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REMS 5013: Research Design & Methodology

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Home Schooling and its Socialization Motivations

A growing number of American Families are choosing to home school their children. According to the Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 850,000 students were being homeschooled in 1998. The National Home Education Research Institute indicates that number now stands at around 3,000,000. (Lips, Feinberg, USA Today, 2009)

In Family Ties: Relationships, Socialization, and Home Schooling, Gary Wyatt provides a brief glimpse into the lives of some home schooling families and a cursory qualitative analysis of the factors that compel parents to home school their children. Wyatt devotes a relatively large portion of his work to the most prominent public criticism of home schooling: the question of “socialization.” Home schooling parents are often asked how their children can possibly “be socialized” if they do not attend conventional schools with their peers. The home schooling subculture has developed numerous responses to this question, and Wyatt’s chapter serves as a slightly more scholarly version of that argument. Drawing from the field of education, he presents an abbreviated review of some research on peer influence in schools, to argue that, in some cases and for some children, conventional schools provide inappropriate and undesirable socialization. (Contemporary Sociology, Nov 2008.)

Parents give many different reasons for homeschooling their children. In 2007, the most common reason parents gave as the most important was a desire to provide religious or moral instruction (36 percent of students). This reason was followed by a concern about the school environment (such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure) (21 percent), dissatisfaction with academic instruction (17 percent), and “other reasons” including family time, finances, travel, and distance (14 percent). Parents of about 7 percent of homeschooled students cited the desire to provide their child with a nontraditional approach to education as the most important reason for homeschooling, and the parents of another 6 percent of students cited a child’s health problem or special needs. (U. S. Department of Education. Washington)

Searching the literature one can find that the socialization process connected to home schooling choices needs a more in depth study. There are some prevailing early studies showing homeschooling and socialization skills may be on the positive side. “Looking particularly at

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socialization, (Stough, 1992) compared 30 home-schooling families and 32 conventionally schooling families, families with children 7-14 years of age. According to the findings, children who were schooled at home “gained the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to function in society…at a rate similar to that of conventionally schooled children.” The researcher found no difference in the self concept of children in the two groups. Stough maintains that “insofar as self concept is a reflector of socialization, it would appear that few home-schooled children are socially deprived, and that there may be sufficient evidence to indicate that some home-schooled children have a higher self concept than conventionally schooled children. (Eric Digest No. 94).

Dan Lips, Evan Feinberg, USA Today, Farmingdale: Sep 2009. Vol. 138, Iss. 2772; pg. 22

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