I use the term "success"

here as defined by the notion of attaining a goal. While not all participants discussed their terms

for success, six of the nine noted college as an expectation or pressure. For many, the goal was

college —for others the end point was or currently is far less defined.

State standards provided a framework for students' learning while simultaneously

limiting students' choices. Hendrix pointed out that in Florida, "it's really flexible with how you

want to fulfill your high school requirements for your child, but if you want them to go to

university, you have to make sure that they're accepted by the University that they're considered

equivalent." Florida, a state with relaxed homeschooling laws, does not have state mandated

subjects nor teacher requirements. However, even Hendrix acknowledged that the flexibility in

his homeschooling curriculum was confined by the standards expected to attend college. He

added that Florida State University has sections of their admission booklet dedicated to

homeschoolers outlining how to make it to college. Likewise, state standards were pivotal to

Hana's homeschooling experience. Her mother took direction from the state standards and

public education to ensure that Hana was meeting the targeted benchmarks per grade. "She

followed some homeschooling board—I'm sure you're familiar—where they approve your

curriculum." Maine, where Hana resides, has slightly more rigid laws requiring students to learn

core subjects such as English, Math, American History, Maine history, etc ("How to Comply",

2020). Hana and Nola mentioned using these core curriculum subjects as a stepping stone to

fulfill their subjects. "It was a lot of just word of mouth and kind of just being like okay: what

person? Who can we draw on for that?" Those that did not mention state standards explicitly

referenced the need to meet certain criteria for attendance in mainstream schools. Even Marissa,

an unschooler, suggested that she was insecure about her academics because she was not

meeting the delineation of "academic education" based on external standards. State expectations

vary and can both help students decide on curriculum and hinder students' ability to choose

their own curriculum.

College and academic expectations also played into how these homeschooling graduates

categorized their choice. Of the six who directly mentioned the expectation or pressure to attend

college, only one purposefully went against the grain —Suede attended college for one year in

Spain before attending a small language school instead. Marissa similarly departed from

traditional paths of education as she entered the workforce at age fifteen and never attended

college, nor did she express pressure to attend. Even though these two participants diverged

from what I will term the "traditional" path—of going from grade school to college[5]— both

noted the pressure of entering the system. Suede explained that the school system promotes

college as something that is required,

---

[5] I note that this is not the "traditional" path for everyone in different locations or from different backgrounds. I
merely say "traditional" given these particular participants and the literature that emphasizes the education
"attainment" of homeschoolers.

or else you're just going to be working a nine to five your whole life. I definitely don't

think that's true. I think that college is for some people and not for other people and

there's nothing wrong with it. It doesn't mean that the person that goes to college and

finishes is smarter, it just means you're learning in different ways.

Her post-high school choices run counter to what she sees as societal norms of attending college

full-time. Moreover, Marissa did not feel pressure to attend college, but she explained that she

felt behind academically, leading her to attend a charter school. The remaining participants all

attended college and/or highlighted the pressures in attending — a sentiment reflected in my

experience as well. In spite of having a family that encouraged me to follow what *I* was

passionate about, whether that be a trade or academics—a conversation we had throughout my

time homeschooling—there was an expectation that I would be well-educated. In my household,

comments towards those uneducated were less than savory. Expectations to follow a

"traditional" path seemed to inform the choices of participants that followed the expectations

and those that differed from them.

      Socio-economic background also impacted the categorization of choice. Where I was

well aware of the implicit and explicit expectations for me to attend college, I also held the

assumption that I would get into and be financially able to attend college. My parents told me

"we'll make it work" whenever I was worried about finances, so I never felt limited by my

choices despite being from a middle-class background. On the other hand, Indigo explained that

in attending college, she realized she had had limited choices because of the sheer wealth that

enabled some of her peers in college to attend private institutions in secondary school. Joe

explained he was told he should attend college, but highlighted that there was no expectation

that he would be able to attend given his socio-economic background. Even though all

participants seemed satisfied with their current trajectories, their paths to meet or exceed their

academic and college goals were impeded or supported via monetary limitations. Thus the

expectation of college attainment and the perception of one's preparation for college was based

on one's own socio-economic or perceived socio-econonomic status.

Pressure to attend college or mainstream schools played into the choices made during

participants' formative years and how they and I currently navigate the world. Hendrix

described choosing classes to fit a college-ready profile. Nola explained that one reason why

she attended a public high school was because otherwise it would be challenging to meet state

requirements and attain a diploma for college entrance. "We knew it was going to be too hard to

apply to college homeschooling in high school. My parents were done with being responsible

for my education," she posited. Despite never having attained a GED or high school diploma

and obviously not taking a "traditional" route, Marissa noted that she felt the need to learn

certain skills to fit a school environment. This is not to say the pressures to attend certain

classes, fit into a mainstream school, or attend college is inherently a bad or good thing. Rather,

pressures clearly existed and affected student choices.

Choice in homeschooling is also paradoxically driven by and constrained by parent

expectations. In all homeschooling situations, the very option *to* homeschool is driven by

parents and at the end of the day, it is the parent who decides whether their child has the choice

to continue homeschooling or not. There were a mix of ways that
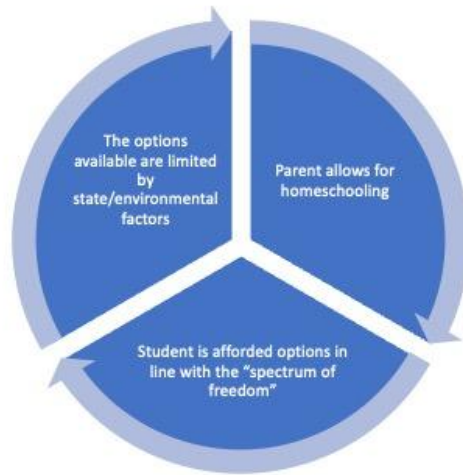
Figure B

homeschooling graduates conceptualized the role of their parents in their homeschooling

choices. Marissa and Suede generally framed their homeschooling choices from the first person

perspective. As Suede said, "I tried first grade, but I was like I want to be home." In contrast,

Maybelline and Nola featured their decisions as a more collective process. "We were trying to

figure out where I was going to go to school," Maybelline said about her decision to attend after

moving to Connecticut. Even though she mentioned not liking school at some points, or social

dynamics pushing her to attend public school, Maybelline—like Nola— explained choices as a

choice of both parents and students. Still others, like Indigo and Joe emphasized the role of their

parents in the decision-making process. Indigo's parents decided her Calvert curriculum and

which portions she would be required to complete. Likewise, Joe explained that his mother had

been instrumental in having him participate in a range of activities and classes. Simply put,

parents drive the choices afforded to their children. Homeschooling is a choice allowed by

parents, but has different degrees to which students conceptualize choice within their

curriculum.

Choice Fulfilling Needs

Besides social and parental expectations impacting participants' choices in

homeschooling, they generally viewed their homeschooling choices as fulfilling their needs

even if it was against their will. Mikayla explained that she needed structure and thus being

forced to attend a private school in 7th grade was good for her. This was in contrast with my

opposite experience of having ample choice of schools entering high school, choosing to attend

the public school for the community. Maybelline and Nola's needs for social interaction seemed

to be satisfied by the option to attend public school. On the other hand, the similar options for

Maybelline and Nola appeared for Hendrix and Joe who found homeschooling provided them

with plenty of close social connections. Moreover, in contemplating the future, choice allowed

participants to meet their individual goals and aspirations: to attend college and to enter the

workforce. For Suede, this looked like a flexible homeschooling curriculum and a strict private

school. For Indigo, this looked like quickly finishing the day's homework in order to listen to a

podcast. On the other hand, Marissa required more creative exploration time. The varying needs

of different participants led to choices in and post homeschooling, resulting in choices that

served some and not others in similarly aligned contexts.

Chapter 5 The Paradox of Choice

This explores how homeschooling graduates conceptualize homeschooling in the context of school choice. In what ways did they view their experience in the broader conversation about school choice? I used critical theory and personal perspective to better outline my thinking as to how homeschooling graduates view their experience. Critical theory through the framework of Freire (2018) pushed me to think of education unconventionally and to wonder how parents' impact on children through homeschooling truly evolves. My personal experience developed the way I connected with people's experiences. Through this discussion, I pull from the key themes of Chapter 1 in combination with the portraits and summaries of Chapter 3 and 4. The nuanced and textured understanding of homeschoolers' choices through their perspectives add to the existing literature surrounding parent and scholar perspectives. First, the access to freedom for the child is in and of itself made possible by the determination of the parents. Second, homeschooling graduates diverged from state expectations and laws, yet used those standards and public institutions to enhance their curricula. Moreover, the well-being of homeschooling graduates seemed to rely on both the positive and negative aspects of mainstream education. How homeschoolers in this study conceptualize homeschooling in the context of school choice is paradoxical in many ways to the literature.

Free Markets and Homeschooling

Like Friedman's (1968) conceptualization of school choice as a means of driving better schools through a market economy, the participants in this research found homeschooling to be a subset of school choice — a system that afforded them more educational opportunities in the

midst of a lacking public sector. Participants' responses followed the positive attributions of

Friedman's system. Homeschooling graduates tended to associate choices within their school

system as a net positive gain, without contending with the harsh reality of inequality that can be

perpetuated in a free-market and choice driven system. The two participants (Nola and Hana)

who mentioned the inequality in choice within the general school system attended small-liberal

arts institutions in college and thus used similar terminology to which I am familiar. In spite of

this recognition, these two participants' experiences focused on the opportunities they were

afforded rather than expanding on the possible detriment to racial minorities or those with

lower-socioeconomic status. The other 7 participants did not mention accessibility as part of

their understanding of the term school choice, instead painting the term in a positive light. As

expanded upon throughout the portraits and summaries, the participants—like myself—had an

expectation that homeschooling or other non-traditional schooling options would be made

available to them. This expectation aligns with Friedman's free-market model by supporting the

idea that there is always something better and that a consumer is not limited by one option

(Freidman, 1997). A couple homeschooling graduates mentioned that they had to abide by their

parents' rules in order to maintain the homeschooling status demonstrating that the option to

homeschool was driven by the individual families over societal factors. Friedman and *EdChoice*

could point to these instances of homeschooling and school choice as examples of when

free-markets have worked to allow for options when public systems of education have proven to

be inefficient.

In line with the market-based approach put forth by Friedman, options to selectively join

the public school or other mainstream schools as a homeschooler were not uncommon.

However, the conversations proved inconclusive as to whether these homeschoolers view their

participation in such programs as preferential treatment or not. I presumed that students may

have commented on being ostracized as homeschoolers, not based on my own experience, but

rather based on my reflections upon the literature. However, none commented on having a lack

of access to public institutions; those that did not attend felt they did so voluntarily. This runs

counter to Parson (2019) who argued that there was discrimination in public schools against

homeschools as they were excluded from public school activities. While homeschoolers may

feel discriminated against in some literature, for the homeschooling graduates in this study who

both attended public schools as a homeschooler and those that did not, they commented on the

practice as a privilege if they mentioned it at all. Nola and Hendrix particularly expounded on

their ample choices through their attendance at the public middle school and through

dual-enrollment programs. Moreover, my own experience of attending public school as a

homeschooler was seamless. Yet, my sister never did the same and our experiences never felt as

though one of us was lacking an experience that the other attained. This lack of perceived

discrimination could be due to the select states that were represented in this study: Maine,

Rhode Island, and Florida all of which allow homeschoolers to attend public school rather than

states with high regulation like New York or Connecticut. Still, Parsons (2019) commented on

what she termed "unnecessary burdens" for those who want to participate in public schools in

states such as Maine which requires more approval from the state than does other states. Instead

of viewing entry into public education as a burden, there was an element of possibility that

mainstream schools allowed for public school-going homeschoolers.

Reproduction of Situation or Mobility?

Considering arguments for and against the choice to homeschool, some literature demonstrated how homeschooling can negatively reproduce situations. Sarajlic (2019) highlighted how homeschooling can impart parent values and perspectives upon their children, decreasing homeschoolers' authenticity. Further, authors such as Viteritti (2003) commented on how school choice can perpetuate inequality by allowing some students to attend the schools where their parents so choose. Here, societal inequality and parental influence was framed in a more negative light. Having studied how school choice can result in some students being unable to take advantage of such opportunities, I was convinced that homeschooling was merely a subset of school choice which *I* had benefited from but only due to my circumstances. However, from my findings the question of whether homeschooling merely reproduces the parents' situation or values seemed more nuanced than upon initial consideration.

Participants in this study generally found that in situations where parents imparted or made decisions for their children, it supported homeschooling graduates' development. In some cases, such as Marissa and Suede, homeschooling allowed them to think outside of traditional norms of their own accord in line with Freire's (2018) conscientizacao or freedom bestowed by one's own consciousness (p. 67). As outlined in Chapter 4, most participants were well aware that homeschooling was not something to be taken for granted. Where parents prescribed curriculum for Maybelline or Joe— in line with Collom's (2005) conceptualization of homeschooling as a parentally motivated by negative *parent* experiences— these decisions seemed to paradoxically push students *outside* of their parents' perspectives or experience by giving them new learning platforms, contrary to Sarajlic (2019). One could argue that Maybelline's parents limited her ability to be autonomous by encouraging her to attend a

Montessori school; but she ended up attending a public school for some time according to her

own wants. Furthermore, Joe's highly prescribed homeschooling curriculum to compensate for

lack of opportunity on the part of his parents pushed him outside of his parent's experience.

Rather than the emphasis being to uphold the values put forth by the parents, homeschooling

graduates focused on the way their parents forced them outside of their inner circle. Mikayla

and Indigo described family encouragement to attend mainstream schools, which forced them to

expand their circles of friends and expectations for learning. In these cases, parent values

seemed to encourage finding different values or ways of thinking in line with Freire's (2018)

humanizing pedagogy which looked to education as something that "ceases to be an instrument

by which the teachers can manipulate the students, because it expresses the consciousness of the

students themselves"(p. 69). Here, parents instilled the importance of finding one's own values

or engaging and learning about different values instead of merely reproducing the same thought

processes.

Centered Around the Student

Beyond the concept of homeschooling in the system of school choice, the literature

review expanded on the plethora of options within being homeschooled. As highlighted in the

portrait summaries, these options within homeschooling curriculum do not align wholly with

any one type of homeschooling, but take elements of various kinds of curriculum and

educational practices to fulfill the overall experience. John Holt's (1967) philosophy of

following children's interests was clearly present through multiple participants' experiences.

Yet, the unschooling element of his work was only made explicit through Marissa's background

as an unstructured schooler. However, unlike an escape from public school, complete freedom

through unschooling almost seemed to have the opposite effect. Marissa described feeling like a "sitting duck" during the final years of her unschooling experience which showed a sentiment of entrapment. On the other hand, Rousseau's (1905) child-centredness underlying homeschooling literature aligned in all participants' experiences to varying extents. Choice for these homeschooling students was built into the educational practices throughout what would have been the school day. This freedom of choice can be viewed through the continuum between freedom *in* homeschooling and freedom *because of* homeschooling highlighted in the portrait summary. On both sides of the continuum, homeschooling allowed for child-centred learning by encouraging the homeschooling graduates to be self-sufficient. This autonomy either was driven by the homeschooling curriculum or allowed for by flexibility outside of time in the curriculum.

In many cases, participants' child-centred learning followed a Freirian framework of education by usurping the traditional banking model of education and focusing instead upon co-construction of knowledge. "Education as the practice of freedom — as opposed to education as the practice of domination — denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people" (Freire, 1968, p. 81). For Indigo, homeschooling was less a co-construction of knowledge, with her consciousness raised through experiences afforded outside of the homeschooling curriculum. Yet, every participant highlighted how homeschooling allowed them flexibility that would not have been afforded in a traditional setting; in many cases they had more ownership and sway over their own education, humanizing and co-constructing their path. For Joe, this came in the form of collectively choosing the books he wanted to read to meet academic requirements. In Hana's situation, education focused on writing: a curriculum that was built in tandem *with* her mother's guidance. Problem-posing education, as a form of never-ending

learning, also appeared through Marissa's and Suede's experiences. Marissa and Mikayla were critical of parts of their upbringings — including about general curriculum and participation in the Chinese School — with a sense that their very background allowed them to do that reflection. Likewise, Suede expanded upon what she termed the "School of Life" in that learning never ends. Thus, even though participants' did not outwardly refer to problem-posing education, their experiences reflected co-construction of knowledge in many cases.

The State

Creating a parallel system of education to that of the public school was clearly present through the participant interviews and in line with Gaither's (2008) reference to the historical conceptualization of homeschooling as an alternative. Based on a review of the literature, it would seem that there would be far more resentment towards public education than was present in participants' interviews. Even though I never felt as though my homeschooling background was placed in contrast to the public school in the way that Gaither described, I was aware that some homeschooling families conceptualized the public schools at odds with their homeschooling philosophies. Homeschooling as an alternative for the participants in this study was linked far more to participants' individual situations than to an active distaste of public education. Here, it is possible to revisit the understanding put forth by Lois (2012) of "first choice" and "second-choice" homeschoolers; "first choicers" considering no other options and second choicers deciding to homeschool as the best option. Of the homeschooling graduates who would more closely classified as "first-choice" homeschoolers (those that started by homeschooling and did not consider options at all or until they became what could be classified as "second choice" homeschoolers), many finally attended a mainstream school; those initially

had attended a school commented on ending up in homeschooling because it "just made sense."

The resulting educational practices for the participants in this study clearly had similarities to,

and sometimes drew from, public education, but were certainly not conflicting with mainstream

schools.

Well-Being

Aligning from the portraits and literature review, "second choice" homeschooling was

conceptualized through the concept of well-being. Here, I use the term well-being liberally to

describe homeschooling graduates' contentment with their situation. The concern for the

environment of schools driving parents to homeschool in the literature—whether that was

bullying, drugs, or negative experiences— was similarly placed for participants in this study

who were coming from public or mainstream schools to be homeschooled. Like Sabol's (2018)

analysis that cited bullying as a cause for homeschooling, negative social interactions were

paramount to homeschoolers' decision to homeschool. Participants cited negative teacher

experiences and student bickering in mainstream schools as reasons to try homeschooling. Nola

and Hendrix's poor teacher experiences and Hana's challenges with other students (in addition

to learning difficulties in the classroom setting) resulted in both leaving the public school

environment. Aligning with Lois' (2012) conceptualization of homeschooling as a second

choice and best option out of other less appealing choices, this project demonstrated that

well-being clearly does play a central role in some homeschooling graduates' perceptions of

why they choose to homeschool.

The literature review did not fully reflect participants' conceptualizations of

homeschooling as lacking or satisfying social well-being. Mikayla and Joe specifically pointed

out having been socially satisfied with their homeschooling experience which mirrored

Murphy's note that homeschoolers are not isolated in spite of critics' speculation that

homeschoolers lack social interaction (2012, p. 144). Alternatively, Maybelline, Nola, and

Marissa described feelings of isolation summarized in Chapter 4. A review of the literature

revealed that through parent and historical perspectives, little emphasis was placed on social

ostracization as a reason to leave homeschooling. What was abundant in homeschooling

parents' perspectives was the worry that their children would not have enough socialization

—thus parents in the literature worked to create social interactions for their children within

homeschooling (Murphy, 2012). Literature also focused on how in practice, homeschooling did

not fulfill the stereotype of having a lack of socialization and in fact socialization could be a

reason to homeschool (Kunzman, 2021). Yet, in interviews, insufficient social interaction

caused the homeschooling graduates themselves to move away from homeschooling. Pulling

from a child-centered approach in these participants' situations, the yearning for social

interaction from what could be described as a lack thereof seemed to play a much larger role in

determining homeschoolers' decision to abandon homeschooling than in the literature.

Student Achievement

Student achievement as a reason purported by specialists *to* homeschool and also as a

result of homeschooling drove participants' decision-making in this project. Expected student

achievement through homeschooling was a driving factor for student choices within

homeschooling curriculum (Murphy, 2012; McCabe, 2021). Here, however, student

achievement differed in meaning from that of the literature. Where Murphy (2012) and

Drenovsky and Cohen (2012) commented on test scores and academic achievement, participants

cited more nuanced measures of achievement. Joe conceptualized homeschooling as the "right"

decision based on a gut feeling, highlighting that he had met his goal by attending college. This

differed from achievement through merely test scores and grades; instead matching a more

humanizing understanding of accomplishment. For Marissa, achievement meant being able to

move out from her family home which she has now accomplished. Within the academic

experiences of each participant, different goals pushed forward varying choices to meet those

goals. Where Hendrix wanted to attend college, he chose classes that would specifically make

him an ideal candidate. On the other hand, Suede was hoping to travel abroad and followed an

unconventional path of different online and private school options to make that happen. All

participants seemed satisfied with their current life trajectory or personal version of

achievement. Thus, participant data reinforced the idea that student achievement is a reason to

homeschool and make certain decisions within the homeschooling curriculum, yet it

complicated what student achievement may be (Ray, 2017).

Future Research

Previously mentioned in the literature review, but not heavily brought into conversation

through this research, the way homeschoolers conceptualize religion as a component of

homeschooling choice would be an interesting area to explore in future research. Religion,

especially Christianity, was clearly present in a review of the literature. This was unsurprising

given that the historical underpinnings of contemporary homeschooling were born in part from

far-right religious groups (Gaither, 2008). Indeed, even in situations where religion was not a

driving force for homeschooling choice, it was present in curriculum. For Hendrix, his location

determined his religious curriculum despite not choosing to homeschool for religious reasons or

carefully following the religious portions of the curriculum. Moreover, the growth of

non-Christian homeschoolers such as Muslim homeschoolers cited in Chapter 1 continues to

expand (Seif-Amirhosseini, 2016). Given the scope of this work, I focused on homeschoolers

who did not prioritize religion. However, should time allow, this is an area to further explore.

Accompanying the lack of religious representation in this research, current trends in

homeschooling are important to investigate further. Especially prevalent in the contemporary

media center about changing demographics of homeschoolers, is that of those who choose to

homeschool for racially driven reasons (Reilly, 2022). Even though a racial lens was not a

central theme in this research, it was a component of Mikayla's portrait and my

conceptualization of how I view the world. Mikayla's homeschooling experience included racial

identity providing certain elements of education through the Chinese School, an area of her

educational journey where she felt she had less choice. For me, the same component of my

educational journey was fulfilling and felt like a choice for me. Yet, for some, racial identity *is*

the key reason to homeschool for families and to some is viewed as a means to uproot racial —

not just socioeconomic — inequality. Given more time and scope, this would be a critical area

to explore in-depth in my research.

Conclusion

"Wow, so different from my own experience" is the message scribbled across my researcher's journal following my second interview with Indigo. Whatever I had previously understood to be homeschooling — specifically the differentiation I made between homeschooling and unschooling; a point important to me in order to legitimize my own experience and delegitimize the unschooling experience — was confined to my background and perceived notions of different styles of learning. I came into this work thinking that my experience with homeschooling was far more of an outlier and that homeschooling was somehow outside of school choice systems. Furthermore, in my brief stint in higher education, I became critical of school choice as a model; and where homeschooling fit into school choice, I was convinced that students would be confined by inequitable systems that arguably afford some students the opportunity to homeschool and others not. What struck me was that choice was not only afforded to one type of person in this work. For many students, it had worked in line with what they considered achievement. Homeschooling was an option for people of different backgrounds; and the conceptualization of choice within the practice varied among participants. Ideas about homeschooling and school choice that I had boxed into my mind as good or bad, became misperceptions.

The lived experiences for these participants in the context of the broader literature about homeschooling in the context of school choice was paradoxical. It was driven by a mix of individual choices and decisions based on responses to environmental factors. Where a review of the literature broadly emphasized freedom, state control, and social mobility, the participant data focused on freedom to choose, not as a choice in all circumstances, but rather bound by people and places involved. In spite of literature describing free choice and child-centredness,

lived experience highlighted the role of parents at the center of learning. State control, while

generally frowned upon in the literature, was instrumental in the way some participants viewed

their homeschooling experience. In addition, social well-being appeared as a reason *to*

homeschool and also a reason to not homeschool. In the case of Suede, it was both. In

homeschooling and school choice, student achievement was a reason to make the choices in

each individuals' educational journeys, yet the conceptualization of student achievement

differed between participants and the literature. Homeschooling is certainly a choice, but the

choices it affords are not the same among all participants.

References

Compulsory attendance, (2021). Retrieved from

http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/20-A/title20-Asec5001-A.html

Are we there yet?: Examining parent motivation in private school admission. (2018,). *PR*

Newswire Retrieved from

http://libproxy.vassar.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/are-we-ther

e-yet/docview/1985571839/se-2?accountid=14824

Bay, J. L., & Swacha, K. Y. (2020). Community-engaged research as enmeshed practice.

Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 26(1), 121-142.

Bevir, M. (1999). Foucault and critique: Deploying agency against autonomy. *Political Theory,*

27(1), 65-84. doi:10.1177/0090591799027001004

Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research*. New York, New York:

Routledge.

Callan, E. (2014). *Autonomy and schooling*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Retrieved from

http://vassar.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwtV09T8MwED1R

yoDEAIWKb2VjCkr8ESdDl1YBFgZEmavUcaRKJUOVIPHvObuOo5qhYmCJEiuyl

TvLL2ffewdAyWMUemvCMi2rZImrZIrwIitCBBeM81KQRBfgVrt0CyfR0Lf9q-OxD

V2vibR_cL7rFBvwHqcAXnES4NX7P3aPNvu4bQxfYZubabQ2O5QyRw7o_rpnIti4P

2Ze3P8qn1frdfjWKlt7xWcW7gSKkRBUS9Nty4Z4CtP5dEb1ASwui1pv_LNcyWai6v

DjfQADkWFIO0SMzN0uCNFs19jKnBnEI0JgoGJ2Rew4Vk6rH_cX1hkAn5_CUGl

WxxkcqHqkS1XbtJYRzoiumMP3OYw7qwVotcBZ7QIenvL57CXs-l6YM2ab2Lrov4y

O4aTQnIG6MdzC8hKCLK4inhJBZMZYVtE0USUVCNBcpRUr5BUE-7q93v_KDR

z37ruFw2bTqjs4-sLYqNjcW9P-AIMx9rQ

Carpenter, D. M., & Kafer, K. (2012). A history of private school choice. *Peabody Journal of Education, 87*(3), 336-350. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/41725438

Collom, E. (2005). The ins and outs of homeschooling: The determinants of parental motivations and student achievement. *Education and Urban Society, 37*(3), 307-335. doi:10.1177/0013124504274190

Cook, B. (2011). How charter schools are screwing up the prep sports world. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/bobcook/2011/04/01/how-charter-schools-are-screwing-up-the-prep-sports-world/

Cooper, B. S., & Sureau, J. (2007). The politics of homeschooling: New developments, new challenges. *Educational Policy (Los Altos, Calif.), 21*(1), 110-131. doi:10.1177/0895904806296856

DeAngelis, C. A., & Dills, A. K. (2020). Does compulsory schooling affect innovation? evidence from the united states. *Social Science Quarterly, 101*(5), 1728-1742. doi:10.1111/ssqu.12832

Definition of AUTONOMY. Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomy

Dennis, C. M. (2016). *Returning to the fold: A study of homeschoolers who return to the public school* Retrieved from https://go.exlibris.link/HFbwdPQP

Dennison, A., Lasser, J., Awtry Madres, D., & Lerma, Y. (2020). Understanding families who

      choose to homeschool: Agency in context. *School Psychology, 35*(1), 20-27.

      doi:10.1037/spq0000341

Dewey, J. (1897). My pedagogic creed. *School Journal, 54*, 77-80.

Dixson, A. D., Chapman, T. K., & Hill, D. A. (2005). Research as an aesthetic process:

      Extending the portraiture methodology. *Qualitative Inquiry, 11*(1), 16-26.

      doi:10.1177/1077800404270836

Drenovsky, C. K., & Cohen, I. (2012). The impact of homeschooling on the adjustment of

      college students. *International Social Science Review, 87*(1/2), 19-34.

Fields-Smith, C. (2020). *Exploring single black mothers' resistance through homeschooling*.

      Cham: Springer International Publishing AG. Retrieved from

      https://go.exlibris.link/W8RRGQcY

Foreman, L. M. (2017). Educational attainment effects of public and private school choice.

      Journal of School Choice, 11(4), 642-654. doi:10.1080/15582159.2017.1395619

Foucault, M. (1977). *Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*. New York, New York:

      Pantheon Books.

Friedman, M. (1997). Public schools: Make them private. *Education Economics, 5*(3), 341-344.

      doi:10.1080/09645299700000026

Freire, P. (2018) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing

      Inc. (Original work published in 1968)

Gaither, M. (2008). *Homeschool: An american history* (1st ed.). New York, N.Y: Palgrave

 Macmillan. Retrieved from https://go.exlibris.link/LmKRxz0g

Gaither, M. (2021). The history of homeschooling. In M. Gaither (Ed.), (pp. 5-31). Hoboken,

 NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. doi:10.1002/9781118926895.ch1 Retrieved from

 https://go.exlibris.link/ZWSMb4C9

Gladin, E. W. (1987). *Home education: Characteristics of its families and schools* Retrieved

 from https://go.exlibris.link/nV9S7ZGw

Goldberg, B. (1996). A liberal argument for school choice. *The American Enterprise*

 (Washington, D.C.), 7(5), 26.

Hamlin, D. (2020). Homeschool happens everywhere. *Education Next,* Retrieved from

 https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.vassar.edu/docview/2475144955?pq-origsite=sum

 mon

Hill, P. T. (2000, June 1,). How home schooling will change public education. Retrieved from

 https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-home-schooling-will-change-public-education

 /

History. (2019). Retrieved from https://eleducation.org/who-we-are/history

Holt, J. (1967). *How children learn*. New York, New York: Merloyd Lawrence Book by Da

 Capo Press Hachette Book Group.

Holt, J. (2004). *Instead of education: Ways to help people do things better* (4th ed.). New York,

 New York: Holt Associates, Inc.

Homeschool laws by state. Retrieved from https://hslda.org/legal

Homeschooling: Which model is right for you? (2016). Retrieved from

       https://thebestschools.org/magazine/homeschool-style-right/

How to comply with maine's homeschool law. (2020). Retrieved from

       https://hslda.org/post/how-to-comply-with-maines-homeschool-law

Isenberg, E. J. (2007). What have we learned about homeschooling? *Peabody Journal of*

       Education, 82(2-3), 387-409. doi:10.1080/01619560701312996

Janak, E. (2019). Education in the neoliberal period (1983–Present). (pp. 83-103). Cham:

       Springer International Publishing. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-24397-5_6 Retrieved from

       https://go.exlibris.link/3rDj3ydQ

Johnson, D. M. (2013). Confrontation and cooperation: The complicated relationship between

       homeschoolers and public schools. *Peabody Journal of Education, 88*(3), 298-308.

       doi:10.1080/0161956X.2013.796832

Kararo, M. J., & Knobloch, N. A. (2018). An analysis of education-related policies regarding

       the participation potential of homeschool students in agricultural education and FFA.

       Journal of Agricultural Education, 59(3), 36-58. doi:10.5032/jae.2018.03036

Katz, M. S. (1976). A history of compulsory education laws. fastback series, no. 75.

       bicentennial series. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED119389

Key to algebra, set of books 1-10. (2012). Retrieved from

       https://www.mheducation.com/prek-12/product/key-algebra-set-books-1-10-mcgraw-h

       ill/9781559530880.html

Kirchherr, J. W., & Charles, K. J. (2018). Enhancing the sample diversity of snowball samples: Recommendations from a research project on anti-dam movements in southeast asia. *PloS One, 13*(8), e0201710. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0201710

Koinzer, T., Nikolai, R., Waldow, F., & Springer (Firm). Ebook collection. (2017). *Private schools and school choice in compulsory education: Global change and national challenge*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. doi:10.1007/978-3-658-17104-9 Retrieved from https://go.exlibris.link/w49JdM2H

Kridel, C. (2010). *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (1st ed.) SAGE Publications.

Kunzman, R. (2021). Homeschooler socialization. In M. Gaither (Ed.), *The wiley handbook of home education* (pp. 135-156). Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. doi:10.1002/9781118926895.ch6 Retrieved from http://vassar.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwtV07b8IwELYYKra qqHfpUoQ8xdWgVmtgJOQ-dKir2wowc21E7EBClHfj1PT9ICKgDQwciZIyJc8f57nz fZ0IY7YbBhk0Ida6lYf7oKVzyFUhDkwJUxSpNM_yoDrcoD3-r2v5V8NiGojdA2h2E Xw6KDfgeVQCvqAR43fCP65nYUgfc334gCmU62Lz9dKKrwo5qL6dY-myoq7ZeVy bzlS_L16nnTw7R6_Gb61kDaqubHLDXWfTtspx67aWLL9EQAqc97lOQzsZFjl_EL5 eR4wXfssSO2bUaA3jSlR8brNc-DPm7t-E_n6hPuXjRRTB6b5AGhHGT7OOa3S-zM hSSngEkVLk1DILQ0NiDofwEEk_vVU5otcMd0uetn60HKtbTGJ6SY4M-6RhYCN7 9GdnTxbk5WttL65wcrorIL0h7XSydmlguyeitP3wdBP6si2AaxWke6FAwUIqlKgEegx agqIx6oeBM5DzGG6Zcs0gAhywBKakC4_pFPIsynSYJuyInwmAiioXFTqpr0omBof MlE5uz4qGADL29XEYgYi2ZYi3yaKc5tvvyX2PHYE3HtecxxudhXi3yUOtc77T8nN mOM5W3dxn1hhxV2nlLmov5t74jBz8YOIr5vZfzLxLcROQ

León, J., Medina-Garrido, E., & Ortega, M. (2018). Teaching quality: High school students'

    autonomy and competence. *Psicothema, 30*(2), 218-223.

    doi:10.7334/psicothema2017.23

Life of fred mathematics. (2021). Retrieved from

    https://www.lifeoffred.uniquemath.com/lof-university.php#.YiuRkO5uc6G

Lillard, A., & Else-Quest, N. (2006). Evaluating montessori education. *Science (American*

    Association for the Advancement of Science), 313(5795), 1893-1894.

    doi:10.1126/science.1132362

Lipman, P. (2013). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the*

    right to the city. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis. doi:10.4324/9780203821800 Retrieved

    from

    http://vassar.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwfV1LS8NAEB7U

    ehA8-KTx0QbBm5V0d5NsDgptaekP0B56WXab5GKp0qRB_70z2bQ2hQohEHZIyE

    yYV-b7FoCzZ6-z4xMSP04wF9WYHJvYRASdMWksdMpEGIQzWYdbbDBixWz-N

    yy9l7X2JQgZj4JDrLw82r2hN51u2iyUoTDuUz3GPC4xoHlhxbuzvqa2h84-0Kegv8m

    zHc7SeuZJUJEVihwXmNrq5VYoGp1BIyF8wjkcJIsL2nS5GtC4hCc0uYtOy61m2vTc

    tbDjH_czdd-XRi_cjfgVtEfDt8G4Yx-hqjaOMgwjaxjJLr-GU03j74u8hMnFTXB9ornB

    WBtiBSVMVxg_xbwgJn46EXMTOPCw9YqqmJe_YjNV08M_Qt2S2Y1imwOv2-pR

    edlYSO0uIFYe6wri-avfXBW2_8ccaK8VqsoHVFOoatgfWEM68Gj1rL4s44ZiKmPK

    U1JgcUleSEqVf-cONHfkArI3j6TApX3qu9m_dAsntmVMxx0c5ctVcr-2dQsavV6_P2

    mVHxiex_7kF5ir2Fs

Logan, S. R. (2018). A historical and political look at the modern school choice movement.

    International Journal of Educational Reform, 27(1), 2-21.

    doi:10.1177/105678791802700101

Lois, J. (2012). Looking back. () NYU Press. doi:10.18574/nyu/9780814752517.003.0006

    Retrieved from

    http://vassar.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwtV1LT8MwDLZY

    QQjtwlO8NQnBpXRL16RrD1yYhpg0TmwHTlXXZrDD2qnbkPj3OE3oSxMaBy5RF

    VmWY0e2k9pfAKx2kxgVnyBaHMcuNQU2jG1ZNnWC0AknIWuTicAbKbdbZG83

    5HP_anicQ9OLRto_GD9jihP4jVsAR9wEOFby4_JNrIQyjGdc7y909LgJT1NMBbrZz

    zLpQTxdFKtciltoIDhG7_qjr5Dz1e2AmT5UIpshZfHE26hUyyGPjZgG0A4TYGVrnaj

    DOlSgsn6tZPlETt4kKSAsqYBXp-FwNV_EXonaCz78OZJ49p3AMZ-F02D5wCNj9F

    qDmkOoBtsYe3sv2Z0YZq8mc5wUplMxcRVIUsZ0F25-ZGyhhK318sl2xUKmMNyH

    uugeaXSlTAewxaND8TS2KqM5grrSakNo9Rjun3rD7rOBbLx0ab-tzzoBLYojfgoNmw

    Vt8XMS44ZLbR6MTZ-GjLuEu6bLAnIGtxuxPN-Q7gL2crtfgrZMVvwKdj7x6OUn1

    0rD3ys1DWI

Macewan, A. (2020). *Has neoliberalism underfunded schools?*. Somerville: Economic Affairs

    Bureau. Retrieved from

    http://vassar.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwrV3dT9swED-xM

    WlIaDA-BmOrAtLgqWvrxHH6MKGqaqESUKGxCe0luvgDTWJJV7cP--_nc9LRTEj

    jYS9-8el0ie2zz77f_QBC9rHd_MsnxMaYSHKq-EQ8k4x1M8aE7LZ1WyA3cR1uUaZ

    D2UXyO7lK77RxMrEtVchWL-a0MbvdrDW6GQ9Pl8g05p_yX_Y-tdqNlLU4fQar9Ix

    Ja3Y0Hv5x0i7WLh-fiQqAEZjpcY_st5nhBkweLKqYE0r1S3nXiwKO_8fuTVgjN3fv

    QT2vYUXnW_ByAVa2W_DKM1ye2KDKN9yG43O0wZUufF4KVU_8EXjuJENoN

BWUVT3t6Q58GQ5u-ufNimyhecdizpsCE8OMTqIkDMOIUyTixkUhw47QKo66ym
TOct2JjHZHsExmnRCVO_9giO7UZMJdWEdKys9nHryn9iAQSaayGA3nQkYCDQr
DQ5EJJUQsRSz24QP9o7Ti23SNpRsJe4dza9OHn7UPx16O6lXklBAjy0uV1H1Af1w
TPKoLlpqSs4t_C40-X9WE3lRCpphNUaZLPSe1HqxwDEWuqZRWTcdBTVJOvv9c
1nO4mGqpW9L0ToO5LuY2ZVHiwtq2i0zfPsXUA1hjdAngAZLv4PlsOtfv4UU5jRq
w2vt2Peg33PTvjakd9Bp-Kbj28uula29H4jexyRnV

McCabe, M., Beláňová, A., & MacHovcová, K. (2021). The gift of homeschooling: Adult
homeschool graduates and their parents conceptualize homeschooling in north
carolina. *Journal of Pedagogy (Warsaw), 12*(1), 119-140. doi:10.2478/jped-2021-0006

McDonald, K. (2019). Homeschooling and educational freedom: Why school choice is good for
homeschoolers. Retrieved from
https://www.cato.org/briefing-paper/homeschooling-educational-freedom-why-school-
choice-good-homeschoolers

McGuinn, P. (2012). Stimulating reform: Race to the top, competitive grants and the obama
education agenda. *Educational Policy (Los Altos, Calif.), 26*(1), 136-159.
doi:10.1177/0895904811425911

Moore formula. Retrieved from https://www.moorehomeschooling.com/about/formula

Moore formula. (2022). Retrieved from https://www.mooreacademy.org/about/formula

Morrison, D., Annamma, S. A., & Jackson, D. D. (2017). *Critical race spatial analysis:
Mapping to understand and address educational inequity*. Herndon: Stylus Publishing,
LLC. Retrieved from
http://vassar.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwtV3PT8IwFG4UP

OjJnxF_pfFqMGzrNmriQRHjxZPIlZS1S4hsUzZI_O99r-vowAsePLBAR7bka9P3vdf

3vkeI59522mt7QgRegITdMpLhmIUCC0xiH8295MpnWvyzVm6xbBtqx_514mEMph

4Laf8w-cuHwgB8hyUAV1gEcF3jx8ufRnag6mEwE6gii4nTWhag1CDBQEAiPstiqU

w3wy1LXErxVil1BYmqsj-0Mof6mk8KmzSczXT7QrNp2XBCKpJElAk_4HVPbh7S

yObp2Ir-J8wRnk5NxrGJO4AtQ4FDz8Ydi-_pPK8Fy1YcUyfQB5xuKQS8pmi9eh8lzh

M5iYp7lbbf37ZJ0_WBhzVIEwxz_9UGzMBZD9AT2BP5BxgAMA5F_suCalow2Cd

NhbUiB2RLpYfYANvAdUSGFfwU4acGflrBf0cN-LTIqAWf6k8JPq2BTyvwj8nwuT_

ovbRNC4u28ICIcbAlinHBYmBSCsmZdGMMPQOtFB1HSqcbcxbGKgo8xSOhkB47

QgpXhkjVx653QhpplqpTQoF5Colh265E1cSQKwFsUQZjzmLGldsi1zVkRoupPm7P

Rytwb_CnoNMitEJ1pO-bROFR_7HHugy8TP9sk5edk127ci5Io5jN1SXZWYBbKGZ

XZoJ_AExMUCg

Murphy, J. (2012). *Homeschooling in america: Capturing and assessing the movement*.

Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin Press. Retrieved from

https://go.exlibris.link/Wc0FM6kn

Neuman, A., & Guterman, O. (2016). Academic achievements and homeschooling—It all

depends on the goals. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 51*, 1-6.

doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2016.08.005

Noel, A., Stark, P., & Redford, J. (2013). *Parent and family involvement in education, from the

national household education surveys program of 2012*. (). Washington, DC: U.S.

Dept of Education. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED544174.pdf

Our legacy. Retrieved from https://www.edchoice.org/who-we-are/our-legacy/

Parsons, A. (2019). When the public school system prioritizes control instead of children.

    Retrieved from

    https://www.alec.org/article/when-the-public-school-system-prioritizes-control-instead

    -of-children/

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks,

    CA: SAGE Publications.

Pedroni, T. C. (2013). *Market movements: African american involvement in school voucher*

    reform. New York: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203941355 Retrieved from

    https://go.exlibris.link/StVlFDX5

Petrovic, J. E., & Rolstad, K. (2017). Educating for autonomy: Reading rousseau and freire

    toward a philosophy of unschooling. *Policy Futures in Education, 15*(7-8), 817-833.

    doi:10.1177/1478210316681204

Ray, B. D. (2017). A systematic review of the empirical research on selected aspects of

    homeschooling as a school choice. *Journal of School Choice, 11*(4), 604-621.

    doi:10.1080/15582159.2017.1395638

Reilly, K. (2022). For black parents resisting white-washed history, homeschooling is an

    increasingly popular option. Retrieved from

    https://time.com/6151375/black-families-homeschooling/

Renzulli, L. A., Werum, R. E., & Kronberg, A. (2020). The rise of homeschooling regulation in

    the era of school choice: Legislative and judicial trends, 1972–2009. *Sociological*

    Forum, 35(2), 297-322. doi:10.1111/socf.12582

Romualdo Luiz Portela de Oliveira, & Luciane Muniz Ribeiro Barbosa. (2017a). Neoliberalism

    as one of the foundations of homeschooling. *Pro-Posições, 28*(2), 193.

    doi:10.1590/1980-6248-2016-0097

Romualdo Luiz Portela de Oliveira, & Luciane Muniz Ribeiro Barbosa. (2017b). Neoliberalism

    as one of the foundations of homeschooling. *Pro-Posições, 28*(2), 193.

    doi:10.1590/1980-6248-2016-0097

Rousseau, J. (1905). *Emile or, treatise on education* Appleton.

Sabol, J. M. (2018). *Homeschool parents' perspective of the learning environment: A*

    multiple-case study of homeschool partnerships Retrieved from

    https://go.exlibris.link/k31MYCpC

Sarajlic, E. (2019). Homeschooling and authenticity. *Theory and Research in Education, 17*(3),

    280-296. doi:10.1177/1477878519885360

Schmidtz, D., & Brighouse, H. (2020). *Debating education: Is there a role for markets?*. New

    York, NY: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from

    https://go.exlibris.link/D2KFBbmx

Schnoor, A. (2020). The life of a homeschooler. Retrieved from

    https://medium.com/focus-on-learning/the-life-of-a-homeschooler-713645580d1

Seif-Amirhosseini, Z. (2016). The growing trend of homeschooling in the washington

    metropolitan area muslim community. *American Journal of Islam & Society (Online),*

    33(2), 69-89. doi:10.35632/ajis.v33i2.234

Snyder, M.*Handbook of home education* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Stehlik, T. (2019). *Waldorf schools and the history of steiner education: An international view of 100 years*. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG. Retrieved from https://go.exlibris.link/XzqRkrcG

Tiboris, M., Danforth, S., & Department of Philosophy, Florida State University. (2016). Learning to occupy yourself: The substantive content of educating for autonomy. *Social Theory and Practice, 42*(3), 636-654. doi:10.5840/soctheorpract201642319

Travis, S. (2020). Portrait of a methodology: Portraiture as critical arts-based research. *Visual Arts Research, 46*(2), 100-114.

Viteritti, J. P. (2003). One defining equity: Politics, markets, and public policy. In A. Wolfe (Ed.), *School choice: The moral debate* (pp. 13-30). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Waisanen, D., & Kafka, J. (2020). Conflicting purposes in U.S. school reform: The paradoxes of arne duncan's educational rhetoric. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs, 23*(4), 637-674. doi:10.14321/rhetpublaffa.23.4.0637

Washington Post. (2012, -02-17). Should home-schoolers play on public school teams? *Washington Post* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/should-home-schoolers-play-on-public-school-teams/2012/02/17/gIQAiO0iKR_story.html

What is homeschooling and how does it work? (2020). Retrieved from https://hslda.org/post/what-is-homeschooling

Wilcock, N. (2021). Rousseau, dewey, and freire: A political and educational method.

    Metaphilosophy, 52(2), 255-279. doi:10.1111/meta.12483

Wolfe, A. (2002). In Alan Wolfe (Ed.), *School choice: The moral debate*. Princeton, N.J:

    Princeton University Press. Retrieved from

    http://vassar.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwdV3NT8IwFH9R

    uGg8KErADyDewbVbu-0KgXgx4aBem421RiSTwOTv97Xdls7IZUnTj-W9Nu-1r7_3

    K4BPJ974j01IQqniKJVhjCuMJkTSKFXoKSjhK6oS2Uy3qBPt6mcKDriTTHYOyNl

    hS9RITAMlNBf_uKdKN7KCOD-tJ6uiCPc8RzN9yjyvBW209_OXOg6DPopEnOgD

    G0fXqckqPadAYpMNZk9S1C8pe6qWrFkmtCaRsu2DczhP9l9ortCUFZpZNPvcKs2K

    -rGto0wVErIZfWnueK38judbXEJb6nSIKziReUe_8VziQa7hwhJ4jvCLxuYGhov56-x

    5bMcQZVhIpL6m9sLThN-FVv6dyx6MZEwyTonK8JAUcJpFK80XrxhR6OAij_Xh0

    RFHHDbmRncvGjL3oaOlFFtLlyF4wAn3-jByha5rl2_LqbliCLBj1yhC2EHXopo67Ot

    oRvz_02GlLltfYlvFfDoLAsZCbNE7poHb41V3cGbgeybocg-tYvcjH6r5GJSLaYAmlb

    3_Avwm018

Wright, B. A. (2015). *Homeschoolers returning to public school: Why do they come back?*

    Retrieved from

    http://vassar.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwpV1LSwMxEA7

    WehAF31itJf6A1ew23SReqtQWL4JCRfBSkuxEQejWPoT-eyf7qPWBF48hyzI7yc58

    M5nMR0gzOmPBN5sgIyeUsxZCoyxiCs6NU1wza2JhQpl8vW6RFxf6qzHFcpdWMj

    PdSWp91vzcE7Iy3-6Ot0dvgeeR8uetBalGhVR9a3Tc89Wrp_tu55cI3ltvtM1CtYrWT-

    WY_bDLmbPpbZHnUq4Ff8I7Qlw9Xqq-Lts4_kv6bbJxvXQcv0NWYLjreZyLmo89c

    ulZ1CdZo06EiXQM6KB8IoVOU5o3yKb57AV9fJnTJKWIJ-cUJQBqtH1t75N-r9vv3

    AQF50IwQkcdhFIxsICgSFoFGEyoCDRGjFJYaRAMJswZxZ1EVbVc6DjCJQlWOQ

ArAD-oeUA2tS_NH06zK3zJIaFxS1hEVlJEkeOhBC11qJNYgtQGjGU1Ui81NCh-oM

ngUz01crqYxq3vzzP0ENIZPhO3sngw5kd_v-KYrCPO4XnmpE5Wp-MZnJC1fO0ap

CIeeKPYJzi6ZXcfn4DPkQ

Appendix A

Initial Codes

What do you think of when you think of School Choices (DSC)

- Definition of School Choice

If you think of "homeschooling" what do you think of? (ENV)

- At what age did you begin homeschooling?

- Where did you homeschool?

Did you choose to homeschool? And if you did, did you ever change your mind about that? And were you met with your needs? And if you weren't, how did that effect you? (PC)

2 minutes to draw out initial thoughts

And it would be very helpful if you would add add to the map as talk

Can you give some background to your homeschooling experience?

- Can you give a bit about the general make-up of the homeschool environment? Were there other people homeschooled with you? (ENV)

- How would you describe your homeschooling curriculum? (CUR)

- Did religion play a part in your homeschooling experience? (REL)

- In what ways did you make choices in your homeschooling experience? In what ways did your parents make choices? (PC)

Certain questions were grouped together in initial coding because they covered similar themes. Environment (ENV) relates to anything about the homeschooling setting including whether or not the homeschooling took place in the home. This includes extracurriculars or siblings.

Parent/Student Choice (PC) relates to anything connected to choice in the educational

experience such as who was the deciding factor in the curriculum or whether to attend public

school.

Curriculum (CUR) relates to the actual learning material. This only includes learning material

that the interview participant considered part of the homeschooling curriculum. Some

participants considered what others would consider extracurriculars to be part of the

curriculum/learning materials.

Religion (REL) relates to anything connected to religion in the participant's experience, whether

that is in the homeschooling curriculum or outside of it.

Definition of School Choice (DSC) relates to how the participant conceptualizes the educational

system of school choice.

Future (FUT) relates to how participants feel homeschooling or a certain decision within their

educational journey affected the way they later on conducted themselves.

College as a Societal Pressure was a point that arose within multiple interviews. This code was

added not based on the set interview questions although did arise as a topic in some

conversations.

Memory/Retaining Information was a point that arose in a couple interviews. This code was

added not based on the set interview questions.

Transitions relates to anything connected to the transition between homeschooling and

public/private school or vice versa. This code was added not based on the set interview

questions, but arose during some conversations.