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Socialization Within Homeschooling

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Abstract

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by

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MM, Manhattan School of Music, 2009

BS, Manhattan School of Music, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

There is limited research on how homeschooled children socialize and how homeschooling parents view their socialization practices. More research could help parents be more effective in providing socialization experiences to enhance homeschooling. This study was conducted to develop a better understanding of parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school-aged children. The research questions also explored in what ways parents make socialization a component of homeschooling practices. Medlin's three foci of socialization (i.e., social activity, influence, and exposure) were used as the conceptual framework. Using a basic qualitative approach, semi structured interviews were conducted with eight homeschooling parents. Open-ended coding of their responses resulted in five emergent themes. Parents perceived homeschooling provides their children with the opportunity to interact with people from all walks of life and fosters self-development and self-directedness. They also perceived family creates community and culture and that homeschooling parents employed strategies for organized socialization and encouraged organic socialization. Educators and homeschooling parents may constructively use these findings to integrate socialization into learning and for increased understanding of how children make friends and upon what those friendships may be based. Positive social change may result from children supported in socialization that results in engagement with difference and increased civic involvement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Children have been educated at home throughout U.S. history (McMullen, 2002). In the early years of the United States, homeschooling was the norm based on its practicality. In the 1850s and 1860s, homeschooling was later replaced to a considerable extent by a central education system run by the government at both the federal and state levels (Jolly et al., 2012). This shift in educational practice was the result of various societal changes, most notably the industrial revolution and immigration that required a central compulsory education system to support a proficient, cohesive, and competent workforce (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009). These changes altered the prevalence of home-based education, thereby affecting its growth, transformation, and uncommonness at various times since the founding of the United States.

Home-based education reemerged in the second half of the 20th century, offering an alternative method of education from that of public schooling. Parents who elected home-based education valued more involvement in their children's education and control over curriculum and instruction (Jolly et al., 2012). Previously, the education of children had been dictated primarily by practicality and need as deemed essential by the local, state, and federal departments of education. In contrast, the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century put the focus on parental choice and involvement. Parents seeking the most appropriate schooling for their children considered not only the academic needs of their children but also what was best suited for their emotional and social development (Lebeda, 2005). Whereas many parents believed the public school system to be the best avenue to meet the social and emotional needs of their

children, Lebeda's (2005) found that home-based education offered more opportunities for children to grow socially and emotionally

A primary question many prospective homeschooling parents have is how their children will make friends and socialize with peers (Kraftl, 2013). The social component plays an integral part in the emotional, social and overall development and well-being of children (Ekind, 2005). The experiences children have with peers during childhood greatly affects their social and academic development (Gardner, 1982). Numerous studies conducted on the interaction between homeschooling and socialization have found that homeschooled adolescents possess a strong commitment to social responsivity and go on to lead emotionally healthy lives as adults (Medlin, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Ray, 2015). In addition to positive social and emotional effects, Ray (2000) found that the homeschooled children, on average scored at or above the 80th percentile in all academic areas tested.

Though there is vast research available concerning the potential for positive social outcomes from homeschooling (Firmin et al., 2019), little research has been conducted on the actual socialization practices of homeschooled children (Pearlman-Avnion & Grayevsky, 2019) and how the parents of homeschooled children perceive those practices to affect their children's social and emotional development (Mazama, 2015). Though research has shown that homeschooled children grow up to be socially responsible and emotionally well-adjusted adults (Medlin, 2013), there is a gap in the research on how parents view and approach socialization between their children and their peers (Ray, 2015). Parents who are exploring the option of homeschooling would benefit from

learning how experienced parents of homeschoolers view the socialization component. This study may provide information and insights for prospective homeschooling parents concerning their expectations for their children making and maintaining friendships while homeschooling. Furthermore, the study addressed how the execution of homeschooling practices addresses the social and emotional development of children.

In Chapter 1, I provide background information on homeschooling from an historical perspective to its modern-day relevance. Following the background is a presentation of the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, and nature of the study. These elements are followed by a discussion of the definitions, assumptions, scope and limitations, and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points of the chapter.

Background

To date, compulsory education laws demand all children attend public or state-accredited, private school for a set period of time (Glymour & Manly, 2018). Compulsory education is also known as standard education with specified curriculum. The only exemption from compulsory education is homeschooling, which has its own set of requirements as mandated by the state (Jolly et al., 2012). Prior to the establishment of the compulsory education system, in the early years of U.S. history, homeschooling was the primary method by which children were educated. Homeschooling was born out of a need for basic education, including acquisition of fundamental skills, such as reading and writing.

Homeschoolers of today are drawn to it in spite of other numerous schooling options available (Firmin et al., 2019; Wimhelm & Firmin, 2009). Whether parents cite academic, religious, or other reasons for homeschooling, the basis lies in parental control (Firmin et al., 2019). Educational reformers emphasized the benefits of parents as teachers in the home setting. Holt (1964) was a renowned educational reformer and progressive pedagogical thinker of the mid to late 20th century who advocated that parents remove their children from formal learning institutions because the parents could more effectively educate their children than the compulsory system could. Though believing that teachers in the compulsory education system were well intentioned, Holt maintained that the very nature of a standard classroom, which encourages the memorization of correct answers rather than self-directed learning, could not match a natural, home-based learning environment (McMullen, 2002).

Moore (1994), also a renowned educational reformer, drove the second push for the reemergence of homeschooling. Moore's advocacy of homeschooling focused on religious considerations, including personal values and beliefs that were not taught or recognized in the public-school system (McMullen, 2002). Many parents found homeschooling to offer them freedom from the secular infringement they believed to have a foothold in the public-school system (Kunzman, 2010).

Religious concerns continue to be held by a significant percentage of homeschooling parents, and they are joined by a growing number of parents with numerous other concerns about the public-school system (Gaither, 2009). The 2016 National Household Education Survey by the National Center for Education Statistics

found that 72% of respondents cited dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at public schools as a primary reason for homeschooling, and 90% responded to having a concern as to the overall environment of public schools (Cui & Hanson, 2019).

Other researchers have reported on additional specific reasons for homeschooling. A prevalent reason is the instillation of family values (Kunzman, 2010). Some parents want to focus on specific material, such as family history/heritage, to instill and foster individual identity (Mazama, 2015). Some parents want to protect their children from threats, such as bullying and other safety concerns, which they felt were prevalent in the public-school system (Hannah, 2012). Other parents turn to homeschooling in order to give attention to their special needs or gifted children (Olmstead, 2015). Parents often veer away from standard schooling because of what they see as limitations. As they better understand the homeschooling process, they gravitate toward homeschooling for its positive attributes and come to view homeschooling as a favorable action rather than a reaction against the limitations of public education (Medlin, 2000).

Homeschooling continues to be accepted as a sound approach to educating children because it offers more diverse societal appeal as a method that has adapted to society and technology and offers a schooling option for parents of different backgrounds (Gaither, 2009; Guterman & Neuman, 2017). Gaither (2009) explained that "Home schooling is blending with other education movements to lead the way toward a 21st century education matrix that is far more dynamic and adaptive than the schooling patterns of the past" (p. 1). Gaither debunked the stereotypical view that homeschooling is an isolated medium that cuts off children from other children because they do not share

classrooms with peers. Guterman and Neuman (2017) found that homeschooled children are involved in a large variety of social activities with peers and the adults in their lives even though their experiences are not relegated to one specific learning environment.

Gaither (2009) discussed how those unfamiliar with homeschooling would often stereotype homeschooled children as likely to be socially awkward. This notion comes from the fact that homeschooled children are not in a standard classroom for hours every day; thus, a commonly held assumption is that being in school with other children automatically guarantees social connectivity. This prompts questions for parents as to how their children will make friends if homeschooled in comparison to going to a standard school (Firmin et al., 2019).

Whether the outcomes are found as positive or negative, parents' perceptions of their children's social life may be based on what they think transpires in a standard school environment (Medlin, 2013). How their children make friends is considered helped by being in school (Lebeda, 2007). However, parents can play a more significant role in the socialization process of their children in the home setting. The research literature indicates limited understanding of how parents perceive the socialization of their children through home-based education (Guterman et al., 2017; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). This study was needed to answer questions surrounding how homeschooling parents perceive the way in which homeschooling affects the socialization of their children, how homeschooling parents incorporate socialization methods as a primary focus in their homeschooling curriculum, and how homeschooled children socialize with peers.

Problem Statement

Little research has been done regarding the actual socialization practices of homeschooled children; specifically, how the parents of homeschooled children view and influence the socialization of their children (Mazama, 2015). Current research has found there are positive social outcomes associated with homeschooling (Firmin et al., 2019; Murphy, 2013). The literature shows that homeschooled students have a strong commitment to social responsivity (Green-Hennessy, 2014; Guterman & Neuman, 2017) and grow up to lead emotionally heathy lives rich in socialization and positive friendships with peers (Ray, 2015).

More research is needed on how homeschooling parents take into account stereotypical assumptions about their children lacking social skills and community competence (Firmin et al., 2019) and homeschooling parents' perceptions of how socialization plays into the education of their children. Ray (2015) suggested that more research is needed regarding which homeschooling practices help integrate socialization. Prospective homeschooling parents could benefit from such research in response to the question of how their children would make friends in a home learning environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how homeschooling parents view socialization within their homeschooling practices. Based on the gap in the current research on the role socialization plays in the life of homeschooled children, the goal of this study was to provide an increased understanding of how socialization is implemented into homeschooling practices so that parents seeking clarity on the matter have a well-

informed perspective. In this study, I sought to understand parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school-aged children. In addition, I examined how these parents perceive the role of peers concerning social development of their children and explored homeschooling practices parents use to foster socializing of their children. This study was undertaken with the intention that it answer queries from educators and potential homeschooling parents on the topic of socialization among homeschooled children.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school-aged children?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): In what ways, if any, do parents make socialization a component of homeschooling practices?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

I used the concept of socialization as described by Medlin (2013, 2015) as the primary conceptual framework for this study. Socialization is defined as the manner by which individuals learn and attain the rules, values, and behaviors of their society (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). Acknowledging that socialization has varying interpretations, Medlin (2013) named three foci through which to better understand socialization:

- Social activity: The interaction homeschooled children have with friends and peers.

- Social influence: Teaching children how to navigate social norms.

- Social exposure: How children understand the cultures and values of those around them.

. Thirteen years after the initial major study on the connection of socialization and homeschooling, Medlin conducted a second review on the same topic and found that the three original, descriptive foci regarding socialization remained prevalent. Medlin found these foci to still be an insightful tool in researching the interactions of socializations and homeschooling. Medlin's three socialization foci served as the framework for this study and offered guidance to the development of the research and interview questions.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I employed basic qualitative methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to examine parents' perceptions of the phenomenon of socialization among homeschooled children. Data were collected virtually through semistructured interviews with eight parents who were homeschooling their elementary school-aged children. Open coding of the data illuminated key themes in the socialization process of homeschooled children.

Definitions

Compulsory education: The Education Act of 1880 required elementary education to be compulsory for children between the ages of 6 to 10 years old. Further legal adjustments altered the compulsory age for education as guided by individual state mandates, shifting the age for mandatory education between the ages of 5 and 18 years old, depending on each specific state (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012).

Homeschooling: Also known as home-based education. The act of education in the home setting or an environment other than that of a standard school milieu. Parents are most often the primary educators in homeschooling along with outside tutors and specialized classes deemed advantageous (Holt & Farenga, 2003).

Socialization: The procedure by which humans learn, adjust, and develop behaviors from interactions with the world around them (Erikson, 1950). Socialization is the "process whereby people acquire the rules of behavior and systems of beliefs and attitudes that equip a person to function effectively as a member of a particular society" (Durkin, 1995, p. 614).

Assumptions

I assumed that the socialization of their children, in addition to academic education, is important to the parents who participated in this study. Thus, I assumed that homeschooling parents would be open to talk about how their children make friends and function socially. The third assumption concerned my focus on parents of elementary-aged children because this is the age in which socialization begins and manifests exponentially in the developmental process (see Medlin, 2015). In terms of the sample, I assumed that having a participant pool of eight to 12 parents would lend to rich data and that a geographical spread of participants from two different regions of the United States would lead to findings that are less idiosyncratic.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was to interview parents from five families (ideally 10 parents) over a geographical span from the east coast of the United States to the midwest.

A primary delimitation was that the study focused on eight mothers in two-parent families. Another delimitation was the focus on elementary school-aged children. Other delimitations included choosing families to whom I had access through Zoom and email as well as the limited focus on interviewing parents, not the children.

Limitations

Limitations of the study included the small sample size and relying on only the parents' perceptions, and not including the children. Another primary limitation of the study was that it focused on the present and did not explore how parents feel about the socialization of their children after the schooling process has been completed.

Significance

In this study, I attempted to understand how homeschooling parents address stereotypical concerns concerning the socialization practices of their children. Understanding how homeschooled children make friends and get along with other children and peers can advance knowledge on how homeschooled children develop socially and emotionally. The goal was to provide insight for potential contributions to future policies and practices for prospective homeschooling parents by identifying specific practices regarding social interactions between homeschooled children and the world around them. Research has shown that homeschoolers are concerned with social responsibility and are positive contributors to their communities (Guterman et al., 2017). Therefore, further understanding of the connection between socialization practices and these found outcomes can promote future positive social change with the homeschooling community and related education fields.

Summary

Throughout U.S. history children have participated in home-based education due to either a fundamental need for knowledge as seen in the preindustrial revolution years (Jolly et al., 2012) or as made evident later in the 20th century by the resurgence of homeschooling made possible by the religious and pedagogical philosophies of Moore (1994) and Holt (1997). Homeschoolers of today are predominately concerned with pedagogical reasons for homeschooling rather than core values or religious interest (Jolly et al., 2012; Pearlman-Avnion & Grayevsky, 2019).

Whether students are educated in a standard public-school setting or learn at home, the experiences they have with peers during their childhood greatly affects their social and academic development (Gardner, 1982; Jolly et al., 2012; Ray, 2015). A review of the literature revealed that a primary concern with the exercise of homeschooling centers on how homeschooled children make friends. Though the literature shows that homeschooled students have a strong commitment to social responsivity (Green-Hennessy, 2014) and grow up to lead emotionally heathy lives fluent in socialization and positive friendships with peers (Ray, 2013), stereotypical concerns regarding developing positive social skills still exist. Because homeschooling parents are deeply involved in the education and day-to-day activities of their children, they have a significant role in the socialization of their children (Guterman et al., 2017).

There is limited understand of how homeschooled children socialize, and the topic has been the subject of scant research (Ray, 2013). Therefore, in Chapter 2, I analyze and review empirical literature and research related to how homeschooling parents perceive

the effects of homeschooling practices on the socialization of their children. In Chapter 2, I also investigate previous research related to which elements of homeschooling practices parents perceive as playing an important role in the socialization process and in what ways parents make socialization a focal point in the homeschooling environment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Throughout U.S. history children have participated in home-based education due to either a fundamental need for knowledge as seen in the preindustrial revolution years (Jolly et al., 2012) or as made evident later in the 20th century by the resurgence of homeschooling made possible by the religious and pedagogical philosophies of Moore (1994) and Holt (1997). Homeschoolers of today are predominately concerned with pedagogical reasons for homeschooling rather than core values or religious interest (Jolly et al., 2012; Pearlman-Avnion & Grayevsky, 2019).

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parents perceive the effects of homeschooling practices on the socialization of their children. Chapter 2 also includes an investigation of what specific elements of homeschooling practices parents perceive as playing an important role in the socialization process and in what ways do parents make socialization a focal point in the homeschooling environment.

In this chapter, I describe the search strategy used for the review of literature. The conceptual framework, centering on the theory of socialization and related components, is also discussed. Key themes explored in the literature review include stereotypical assertions and misconceptions of homeschooling, which include subsections on socialization, academic achievement, debates over standardized tests, and parental band student isolation. Other themes include practices within homeschooling to foster socialization with subsections on making friends, freedom of environment, and technological innovations. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate literature for this review, I searched the following keywords and phrases in Education Source, Google Scholar, ERIC, Walden Library search and JOSTER: *socialization and homeschooling, homeschooling disadvantages, homeschooling advantages, social activities in homeschooling, social influence in homeschooling, social exposure of school aged children, homeschooling studies, homeschooling methodology, educational approaches through homeschooling, community and homeschooling, societal influence on homeschooling, homeschooling practices* and *homeschooling trends.*

Literature was also found from references cited in other relevant peer-reviewed articles and sources.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study centered on socialization. The act of socialization is not relegated to a time or to a location (Steiner, 1906/1996) and can be viewed from various vantage points (Medlin, 2000). For the purposes of this study, socialization was defined as the "process whereby people acquire the rules of behavior and systems of beliefs and attitudes that equip a person to function effectively as a member of a particular society" (Durkin, 1995, p. 614). This definition is similar to an earlier one provided by Erikson (1950): the manner by which individuals learn, develop, and adjust their behaviors is derived from their social interactions with the world around them.

Over 30 years of personal research and the analysis of the research of others on the topic of socialization and homeschooling, Medlin (2013) found that rather than using a broad understanding of socialization, an in-depth study requires a narrower focus that can be accomplished with three socialization foci:

- Social activity: The interaction homeschooled children have with friends and peers.

- Social influence: Teaching children how to navigate social norms.

- Social exposure: How children understand the cultures and values of those around them (Medlin, 2000, p. 107).

I used Medlin's socialization foci as the framework for this study and to develop the RQs.

Previous researchers found the first social foci, social activity, to be the most prevalent concern for both homeschooling parents and those questioning the socialization aspect of home-based education (Medlin, 2000/2013; Ray, 2015; Romanowski, 2006). In much of the research on socialization regarding homeschooling, social influence and social exposure were found to be relevant and strongly connected to social activity and not isolated foci (Medlin, 2013). Medlin (2000) explained that the three foci are variations of the interpretations of socialization by people with different viewpoints.

The three foci target specific themes throughout previous research studies. Though often not mentioned by name, Medlin (2013) found that the meaning of each of the foci were relevant throughout the literature. These three foci always circle back to the central theme of socialization and how children learn and develop through interaction with the world around them (Medlin, 2013). In this literature review, I show the interplay of the three foci and their importance to understanding the socialization that occurs within the homeschooling context.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

To date, the scholarly literature on homeschooling remains limited (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Among the limitations is the unavailability of demographic data that is a result of inattention to data collection by many government educational organizations (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020/2013) and inconsistencies among the states. Some states require homeschoolers to register and keep meticulous records, while other states keep no records at all; therefore, those seeking an accurate overall account of homeschoolers and their methodologies are disadvantaged (Carlson, 2020). When there are limitations in

reliable quantitative data, researchers tend to conduct qualitative studies with small sample sizes (Pearlman-Avnion & Grayevsky, 2019).

Brian Ray, Ph.D. independently and in conjunction with the National Home Education Research Institute has been the dominant contributor to research-based homeschooling advocacy (Ray, 2000,2013,2015). Another leading contributor to homeschooling research has been the Home School Legal Defense Association, which has funded the school choice conversation through initiatives, such as the Global Home Education Exchange conferences that are held to broaden schooling options for parents around the world (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020).

Along with private organizations, a select group of independent researchers have dedicated years to the study of homeschooling and have published findings over the past 20–30 years, such as Medlin (2013), Guterman and Neuman (2017), Romanowski (2006), Beck (2010), and Pearlman-Avnion and Grayevsky (2019). These researchers often revisited previously published work with critiques and reassessments. Their interpretations have highlighted specific factors that inform and clarify assertions on homeschooling that are well founded and those that require further investigation.

Medlin (2013) wrote an article "Home Schooling and the Question of Socialization Revisited," in which the author reaffirmed the main assertions and conclusions originally published in 2000. Though the two studies were 13 years apart, Medlin found that socialization has an integral place in homeschooling practices and that the three foci of socialization were a useful tool in narrowing the focal point of the

research on the topic. My literature search was guided by Medlin's (2000) three foci:

social activity, social influence, and social exposure.

Stereotypical Assertions and Misconceptions of Homeschooling

Though homeschooling was the main method of education prior to 1850 and once

again became popular in the 1970s, stereotypical misconceptions and assertions about

homeschooling remain (Jolly et al., 2012). Brooke Haugh (2014), a homeschooling

mother and PhD student in Education, wrote an article in the *Journal of Unschooling and*

Alternative Learning where she explained how her number one concern in consideration

to homeschool was the socialization of her children. Haugh explained that "what about

socialization?" was the first question anyone asked her when she told them she was going

to homeschool. Haugh explained that throughout her experience homeschooling, she had

confidence that her children had and would continue to have opportunities for

socialization which, like the rest of homeschooling, would contribute to their healthy

social development.

Socialization

Ray (2013) explained that homeschooling parents refer to this as the "S" question

because nearly all homeschoolers, both parents and students, encounter the "what about

socialization?" question throughout and after their homeschooling experience. Haugh

(2014) wrote that the question, "How will your kids make friends?" t(a reference to the

social activity focus) is often a follow-up question. Another follow-up question is "How

will your kids learn proper behavior?" (a reference to social influence) and "How will

your kids learn about different people and how to get along in society?" (a reference to

social exposure). These questions are commonplace given that the institutionalization of educating children aged 6–18 years old has been the societal norm for multiple generations (Ray, 2013).

Current research has indicated that development of social awareness skills and civic values "is not dependent on whether a child is educated at school or at home" (Perlman-Avnion & Grayevsky, 2019). In their mixed-method study, Perlman-Avnion and Grayevsky (2019) found no significant differences between public-schooled and homeschooled students in the realm of their social self-efficacy and civic engagement exercises. In their qualitative study, Guterman and Neuman (2017) found that homeschooled children interact with a large variety of people on a regular basis in numerous venues and have shown to grow into socially responsible adults. These findings concur with the concept that the act of socialization is not relegated to a time or more importantly to a location (Kay & King, 2020; Steiner, 1906/1996).

Contradictory to the stereotypical belief that homeschooled children are emotionally and socially inept (Firmin et al., 2019), many studies conducted over the past 20 years found that homeschooled students showed to be emotionally healthy children (Grant, 2011; Lebeda, 2007; Mazama, 2015; Medlin, 2013, 2020). In a study of 74 sets of African American homeschooling parents and students, Mazama (2015) found that the homeschooled children in the study grew up to be adults committed to doing their part for their communities and society. Mazama found that because these parents made identity a significant portion of the curriculum, their children had a great sense of self as well as social responsibility and respected both themselves and people from other cultures, races,

and ethnicities. Grant (2011) had similar findings and observed that homeschooled students connect to their community and feel a deep sense of social responsibility.

In a qualitative study, Grant (2011) also found that participants reported to have close friendships with other children both within and outside of the schooling arena. Grant discovered that students connected with other students of similar interests through digital technology, such as online classes, student chat groups and online study sessions, regardless of their peers' schooling status. Kraftl (2013) had similar findings to those of Grant. Building friendships based on commonalities has been found to unite children and promote positive social engagement (Johnson, 2013). When children interact with peers of similar interests, such as those of sports, other extracurricular activities, or academic subjects, they bond in a natural and organic fashion (Medlin, 2013).

Homeschooling allows for organic social bonding between peers because homeschooling practices offer a greater number of social encounters for students because the curriculum is generally based largely on the individual interests of students (Murphy, 2014). Kris Bales (2020), a homeschooling mom of 25 years and founder of a homeschooling website and blog, explained that rather than having friends chosen for them by a predetermined class structure created by a public-school demographic, homeschooled kids choose friendships based on common interests, such as sports, music, art, and literature. In addition, she explained how homeschooled children are apt to meet peers of similar interests through their pursuit of hobbies, such as community theater or drama clubs, dance, sports and volunteering.

In their mixed-method study concerning the place of new technologies within schooling practices, Furlong and Davies (2012) surveyed 1,069 students aged 8 to 21 years old concerning their use of new technologies in both schooling and home areas on interest. They found that homeschooled children often had a larger social circle than students in the public schools and more chances to interact with other children of the same or differing age range. The authors concluded that homeschooling learning practices encourage freedom to learn through numerous venues while engaging with like-minded peers. According to Hanna (2011), homeschooling parents work hard to adapt to new innovations to better aid their children both academically and socially.

In a 10-year, mixed-method, longitudinal study of 250 homeschooling families, Hanna (2011) found that homeschooling parents enthusiastically take on new methods and techniques to meet the academic and social needs of their children. The homeschoolers studied by Hanna contained a vast and diverse demographic that unanimously agreed that socialization was made part of the curriculum through parental direction and guidance on each child's individual interests. Echoing the findings of Hanna, Baidi (2019) concluded that homeschooling parents make socialization activities a priority and perceive their children to have positive peer relationships with other children. In addition, homeschooling parents also perceive their children to have an abundance of social opportunities that gives them a diverse circle of friends (Firmin et al., 2019). In accordance with Furlong and Davies (2012), Firmin et al. (2012), and Baidi, Ray (2015) found socialization to be a priority and prominently positive aspect of home-based education due to the importance placed upon it by parents.

Despite a plethora of research citing positive social outcomes of homeschooling, misconceptions and myths on how homeschoolers socialize remain among nonhomeschoolers (Firmin et al., 2019). Romanowski (2006) explained that a common argument against homeschooling is that sheltering children from the real world deprives them from needed knowledge and social interaction, and since homeschooled children do not attend school, they are therefore socially disadvantaged. This concept presupposes homeschooled children interact only with their families and have limited exposure to the outside world, an assumption that is strongly opposed by modern day homeschoolers and contradictory to research findings such as those listed above (Firmin et al., 2019).

In response to the assumptions of homeschooling critics, veteran homeschoolers, such as the Colfaxs (1988), have cited both research findings and their own experience on the matter of socialization with homeschooling. Though they wrote their book on homeschooling over 30 years ago, current literature shows that the Colfaxs's belief that homeschooled children are properly socially adept is a belief shared by modern day homeschoolers. Homeschooling parents believe their children to be socially well rounded and equipped on how to get along with a wide range of people (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). Guterman and Neuman (2017) found that many of the social encounters of homeschooled children were linked to community social activities that were based on common community goals rather than age or demographic. Homeschooling parents perceive homeschooling practices to enable their children to develop and mature in the real world, with people of all races and gender, and that it broadens world understanding and social responsibility (Mazama, 2015).

Socialization is a crucial element of the homeschooling process, one that homeschooling parents take very seriously (Forrester, 2017). Socialization-related concerns with the public-school system were the primary reason 67% of homeschooling parents homeschool their children (McQuiggan et al., 2017). The research literature shows that many homeschooling parents did not like the social exposure their children were having and what they felt to be negative socialization outcomes in the public-school arena (e.g., bullying, peer-pressure and primarily cultural differences). These parents homeschool, in part, to build "personalized resistance against a broader culture that does not reflect their values" (McQuiggan et al., 2017 p. 276) and to offer a more expansive range of opportunities for social and individual needs (Medlin, 2013).

Academic Achievement

Hanna (2012) indicated that many critics of homeschooling cite lack of teaching credentials by parents as a natural hindrance to ensuring a proper education for children. Critics of homeschooling also cite lack of experience and knowhow on the part of parents as primary concerns on the quality of teaching methodology and practice (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Homeschooling parents counter these claims of inevitable incompetence by explaining that the art of home-based education allows parents the time, freedom, and resources to evaluate what practices and methods can best facilitate learning by their children. Though these parents may not have certification to teach in the public-school system, review of the literature showed that a high percentage of homeschooling parents have attended some degree of higher education and exhibit resourcefulness and commitment when planning how to educate their children (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

Debates Over Standardized Tests

Critics of homeschooling are preponements of standardized tests as an important factor when evaluating the educational progression of students. Given that homeschoolers are not tested as regularly as public-school students, critics surmise that the evaluation of academic progress of homeschooled children is lacking (Yu et al., 2016). Though standardized testing procedures have been disparaged by many leading psychologists and educators for not having the capacity to assess multiple intelligences of students (Gardner, 2006), they are still exercised more than any other method due to their application to the majority study body. Application to the mass is one primary objection homeschooling parents express on the matter of standardized tests (Furlong & Davies, 2012). Many homeschoolers want their children taught and academically assessed on an individual evaluation basis (Martin-Chang et. al. 2011).

Critics of homeschooling and proponents of standardized testing believe that all children should not be academically assessed in a general manner (Medlin, 2013). Homeschoolers contest that assumption by explaining that educational progression can be calculated in numerous ways (Gardner, 2011) and that standardized tests do not account for all academic advancement (Hardenbergh, 2015). Though children in a public classroom may be of similar age and demographic, their learning may differ greatly based on their unique set of intelligences (Gardner, 1999). Having a standard curricula and testing method does not lend to the possibility that students learn and develop in different ways (Elkind, 1976). Though homeschooling parents suggest that not all methods of evaluation should be subjected to standardized practices they do fervently cite numerous

studies which favorably compare the test scores of homeschooled kids to those in the public-school system (Lubienski et al., 2013).

Critics of homeschooling also suggest that homeschooled students do not receive the same level of education as public-school students and consequently will have trouble taking standardized tests for college admission (Romanowski, 2006). Homeschoolers contest this notion by citing numerous studies which indicate homeschooled students to test on par or at a higher level than their public-school counterparts (Baidi, 2019). While some studies found little or no difference in grade point averages and standardized tests scores between homeschooled and public-schooled children of the same demographic (Bennet et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2016), other studies found homeschooled students to have significantly higher grade point average and ACT composite scores than their public-school counterparts (Firmin et al., 2019; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Lubienski et al., 2013; Ray, 2015).

Another area of criticism for homeschooling is a lack of structure in the homeschool environment (Medlin, 2013). Critics of homeschooling claim that home-based education lacks a central system of learning which instills structure and schedule for students (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). The literature reveals that a wide range of structure exists among homeschoolers and the curricula chosen for each homeschooling family. While some families elect to use standard curricula that could be found in a public-school setting, others choose a less structured approach often exercising elements of Montessori or other "learning through experience" routines (Firmin et al., 2019). The literature also showed that many homeschooling parents elect to hire private, well-trained

teachers to come into their homes to teach subjects that they feel need further expertise than the parents can offer (Ray, 2015). Modern day homeschoolers use technology and the availability of online classes, resources, instructors, methods and easily assessable material (Furlong & Davies, 2012) for educational purposes as well.

Critics of homeschooling also contend that students learn more when in a classroom environment with peers of the same age and demographic (Guzerman & Nueman, 2017; Romanowski, 2006). Homeschoolers agree that socialization is an important element in the learning process (Medlin, 2013). However, the literature showed that homeschooling parents perceive socialization to play a vital role in the education of their children in far more numerous ways than just that of the classroom setting (Firman et al., 2019). Homeschooled students learn alongside peers of various backgrounds thereby encouraging understanding of diversity and societal differences (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b). The social encounters of homeschooled children in relation to learning is considered very important and varies from one homeschooling family to another due to the use of different educational methodologies (Ray, 2015). The number of educational social encounters varies between homeschooling families as does the demographic of peers included in those social experiences (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b).

Homeschoolers assert that their children have more opportunity to learn and grow both academically and socially than public school children because homeschooling encompasses many forms of learning circumstances such as group learning, one on one tutoring, in home learning as well as on site learning and online courses (Firmin et al., 2019). Homeschoolers also believe that children grow and more fully develop socially

and academically than public school children because homeschooled children interact with differing ages and demographical groups enabling them to better learn from other cultures and understandings (Mazama, 2015; Medlin, 2013).

Through observation of 74 sets of African American homeschooling parents and students, Mazama (2015) found a commonality which united participants was their strong sense of identity as African Americans which they considered an important element in both education and social responsibility. Through the subject article Mazama illustrated how homeschooling practices offer attention and guidance for individual needs such as ethnic group identity, personal values, religion and philosophy while appreciating and respecting peers from diverse backgrounds and differing ethnic groups. Medlin (2013) found homeschooled children to be happy, optimistic, well-rounded, and satisfied with their sense of identity and place in the world. Medlin also found homeschoolers to be energetic and motivated to engage in community affairs and well-versed in engaging with others from different cultures and backgrounds. Though the study by Mazama was centered on African American homeschoolers, the findings echo those of Medlin: homeschooled children have a deep sense of who they are and value peers from different backgrounds and cultures.

Parental and Student Isolation

Many critics of homeschooling suggest that the choice to homeschool places both parents and children in a state of isolation from their community and society (Medlin, 2013). Veteran homeschoolers David and Micki Colfax (1988) explained that "homeschooled children are seldom, if ever socially isolated" because they have "more

opportunities to interact with a wide range of people" than those in public schools (p. 101). As will be discussed in the following sections, homeschooled children have various opportunities to make friends through the open environment enabled by homeschooling practices (Medlin, 2020). Homeschoolers contend that the freedom of the homeschooling environment allows children to find peers of similar interests and commonalities which develops into strong social bonds with friends (Ray, 2015).

Homeschooling parents are not isolated as many outsiders to homeschooling contend, but rather connect with other like-minded parents through support groups, homeschooling workshops, activities and online resources such as homeschool teacher and mom blogs, podcasts, articles and webinars (Tipton, 2019). Homeschooling parents have numerous options to engage with other homeschooling parents through these resources and discuss everything from curriculum planning to homeschooling meetups, to new state regulation, to favorite homeschooling field trips (Martin, 2020/2014). From local in-person support groups to Facebook groups, homeschooling parents of 2020 have far more opportunities to interact and support and encourage than ever before (Demme, 2015; Mazama, 2015).

Practices Within Homeschooling to Foster Socialization

Though many homeschooling parents believe that learning takes place in an ongoing fashion, not relegated to time and place (Kunzman, 2012), they make socialization an intentional part of the curriculum by arranging for a variety of outside activities with peers of the same, similar or different ages (Medlin, 2013; Ray, 2013). Homeschooling parents perceive peer relationships to be very important for their children

and tailor socialization activities to their children's individual needs and personalities (Medlin, 2020). This close attention to addressing the individual interests of every child enables children to meet peers with similar interests and hobbies and develop close friendships based on fundamental social similarities (Mazama, 2015).

Making Friends

Like public school children, homeschooled children play with other children on a regular basis (Beck, 2010). Beck (2010) explained that homeschooling allowed maintenance of parental attachment to one's children while concurrently arranging for the types of social interactions for which the children were ready. Beck went on to explain concern that enrollment in public-school would force upon the children social situations and peer attachments in which they were not interested or for which they were not ready. Homeschooling enabled Beck to provide social outlets such as homeschool groups, play dates and other extra curricular activities best suited to the children.

Homeschooling parents make socialization a priority through both routinely organized activities and enabling natural social setting experiences like encouraging children to play with neighbors and peers from commonly shared activities (Firmin et al., 2019). Homeschooled children play with children who go to public school, as well as other homeschooled children (Haugh, 2014). Having a free environment was the primary reason given for fostering homeschooled children to have a diverse demographic of friends and peers (Medlin, 2013; Ray, 2015; Romanowski, 2006).

Freedom of Environment

Homeschooling practices are based on the premise that parents should have the ability to arrange for optimal social interactions through freedom of environment and natural circumstance (Medlin, 2020). Since every homeschooled student is different, so is every homeschooling home which means no two homeschooling environments are identical (Hanna, 2011). Unlike the public-school system where education generally takes daily place in a classroom with the same students, the free nature of the homeschooling environment allows for interaction between students from varying groups and demographic (Jolly et al., 2013).

Society often views and therefore treats school as the foremost forum for learning, as well as social and academic growth for students (Grant, 2011). Grant (2011) went on to add that this societal view of the schooling process thereby separates the home from the school which makes it challenging for students to connect the two venues. Homeschooling parents believe that one highlight of homeschooling is that though, for some, there may be a structured curriculum and schedule, learning is not thought of as needing to take place in one specific place or at one fixed time of day. Social and academic growth goes on independent of location because the emphasis is on the experience, not specifically where and when the experience is taking place (Kunzman, 2012).

Technological Innovations and Their Effect on Homeschooling

The literature showed that new technology of the past 30 years, specifically the internet, has greatly aided the rise of homeschooling by connecting homeschooling

parents to other homeschoolers, enabling homeschoolers to retrieve the most up to date homeschooling law and requirement information, as well as receiving curriculum assistance in the actual learning process through online classes and instruction (Furlong & Davies, 2012). As many other homeschooling resources, Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a well-known resource to many veteran homeschoolers, has become an increasingly accessible and useful tool to homeschoolers due to the creation and rise on technological innovations such as the internet. Online resources like HSLDA guide homeschooling parents on state requirements and laws, curriculum, support groups, peer meetups, peer interaction and individual assistance to offer freedom to personalize educational goals and realize individual potential (https://hslda.org).

HSLDA reported that the number people choosing to homeschool is currently at an all-time high and may change the way the public views education moving forward ((https://hslda.org). As children grow and develop, so does their acquisition of knowledge which is why the free learning environment of homeschooling better suits human nature than the standard public-school setting where the primary space for learning in a classroom (Murphy, 2014). Modern technology goes everywhere with students and answers the curiosity and interest in subjects of all areas of study (Hanna, 2011). The internet has enabled homeschoolers direct and easy access to online resources like HSLDA aiding their educating purpose and intention.

According to Pell (2018), who conducted a qualitative study which included 316 homeschoolers from 52 different locations across the globe, homeschoolers perceive technology to provide their children with high quality education through individualized

instruction and curriculum. The study also found that homeschoolers believe technology creates a constructive and engaging learning environment for their children. Another study of 29 homeschooling parents showed participants perceived technology facilitated their ability to properly homeschool their children by enabling them to play multiple roles in the education of their children (Gann & Carpenter, 2019).

Review of the literature showed that though trips to the library, museums and other learning arenas were popular exercises in learning, the use of cell phones, computers, and iPads were also consistently mentioned as important research tools (Hanna, 2011). The ease and accessibility of information enabled by the internet on digital technology spans a diverse demographic spectrum, broadening the scope of people seeking knowledge and connecting individuals from all over the world. Knowledge is no longer limited by the number of books in the library, or personal interaction with local community members. Homeschoolers reported that using the internet to browse and look up specific material broadened knowledge, interest, reference; and social connectivity (Furlong & Davies, 2012).

In addition to the vast opportunity for knowledge and positive social engagement made possible by the internet, review of the literature also showed the internet to be matter of concern of homeschooling parents (Hanna, 2011). Accessibility to material parents deemed inappropriate or unfit for their children provided by the internet is an issue homeschoolers take seriously (Grant, 2011). In addition to preset digital parental controls of their children's technology, consistent parental involvement by homeschooling parents was mentioned as the tool most prevalent in the dealing with the

matter of unwanted exposure to inappropriate material (Pell, 2018). Closely monitoring their children's daily lives, schedules, friends, schoolwork, and projects, in connection with an open relationship was shown throughout the literature as the manner through which parents dealt with the challenges of modern technology. Homeschooling afforded parents the ability to meet these challenges (Furlong & Davies, 2012).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Homeschooling

Due to modern day circumstances brought about by COVID-19, distance and remote learning is no longer primarily relegated to homeschoolers (Krumsvik, 2020). Parents who never even considered homeschooling were thrown into taking charge of their children's learning when the pandemic hit, and many have decided to continue to homeschool their children going forward as learning practices in the public-school system are unsettled for the foreseeable future (Ali, 2020). Many states have temporarily altered or relaxed their homeschooling laws and requirements, and parents find themselves in a position of monitoring these actions on a regular basis using resources like HSLDA (https://hslda.org).

Today, as people in U.S. society, and much of the world, are unable to experience many cultural activities such as visiting museums and other public venues due to the pandemic, the internet is the primary manner by which students "virtually" experience these venues (Krumsvik, 2020). Though the internet has been widely used by public-school students previously, those schooling at home due to the pandemic can attest that learning does not necessarily need to be relegated to a specific place (Ali, 2020), as veteran homeschoolers have historically suggested (Kunzman, 2012).

Summary and Conclusions

To date, homeschooling continues to maintain its places as an educational alternative to public school (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). The literature showed homeschooled students to score higher or on par on both academic achievement and social tests with their public-school counter parts of same age and demographic (Firmin et al, 2019). The literature also showed that homeschooled children grow up to be valuable members of society with a strong sense of community responsibility (Ray, 2015). In contrast to stereotypical concerns such as a lack of peer friendships, the research showed that homeschooled children maintain positive social connectivity with friends throughout the lives (Medlin, 2013).

Other stereotypical concerns by critics of homeschooling found in the literature were student and parental isolation, lack of structure, inability to take standardized tests and an overall social and emotional ineptness (McQuiggan et al., 2017). Review of the literature showed that homeschooling parents perceive the need for socialization to be very serious and integrate many methods to address these stereotypical concerns (Forrester, 2017). Homeschoolers utilize many resources such as the internet to connect to other homeschooling parents; to access curricula, online classes, and academic instruction; as well as to make use of social connectivity offered by support groups and online interaction (Firmin et al. 2019). Further literature review showed that homeschooled students achieve high marks on standardized tests and excel when reaching the college level (Ray, 2015).

The literature review showed a gap in research on how homeschooling parents perceive socialization within their homeschooling practices and the role of socialization in the overall method of homeschooling. This study addresses the gap in the research as to what specific homeschooling practices are used to foster positive social interaction. This study is also meant to fill the gap in understanding how homeschooled children make friends and maintain positive social connections considering conflicting stereotypical assumptions. This study means to extend knowledge on the matter of socialization within homeschooling education practices so that potential homeschoolers can understand how their children would potentially socialize with peers.

In Chapter 3 I set forth the methodology exercised in conducting the study. In addition, the methodology indicates the models, approach, sampling, data collection and data analysis used in the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was exploring how homeschooling parents view socialization within their homeschooling practices. Based on the gap in the current research on the role socialization plays in the life of homeschooled children, in this study I sought to provide an increased understanding of how socialization is implemented into homeschooling practices so that parents seeking clarity on the matter have a well-informed perspective. Additionally, I sought to develop an understanding of parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school-aged children, which homeschooling practices parents use to foster socializing of their children, and the role of peers concerning the social development of their children. My intention with this study was to answer queries from educators and potential homeschooling parents on the topic of socialization among homeschooled children.

Research Design and Rationale

The following RQs guided this study:

RQ1: What are parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school-aged children?

RQ2: In what ways, if any, do parents make socialization a component of homeschooling practices?

I used the concept of socialization as described by Medlin (2013, 2015) as the primary framework for this study. Socialization is defined as the manner by which individuals learn and attain the rules, values, and behaviors of their society (Grusec &

Hastings, 2015). Acknowledging that socialization has varying interpretations, Medlin (2013) named three foci to better understand socialization:

- Social activity: The interaction homeschooled children have with friends and peers.

- Social influence: Teaching children how to navigate social norms.

- Social exposure: How children understand the cultures and values of those around them.

Thirteen years after an initial study on the connection of socialization and homeschooling, Medlin (2013) conducted a second review on the same topic and found the three original, descriptive foci regarding socialization remained prevalent. Medlin discovered these foci to still be an insightful tool in researching the interactions of socialization and homeschooling. Medlin's three socialization foci comprised the conceptual framework for this study and guided the development of the research and interview questions.

In this study, I employed the basic qualitative methodology to examine parents' perceptions of the phenomenon of socialization among elementary school-aged, homeschooled children. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with eight parents who were homeschooling their elementary school-aged children. Thematic analysis of the collected data using open coding resulted in key themes regarding the socialization process of homeschooled children.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was cognizant of my role to consciously separate interpretation and judgement from description while being aware of my preconceived notions, expectations, and biases (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The importance of reliability and trustworthiness was kept at the forefront of all data collection (see Patton, 2015). When interviewing, I was clear about my role as observer, capturing the views as expressed by the participants through rich description as they shared their experiences in response to the interview questions (see Patton, 2015).

I studied homeschoolers for several years and networked within several homeschooling groups, which enabled me to get to know homeschoolers and furthered my interest in the subject of homeschooling as well as provided me with ideas and conceptions on the subject as a whole. My job as researcher was to guide and direct interviews in order to stay on track. My objective was to make participants comfortable and engaged in relating their experiences of the phenomenon under discussion. It was my job as an interviewer to collect data, not to change opinions or sway public policy but rather to attempt to fill the gap in the research in order to inform others (see Patton, 2015).

The primary reason I selected the basic qualitative approach for the study was to understand the participants' experiences in connection with their lives of homeschooling. How the researcher assesses the validity of the experiences of the participants can influence the outcome of a study. The way in which people understand their experiences can take on different constructs and meanings based on their individual views. In order to

address the researcher's assessment and despite the inability of the researcher to perfectly

capture an objective truth, strategies have been created to help increase the ability for

credible answers to complex questions (Merriam & Tidell, 2016). Accordingly, I used

hand coding for this study. The use of hand coding enabled me to match up common

themes among the participants and comprehend a generalized understanding of the

participants' perspectives.

Methodology

I used the basic qualitative approach in this study because my purpose was to

understand the participants and make sense of their experiences (see Patton, 2015). The

basic qualitative approach enabled me to comprehend the participants' perspectives and

experiences in the area of interest which to date has been the subject of limited research. I

used mixed, purposeful sampling in selecting participants with the goal of attaining rich

data from the specific population of homeschooling parents.

Participant Population Selection, Recruitment Procedures, and Participation

There are no exact rules for determining sample size in a qualitative inquiry;

however, there are guidelines on what sample size would best facilitate a representative

population. The sample size did not need to be a certain number of participants but rather

the appropriate size to offer insight into the phenomenon being studied. I used a mixed,

purposeful, convenience sample and allowed room for opportunistic and emergent

sampling if such circumstances came to pass during the interview process (see Patton,

2015).

I emailed potential interviewees an initial invitation to participate in the study, and upon their response of interest, I sent them a follow-up authorization of consent to participate in the study. There were five criteria for inclusion in this study, participants had to have (a) used homeschooling as the primary educational venue for a minimum of 3 years for their elementary-aged children, (b) a minimum of two children currently being homeschooled, (c) held a post-high school degree, (d) been from a two-parent home in which either both parents coeducate or where one parent acts the primary supervisory homeschooling parent, and (e) access to meeting on Zoom for interviewing purposes. I copied their answers into the interview guide so that the questions, answers, probes, and comments were clear for data analysis. Themes were compiled through manually coding them into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to ensure clarity and understanding of the responses.

Instrumentation

I conducted interviews with semistructured questions following the interview protocol guide (see Appendix). The interview guide was directed by the RQs and corresponding conceptual framework. The interview guide contained the interview questions as well as possible probes and space to indicate researcher comments. In addition to the data gathered through in-depth, semistructured interviews, journal notes were another source of data (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection

I conducted semistructured interviews with the participants in a virtual format using Zoom. I interviewed eight parents and stopped when I accomplished data

saturation. I followed several steps (as described in Chapter 3) to enhance trustworthiness.

Data Analysis Plan

The first step in data analysis was arranging the data by transcribing the interviews and placing them into a Microsoft Word document. This allowed me to organize the data and create a spreadsheet for responses to the interview questions. In the next step, I highlighted participants' responses to create codes. The highlighting method was used again to indicate the additional answers to the follow-up questions. I used the RQs to guide the identification of categories while remaining open to other categories that may have emerged. Simultaneously, I identified emerging themes and connected them to the relevant category. Comparing data using reflective journal notes assisted me in validating the data, and the second round of coding using patterns allowed me to find and confirm categories and the identified themes (see Saldaña, 2016).

My plan for data analysis contained the use of hand coding. Before going through the process of coding, it was important to determine whether I was going to use inductive or deductive coding. After investigating both methods, it was evident that the two are not mutually exclusive and that my study would gain from the combination of both coding techniques (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The qualitative data analysis process requires creativity, intellect, and hard work, according to Patton (2015). As the researcher, I needed to be the one deciding what constitutes a theme, what to name it, and so on (see Patton, 2015). Hand coding enabled me to get a firsthand connection with the transcripts and data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The data collected must be credible as part of a research plan that provides reliable knowledge in an ethical fashion (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The results of the data collection must be deemed valid and reliable to be accepted as valuable and relevant knowledge to assist in the deeper understanding of the topic under discussion. Internal validity is useful because it denotes cause and effect, giving relevance to the specific situation under consideration (Patton, 2015). I chose the basic qualitative research design for this study because it was the most relevant and appropriate method by which to collect data due to its aim to understand the participants and make sense of their experiences.

Transferability

The aim of the interview data collected in this study was to make sense of the experiences homeschooling parents have had regarding the socialization of their elementary school-aged children. The use of transferability relies on the applicability of the findings to other similar, but not identical, occurrences in the same area of interest, thereby going beyond the narrow confines of the data collected (Patton, 2015). Reporting of the data must be filled with information-rich samples and designs that produce opportunity for extrapolation of the findings to assist present and future efforts on the matter of interest. The external validity of this study could very well play a role in the implementation of socialization practices for children in other learning environments outside the homeschooling arena.

Dependability

Dependability of the data strengthens the need for validity and reliability. Qualitative research strategies include, but are not limited to, adequate time for and engagement in data collection, self-reflection on the part of the researcher to limit bias and assumptions, peer review where the researcher confers with colleagues on the process of the study, an audit trail where a detailed account of all procedures is documented, and member checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Confirmability

As Patton (2015) explained, adding depth and detail to qualitative data is one component to confirming and elucidating findings. In order to attain such a goal and establish confirmability, a study must be clearly outlined by the researcher with indication of the conceptual framework, research design, data collection, analysis procedure, and data management (Yin, 2014). As I collected data, I revisited my journal notes to confirm the importance of themes and patterns. I also used reflection and responsiveness to ensure the findings were free from researcher biases and my personal viewpoints (see Patton, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

The role of the researcher is to act as interviewer in the pursuit of knowledge in an area of interest under investigation. Ethical practices must be at the forefront of all qualitative research to ensure validity, clarity, transparency, trustworthiness, and credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I emailed potential interviewees an initial invitation to participate in the study, and upon their response of interest, I sent a follow-

up authorization of consent to participate in the study. The participants were then emailed the entire protocol and interview guide so that they had the material on hand as we conducted the Zoom interview. The interview guide was complete with clear language and numbered questions as well as my cell phone number in case the participant needed to reach me with any questions or concerns before or after the interview.

The semistructured interviews with the eight participants yielded rich data and reached data saturation as I attempted to discern what their views on socialization within homeschooling are and how those views manifest in implementation. If any of these participants withdrew from the study, my back-up plan was to ask the families chosen if they knew other families that would participate. However, no participants withdrew from the study. Looking for the strongest themes, I did not have an inclination as to how many themes would result from the interviews and was open to the possibility of the occurrence of unexpected information.

I reassured participants that I was honest in my pursuit of data collection and that I did not have bias or an alternative motive for collecting this data other than the pursuit of knowledge and understanding to help fill the gap in the literature on the topic at hand. I assured participants that all data collected would be kept in a secure place and the identity of participants would be protected throughout the study process through use of pseudonyms (see Baker et al., 2012; Patton, 2015). After completion of the study, all email trails, recordings, and transcriptions with participants' private information were destroyed and deleted from all archival databases.

Summary

Chapter 3 began with a restatement of my research purpose and RQs as well as a presentation of the research design and rationale. As previously stated, the goal of this study was to explore the socialization component within homeschooling from the perspective of homeschooling parents in order to potentially fill the gap in current data on the topic. In this chapter, I explained my role as the researcher, the methodology used, and why the qualitative approach furnished rich data to the research directive. The chapter also included a discussion of the participant pool and recruitment, data collection instruments and sources, data collection protocols, and content validity assurances. I then detailed the data analysis plan and addressed issues of trustworthiness, such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I explained the rationale for determining the sample size as well as indicated how potential biases were addressed and the ethical procedures used such as participant confidentiality.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore homeschooling parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school aged-children, and in what ways, if any, parents make socialization a component of homeschooling practices. Though research has showed that homeschooled children develop into well-adjusted adult members of society (Medlin, 2013), it was unknown how parents perceive and take into consideration socialization as a component of their homeschooling practices. The RQs were:

RQ1: What are parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school-aged children?

RQ2: In what ways, if any, do parents make socialization a component of homeschooling practices?

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the setting, participant demographics, data collection, and data analysis. The trustworthiness subsections contain explanations of the process of achieving credibility, transferability, dependability, and the confirmability of the study. I conclude Chapter 4 with the study results.

Setting

I conducted semistructured interviews with the eight participants remotely over the Zoom platform. I emailed participants suggesting they find a quiet, private location from which to engage in the interview process. I, too, found a quiet, private space from which to conduct the interviews.

Demographics

All eight participants were parental members of two-parent families residing in two regions of the United States. The participants were given the following pseudonyms: Becca, Ronnie, Nancy, Janis. Toby, Pam, Molly, and Bonnie. All but one of the participants has homeschooled two or more elementary school-aged children for at least 2 years. One participant, Janis, who was currently homeschooling only her youngest son was included in the study due to her 30+ years of homeschooling experience. I addressed all invitations to participate to both parents; however, all parents that volunteered were mothers who were the primary homeschooling parents. All participants held a post-high school degree: three had bachelor's degrees, two had graduate school degrees, and three had doctorates. The range of years homeschooling was 4 to 5. The number of children homeschooled ranged from two to nine (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' Experience With Homeschooling

Pseudonym	Years of homeschooling	Number of children homeschooled in total	Number of elementary-aged children currently homeschooled
Bonnie	2+	2	2
Toby	5+	3+	4
Molly	5+	5+	4
Becca	10+	5+	2
Pam	10+	4	2
Nancy	20+	5+	2
Ronnie	20+	5+	2
Janis	30+	10+	1

Data Collection

I emailed recruitment letters and consent forms to potential participants after receiving approval to conduct the study from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (Approval No. 11-09-21-0307512). After I received consent from the participants, I scheduled the time and date for their interviews. Each of the participants was interviewed over Zoom for 45–60 minutes with the understanding that follow-up questions may be needed after the initial interview; however, no follow-up interviews were required. After conducting and analyzing the first eight interviews, saturation was evident, so I stopped emailing invitations to participants. A $25 gift card was sent to each participant following the initial interview. After completion of each Zoom interview, I used Grain transcription software to transcribe the audio recording of the interview and assigned each participant a pseudonym. I then listened to each interview while reading the transcript to ensure any typos were corrected and removed any identifying information. I then deleted the audio recording of each interview from my Zoom account

and stored the interview recordings on my password-protected computer. I emailed the transcriptions to participants and invited them to review them and make any changes they deemed necessary. There were no requests for changes from participants. I transferred demographic information for each participant into a Word document, including their initials, pseudonym, demographics, and interview dates.

Data Analysis

I began data analysis by reading through all the transcripts, making note of possible codes in relationship to the RQs. I then went back and read each interview carefully and began the hand-coding process by highlighting relevant words, phrases, sentences, or sections. Relevancy and importance were determined when words, phrases, or feelings were repeated or seemed an important factor to the subject matter. I used the highlighting method again to indicate the additional responses to the probes. I also referred to my reflective journal notes to assist me in coding and interpreting the data as well as to recognize what further categories and themes had emerged from a second round of analysis. Using hand coding enabled me to get a firsthand connection with the transcripts and data, which was an important step for a credible interpretation of the data. As the researcher, I decided what constituted a theme as I categorized the codes (see Patton, 2015). Criteria used to determine themes consisted of over 50% participants reporting the same or similar material or experiences, which lent strength and validity to themes.

Five themes emerged from the data (as shown in Table 2). The first three themes relate to RQ1 and last two themes relate to RQ2.

Table 2

Themes and Codes Aligned With Research Questions

RQs	Themes	Codes
RQ1: What are parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school-aged children?	Providing the opportunity to interact with people from all walks of life	Friends with all ages, interacting with people from different cultures, friends with all genders, friends with all races, everyday living, opportunity to socialize, independence
	Family creates community and culture	Influence from within rather than from outside sources, parental control, parent/student connection, outside influences, student directed living, parental involvement, parents/child connection
	Homeschooling fosters self-development and self-directedness	Self-directed socialization, freedom for self-development, sense of self/family, everyday living, opportunity to socialize, independence, organic socialization
RQ2: In what ways, if any, do parents make socialization a component of their homeschooling practices?	Parents choose strategies for organized socialization	Playdates, group lessons, opportunity for student self-directed socialization
	Parents encourage organic socialization	Socialization as fundamental developmental stage, socialization happens as a result of living

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In order to ensure credibility in this study, I followed a robust research design and conducted the data collection process in a systematic manner, leading from data collection to analysis and reporting the findings in an ethical fashion (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout the data collection process, I regularly sought feedback from my dissertation supervisor in order to confirm I was implementing the credibility strategies listed in Chapter 3. I re-read my journal notes in conjunction with reviewing each interview transcript looking for signs of my biases. My goal was that readers of the study should be able to deem the data and findings valid and reliable in order to assist in their deeper understanding of the topic. Internal validity is dependent on me, the researcher, representing the realities of the participants as they expressed them (see Patton, 2015).

Transferability

To ensure transferability, I focused on providing the applicability of the findings of my study to other similar, but not identical, occurrences in the same area of interest, which allowed me to go beyond the narrow confines of the data collected (see Patton, 2015). For transferability, the data reported must contain thick description (i.e., details) supported by illustrative quotes and examples. I worked to obtain illustrative quotes and examples through my interviews of the participants that included questions regarding perceptions of their experiences. I did not deviate from the transferability strategies outlined in Chapter 3.

Dependability

In the attempt to establish and provide dependability in the study, I focused on maintaining consistency throughout my research journey (see Patton, 2015). I employed strategies including adequate time allotment for the collection of data and self-reflection as the researcher in order to limit bias and assumptions. The peer review process was also included where I conferred with colleagues on study processes and used an audit trail where I detailed all procedures (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I aimed for alignment among all elements of the research process because qualitative researchers have found careful monitoring is key to a successful study (see Yin, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a vitally essential component in qualitative inquiry because it is imperative that research is carried out with reflection and responsiveness to ensure the findings are free from researcher biases and personal viewpoints (see Patton, 2015). As the process of collecting data went on, I continued to revisit my journal notes, confirming the importance of themes and patterns that continued to emerge and elaborated on the findings by adding depth and richness.

Results

Five themes emerged from the data analysis, as seen in Table 2. The first three themes relate to RQ1, and last two themes relate to RQ2.

Theme 1: Homeschooling Provides the Opportunity to Interact With People From all Walks of Life

All eight participants stated that in homeschooling, their children have been given numerous opportunities to socialize with people of all ages, genders, races, and demographics. Three subthemes emerged related to this theme:

- friends formed through common interests

- friends formed through volunteering

- parental supervision

Friends Formed Through Common Interests

Toby, a homeschooling mom of 5+ children spoke for the other participants when she stated that their "kids are really set up to thrive socially." Toby explained that her children's access to others are "not restricted by age;" they find friends based on common interests rather than on their peer age group. Nancy expressed that her children have close friends whom they met through activities, such as soccer and baseball clubs. These friends come from various backgrounds and attend both private and public schools; however, all share a love of sports.

All the participants expressed that homeschooling enables them to choose what kind of socialization they deem important for their children. Bonnie, who is currently homeschooling two of her four children in a metropolitan area, explained that she signed up her two older children, aged 5 and 6 years old, for pottery classes. She explained that 50% of the reason was "actually for the actual pottery," while the other 50% was to socialize with the other children in the class and the teacher with whom "they've formed

an emotional relationship." Bonnie expressed that she previously knew and admired the teacher and wanted her children to take her class. "Another mom put together the tae kwon do class," and because she knew and trusted the teacher, Bonnie was excited for her children to take the class.

Friends Formed Through Volunteering

In addition to interacting with friends of differing ages, Toby cited daily experiences, such as visiting a retirement facility and volunteering at the local community center, as giving her children the opportunity to meet all different kinds of people that she believes has enabled them to be "more well-rounded socially." Pam, a homeschooling mom of four, also cited a nursing home as a place her children had the chance to interact with older people as well as people of differing races and genders. Similarly, Becca, a homeschooling mother of 5+ children, two of whom are currently of elementary age, spoke about beautiful relationships her children have formed visiting such venues as the local nursing home. Becca spoke of her preteen son who developed a beautiful bond with "Miss Doris," a resident at the nursing home where he would go several times a week to play bingo. This was a bond that was able to be formed because homeschooling allowed Becca's son the opportunity to visit the nursing home during daytime hours when the residents at the nursing home were engaging in their activity sessions. In addition to volunteering at nursing homes, participants also spoke about their children spending time at community get-togethers to pick-up litter and beautify their hometowns or cities.

Bonnie, currently homeschooling two of her four children, spoke of several close friendships her children had developed over the past few years while volunteering at local community gardens. She said,

> My kids love to garden, and I wanted them to also have pride in keeping our
> neighborhood clean and beautiful, so when I realized they could spend many
> hours a week at our local community garden I signed them up.

What Bonnie did not consider was "all the kids that would be doing the same thing and all the close friendships that would develop through a shared love of gardening and community pride."

Parental Supervision

While participants explained that homeschooling their children gave the children the opportunity to meet all kinds of people, they emphasized that their children interact with numerous individuals under parental auspices. Molly, a homeschooling mom of 5+ children, said that she has never worried about her children socializing, explaining, "There are a lot of people on this planet … many homosapiens, and you will have opportunities to interact with people of all ages, I see that homeschool children are very, very emotionally healthy and socially normal." She went on to explain that her "children spend the first many years of their lives in social situations with adults present." Whether it is she or another mom, her children have guidance and direction from a caring adult, which is generally the parent.

Pam echoed this same concept of parental guidance in social situations. "I'm very careful about the influences on my children," she said. Though she generally encourages

them to work out their conflicts themselves, she said she is always close by to guide or

lend parental guidance when needed and help her children navigate the interactions and

"socialize through all levels." Nancy, another veteran homeschooling mom of 21+ years

of her 5+ children, said her "kids are known for having good social skills, being able to

talk to anybody and that includes older people as well as younger." Nancy credits the

social fluidity she witnesses in her children's interactions to the fact that they have the

opportunity to interact with people of differing groups and they have her guidance on

proper social behavior and norms.

Theme 2: The Family Creates Community and Culture

All eight participants commented on the importance of their family connections to

enable positive socialization. The following two subthemes emerged related to this

theme:

- family as community
- learning and learner-focused environment

Family as Community

Nancy, a homeschooling mom of 5+ children, remarked that in her "homeschool

family, the primacy is the home, the parents, and the kids and their relationship to each

other." Nancy reflected on her love of spending time with her children and how her

family has formed their own culture from which they derive direction and purpose,

explaining that "when you homeschool, your primary group is you, your home, your

children."

Toby, a homeschooling mom of four explained that her home acts as the principal location for their unique family community. Toby stated a belief that the education of children is "primarily a parent's responsibility" and a desire "to be the one in charge" of their learning. In addition to the aspect of learning, Toby explained the family's home education journey "evolves on its own" because it is a "family journey" that encompasses everyone in the home. "Home education is so individual family to family," repeating that the family has created their own community.

Pam remarked that

The standard classroom found today in schools is so artificial … sitting with kids of the same age is not life [and] this idea that your kids are not going to learn to socialize unless they're in school is flawed, they are just learning the socialization level of the other kids … that's why I always think that the one room schoolhouse was great because you had the older kids acting as role models for the younger kids.

Pam has mirrored the one room schoolhouse in her home by having her four children "learning side by side, with the older ones giving cues on behavior to the little ones, and I am right there, learning with them, we have our own way of doing things and its awesome," Pam said with a big smile on her face.

Home Education (as a Term versus Homeschooling)

Toby clarified her use of the term "home education" rather than that of "homeschooling" as she believes that the use of the term "school" connotates having school at home and to her that would defeat the purpose of educating her children at

home. Janis also preferred the use of "home education" to "homeschooling" and detailed her family's unique culture as one in which "music is part of our education and one of the main parts" of her children's education and life experiences. Janice stated, "home education affords the opportunity to socialize with people from all different walks of life and all ages, sizes, stages, and everything." Janice explained her children participated in their local youth orchestras and were "always in the very top level of players consistently throughout their childhood." Janis credited her home music culture as enabling her children to focus on their music skills. According to Janis, her home environment has given her children their culture and community support to pursue such interests such as music, in addition to others.

Similarly, Pam the mom of four girls, said her children are finished with their formal education by two in the afternoon which leaves time for all their activities. "I like that my kids' activities are scheduled during the day, whether it is piano lessons, swim lessons; all of this is during the daylight hours and in the evenings, they're having dinner and spending time with their sisters," which according to Pam is all "part of their home education." Like Janis, Pam's home environment is very much focused on music and participation in the arts, and Pam credits "all interactions between family members as the most important social experiences a person have in life." Unlike her children, Pam does not play an instrument and did not take lessons as a child. However, she said she loves learning alongside her children and doing things together on a daily basis. Pam also remarked that because she spends so much time with her girls in their home and at

outside activities, she knows them better than anyone else and can help guide each one of them "to develop their likes and dislikes on their own without outside influences."

Ronnie, a veteran homeschooler with over 20 years of experience educating her several children said she has seen that "one of the main benefits of having your children home is the building of your own family structure, building a rapport with your kids, connectivity where you understand them better than the rest of the world." Ronnie also said, "you are your own best expert on your family and your children." Ronnie continued, stating that she believes educating children at home creates a "family community" which has enabled her to have a strong connection with her children. Ronnie credited this connection for helping her aid her children in "discovering what is core to them, what their own sense of purpose and mission is about." Ronnie said from her own experience in conventional brick and mortar schools that children are forced to "over-focus" and "be more responsive to external demands than to your internal self."

Participants remarked that because the home has been their central learning environment the guiding force for their children has been their family life. The way they "do things" and the manner in which "they" get along with each other and the world at large is greatly dependent on their home life. Nancy reflected that when she started homeschooling her children, she did not realize the benefits it would have. Nancy remarked that her "kids love each other and connect with each other and help each other." Bonnie shared such sentiments, "we're all really happy" she remarked "I also just really like my kids and don't want to send them away." Nancy explained "We're a homeschooling family" and went on to state that "if your kids are away at school all day,

they're not in your house, they do not have you as their primary [person?]." Nancy continued to say that because she was the primary teacher and influence for her children there has not been any "but my teacher said" argument in response to her parental vocalizations on matters of importance.

Becca, a homeschooling mom of 5+ kids said from the very beginning of her home education journey she consciously made the choice to be the primary influence on her children. "I didn't want my children to learn how to behave by copying other 6-year-olds" in kindergarten. Becca expressed in response to being asked why she chose to educate her children at home, "If I want you to learn how to socialize, meaning how to interact with other people in society, my children are better off doing it with me as their guide than anybody else." Though she believes "friends are important," children "need their parents" Becca went on. In "our culture" she said, "we overestimate how much children need peers and underestimate how much children need their parents."

As a child Ronnie began to get disenchanted with the standard, brick and mortar schooling system. Ronnie explained that she went to standard schools and "did all the things everybody told" told her she was

> supposed to learn to be prepared for life … I completed college and it didn't prepare me at all for life. I didn't know how to live in the world. I had been co-opted into this academic universe that did not prepare me for anything except an active academic universe or a specific academic based career and I swore I would not do that to my children.

Ronnie continued to explain that her older children went on to college and have done quite well, and she plans to support all her children through whatever academic degree they choose. She said she is confident that her children have been "brought to a place of balance in homeschooling, as human beings, like solid human beings" who can healthfully and positively enter the standard system of education after their elementary years at home. Ronnie believes that the solid education at home in the early years gives her children the proper experiences to develop positive social skills. "I'll say that socialization must, in my view, start with a good core socialization with your parents and your siblings at home. Because if you cannot do that successfully, dumping them into another environment is not a substitute," Ronnie also said that how one behaves "comes from the home, the home community" and who better to guide that individual than "the parent who knows them better than the outside world."

Theme 3: Homeschooling Fosters Self-Development and Self-Directedness

All the participants remarked how their homeschooling has enabled their children to "self-direct" themselves both academically and socially. Pam explained that her children "have a lot of free time where they can decide how to use their time" and since they are done with their schooling early in the day "they have the rest of the day to decide what they're going to do." Often Pam's children will do activities on their own or with each other. Pam said she strongly believes the way her children self-direct much of their activities has enabled them to "develop their likes and dislikes on their own" which in turn "prepares them for college and adulthood." Ronnie echoed similar sentiments by

saying that educating her children at home helped them understand how to manage their time wisely.

Socially

Molly, a homeschooling mom of 5+ children said when her kids were very little, she planned playdates for them with other children from families she knew and felt would be positive influences on her children. As her children moved into their elementary years Molly said they started orchestrating their own playdates and homeschooling gave them the flexibility to socialize for a good portion of the day due to the fact their formal learning was accomplished in the morning hours. Molly said her children were so successful at scheduling time with friends she started having to say "no" to playdates at times because her children were "too social", and they needed "some time off in the afternoon to just chill out and relax."

Pam said her kids "never had a shortage of friends" because their lives have always been "packed with different activities and things they were exploring" and they would develop friendships all along the way. Janis remarked that whether it was orchestra practice, aviation classes, or simply local neighborhood playdates, her children have had the ability to get along with every type of individual due to their vast socialization experience provided by the opportunities which are natural to homeschooling practices.

"Learning how to navigate relationships" which include "different personalities is not easy" Pam remarked. Pam also said that one asset of homeschooling is that she can choose the overall pool of friends from which her children can choose their friends, but at the same time the focus is that they still get to "choose their own friends." According to

Pam her children have learned how to deal with different people because the pool of

people she chose for them to interact with has been so vast that her children have

encountered people of many different cultures and religions. Homeschool "has enabled

my children to interact with so many people which is the nature of the world, they would

not have such experiences in a regular classroom setting."

Academically

Molly said "my kids are a lot more open to learning because they learn at home.

Nobody ever forces them to sit down and do something to sit in a chair for however many

hours and then come home do their homework." Molly also said that during breaks like

Thanksgiving or New Year's her children would "pull out their workbooks and do work

with me." Molly believes that "children, by nature are curious and so thirsty to learn

things, and then we like squash them by forcing them to sit in a chair and learn." Molly

said homeschooled kids just love the learning process and that her "kids are always

asking about learning and the next thing they're coming to me with lists of things they

want to learn." Many of their friends in "conventional schools" are always saying they

"hate math" or "hate school," Molly said, and also said she believes her children have

never felt that way simply because "nobody's forcing them to sit anywhere," they are

"learning because they want to."

Bonnie said the lifestyle of homeschooling is something that has given her family

the flexibility to learn and socialize in their own way. Bonnie gives her children a

checklist of items to be accomplished daily. "Every morning we do like an assortment of

activities, like reading a poem or looking at famous artwork, listening to a composer,

reading stories, etc." Each check list includes something like "a math lesson, or a history lesson," or "read a book of geography." Bonnie makes sure that all the important subjects are covered each week and believes that due to the fact her children are given choices on what they want to learn when they are not just inclined to learn but "excited to do so." Before Becca was a mother, she worked in both the public and private school systems. She said, "all children have an innate desire to learn, they are all born curious, and we do a pretty good job of stamping out the curiosity out of them by about the age of 10." Becca acknowledged that she herself did "fine" when she went to school, but she was not willing risk her children losing their curiosity for learning. "I wanted them to be interested in the world, and I was pretty sure that we had a better chance of doing that by learning together than by sending them to school." Having her children at home has given Becca "the freedom to present things in the time and in the way that I feel is best for each individual child." Her children have choices on what they want to learn but at the same time Becca is in control of their learning and takes "responsibility for them." Becca says homeschooling gives her children the opportunity for self-directed learning under her direction.

Theme 4: Parents Choose Strategies for Organized Socialization

All the participants reported having regularly scheduled playdates for their children during their early years as well as offering numerous opportunities for socialization. Nancy said her children's friendships have been formed, for example, by scheduled play dates with children who homeschool and those not homeschooled, socializing at group music and art lessons, orchestra rehearsal, and family friends. Becca

said that it has always been important for her children to have friends and that is why her family "specifically moved to a new development with 40 young families so that there would literally be tons of children outside our door at any moment." Becca said it has always been important to her to organize play dates for her children especially when they were preschool age and to enable her children to schedule their own playdates as they would get older. Living in a neighborhood full of children enabled her children to get together with friends easily since most friends were in walkable distance. Becca enrolled her children in art classes and movement classes and sports leagues to meet friends.

According to Janis, "socialization was a big problem for us; we had to learn to limit it" she said with a chuckle. "In fact, one year she put a total ban on sleepovers" because spending time with friends was taking away too much from family time. Pam remarked that homeschool meetups gave her family the opportunity for socialization for both her and her children. "Two or three meetings a month" with other homeschool families offered Pam and her children a positive way to interact with others and allowed her children to "choose their friends, by and large, from a pool" of children that she was comfortable with. Toby cited similar sentiments as Pam in regard to the homeschool family gatherings.

Toby and her husband moved their family to a large city largely due to its thriving homeschool community. Toby initiated several different group meetups to give her children the occasion to meet friends and socialize with peers. Toby also organized a movement class to take place twice a week in her home for 12-15 children. After the class the children have an hour to play and amuse themselves with different group

activities such as finger painting or playdough. Toby's children also play instruments and Toby organized music groups so her children could find friends with similar interests and talents.

Bonnie also created classes for her children with other homeschooling families. "I see it as my role to enable socialization opportunities," for example "every Monday they know they're going to see their friends at Taekwondo, every Wednesday they're going to see their friends at art class." Bonnie also enrolled her children in classes where they could socialize with children who go to standard brick and mortar schools. Bonnie said she understands "the importance of our kids having these relationships and we work to make that happen."

Theme 5: Parents Encourage Organic Socialization

In addition to discussing scheduling playdates and other planned social interactions, participants reported that socialization happens for their children as a matter of living. "Interacting with adults and peers is a natural exercise of life, having a math lesson, going into the store to order feed for the animals" all these experiences are part of life, said Toby, adding, social situations "sort of all evolve on their own organically" without having to be scheduled.

"Socialization," Becca said, "is everybody we interact with, everything we do in life." Though Becca has scheduled playdates for her children, she thinks that "socialization is when my kids go ice skating, they interact with their instructor, other people on the ice." Becca also said that

all of that interaction is socialization, and it happens naturally. Socialization is

how we speak to the checkout lady in the grocery store, its how we participate in

the museum and talk to the tour guides and the volunteers there.

Becca also spoke about a field trip "tour at the National D-Day Memorial. This old

veteran [guide] was so delighted to have children who actually asked him questions and

were curious and answered questions and were engaged." Becca credits "just life" as the

cause for her children's ability to socialize.

Nancy said that homeschooling her children has enabled her to offer them more

"socialization opportunities" than children in standard brick and mortar schools because

her children are not grouped with peers of their exact same ages. Rather, Nancy

explained, her children select their friends based on common interests, and meeting these

friends occurs as "a result of living." The "flexibility of homeschooling allows" for her

children to meet people and "engage in social situations in a healthy and positive way."

Molly said,

when you are in conventional school, you're with a group of children who are

born within the same few months as you, [but] when you are home no one is

forcing you to play with another child of a specific age, there is no expectation

based on age or grouping. There are opportunities all over to just be a functional

socially normal person; in a lot of ways there are more opportunities to learn how

to be socially functional [when primarily] in the home setting.

 Molly believes her children have had most of their socialization opportunities due to organic circumstances, and not ones that were "contrived or forced" by "placing children in a classroom because on their age and so on."

Molly explained that her children make friends with peers they have common interests with, and the connections are not based on age. She discussed how a homeschooling family with four daughters moved next door, all a year or two different from each of her kids but how each of her children found a "best buddy" to hang out with which "probably wouldn't have happened in a conventional setting" because the majority of their playtime has taken place during daylight hours when most kids are in school "Friendships happen naturally" she explained, and homeschooling has offered more opportunities for such interactions than "conventional schooling."

Summary

This study used a basic qualitative design and hand coding for analysis of the data collected from interviews with eight homeschooling parents of a two-parent homeschooling family. Seven of the eight parents interviewed had two or more elementary schooled aged children of whom at least two were homeschooled; one family had one homeschooled child. The research questions centered on how homeschooling parents perceived the effects of home education on the socialization of their elementary school aged children, and in what ways the parents made socialization a component of homeschooling practices. Five themes emerged which were: providing the opportunity to get along with people from all walks of life, family created community and culture, self-development and freedom, organized socialization & organic socialization.

   In Chapter 5 I will interpret the themes in connection with the conceptual framework and empirical literature discussed in Chapter 2. I will then present limitations of the findings, implications for social change, and opportunities for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore homeschooling parents'

perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school-

aged children and to identify in what ways, if any, parents make socialization a

component of homeschooling practices. In alignment with the purpose, the research

questions addressed how parents perceived the effects of homeschooling practices on the

socialization of their children and how these practices played a part in their everyday

lives.

For this basic qualitative study, I recruited eight participants who had been

homeschooling two or more elementary school-aged children for 2 or more years from

two regions in the United States. After the individual, semistructured interviews were

conducted, data saturation was evident. I then applied open coding for analysis from

which the following five themes emerged:

Theme 1: Homeschooling provides the opportunity to interact with people from

all walks of life.

Theme 2: The family creates community and culture.

Theme 3: Homeschooling fosters self-development and self-directedness.

Theme 4: Parents choose strategies for organized socialization.

Theme 5: Parents encourage organic socialization.

In this chapter, I interpret the key findings of the study in the context of the

conceptual framework. Then, I discuss the ways the findings confirm, disconfirm, or

extend findings of the recent, peer-reviewed research reviewed for this study. The

limitations of the study are described and recommendations for further research are offered. In closing, I explain the potential implications and implications for social change of the findings of the study**.**

Interpretation of the Findings

My interpretations of the findings are structured according to the five themes that emerged from data analysis regarding the conceptual framework and previous empirical literature.

Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was based on socialization as directed by Medlin's (2013) three socialization foci:

- Social activity: The interaction homeschooled children have with friends and peers.

- Social influence: Teaching children how to navigate social norms.

- Social exposure: How children understand the cultures and values of those around them (p. 107).

According to Medlin, these three foci are interconnected and always circle back to the central theme of socialization and how children learn and develop through interaction with the world around them. Medlin's conceptualization of socialization was prevalent in the five emergent themes in the current study. In the following subsections, I address each of the foci regarding relevant themes and whether the findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend Medlin's foci regarding socialization.

Social Activity

The first theme, providing the opportunity to get along with people from all walks of life, confirms Medlin's (2013) foci that social activity and the interaction homeschooled children have with friends and peers is treated with importance in homeschooling practices. All eight participants in the current study reported that social activity plays an integral part in the daily lives of their children and viewed it as part of the socialization. One of my interview questions, guided by the first of Medlin's foci, was "How do your kids make friends?" Participants reported that they believed their children received a healthy social structure from homeschooling practices. Toby, for instance, a mom of five, explained that her "kids are really set up to thrive socially. My kids get to meet all sorts of people and I feel deeply this is helping them flourish socially and emotionally."

Toby, in addition to the other seven participants, reported that volunteering is a key activity in the lives of their children and unique friendships have been formed through volunteering. Toby said that her children visit a retirement facility within walking distance from their home, sharing, "My kids go on a regular basis and consider their elderly friends near and dear to their hearts." Toby believes having this exposure has enabled her children to be "more well-rounded socially." Whether it was visiting retirement facilities, nursing homes, youth centers, or community clean-up initiatives, all eight participants reported that their children have ample time and opportunity to engage in civic duties.

Medlin (2013) credited the three foci with indicating how homeschooled children socialize in a manner that fosters their capacity to be active and responsible members of society. Many of my interview questions were based on this framework and both the opportunity for and exercise of social interactions between the participants' children and the world around them. In response to these questions, participants explained that socialization manifests in how their children get along with other people, both young and old. Nancy gave the example of her children having the ability to "get along with everyone" and having the reputation of "having good social skills and being able to talk to anyone." The ability to have positive interactions with friends and peers is a result of "the very nature of homeschooling which promotes interaction with an array of different individuals," according to Pam. This sentiment was repeated by the other seven participants as well.

Social Influence

Guided by the second of Medlin's (2000) three foci, one of my follow-up interview questions was "how will your kids learn proper behavior?" Participants answered this question by reporting that their children have learned how to get along with different personalities because the home learning environment has taught them how to navigate through differing societal norms. Understanding that people come from different places and cultures can be challenging, according to the participants; however, homeschooling has allowed them time and space to positively meet these challenges. Examining the participant contributions under the context of the framework fostered

confirmation that the social influences surrounding homeschooled children enable them to positively navigate social norms.

Social Exposure

Understanding the cultures of those around them and each child's peer's unique value system is at the core of homeschooling explained the participants. Guided by the third of Medlin's (2000) foci, I asked, "how will your kids learn about different people and how to get along in society?" Having social exposure to "all sorts of people" and not "just being surrounded by kids of the same age and demographic" is how Becca's children, for instance, learn to understand the "differences in people around the world." For example, having daily exposure to an array of people "enables children to grow into well-adjusted adults," Molly said. The other participants echoed Molly's sentiment in their own words and through their own personal stories and examples that confirm Medlin's ideas. Medlin found that homeschooled children maintain close friendships with individuals from various socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds as well as different ages and cultures.

Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Empirical Literature

This subsection is organized according to five of the concepts that, in part, guided the literature review in Chapter 2: practices within homeschooling to foster socialization, making friends, parent/student connection, stereotypical assertions and misconceptions of homeschooling, and freedom of environment. I have rephrased these five headings to better reflect the findings.

Stereotypical Assertions and Misconceptions of Homeschooling

A primary stereotypical assertion and misconception referenced in Chapter 2 was that homeschooled children do not have friends and are socially inept (see Jolly et al., 2012). The question about socialization has always plagued the lives of homeschoolers (Haugh, 2014). Participants in the current study referenced that they knew the social stereotypical assertions that were made by individuals "on the outside" or "those that do not understand homeschooling." However, the participants reported that they used those assertions and misconceptions in positive ways to help them create home learning environments that would serve to debunk those stereotypical assertions and misconceptions.

Many studies, such as the one by Mazama (2015), found homeschooled children to be emotionally equipped and to have friends of various cultures, races, and ethnicities. Mazama found that the homeschooled children in grow into community-minded adults with positive social awareness. Mazama credited the positive socialization findings to the strong connection the parental participants had with their children and the fact that these parents made identity and sense-of-self priorities in the lives of their children. The participants in the current study confirmed Mazama's conclusions.

In an article on common homeschooling myths, Romanowski (2006) explained the common assertion that the practice of homeschooling limits a child's exposure to the outside world and, therefore, that child will grow up to be socially deprived and lacking social awareness. Participants in the current study discussed this common assertion and reported that they believe influence from within the family structure, rather than from

outside sources, builds socially aware and healthy individuals. These participant responses led to the creation of Theme 2: Family created community and culture.

Parent/Student Connection

Mazama (2015) explained that homeschooling parents have a strong connection to their children, knowing what their children need both academically and socially. Romanowski (2006) found that one of the primary reasons for homeschooling was that parents wanted to "foster family relationships amongst siblings and parents" and "provide their children with guided and reasoned social interactions with peers and adults" (p. 129). Participants in the current study confirmed this guided interaction between parent and child, also reporting that this relationship between parents and children led to a deep connection that strengthened the family unit as a whole.

Several recent studies, such as Abuzandah (2020) and Tweni et al. (2022), found that homeschooling parents can adequately address the developmental needs of their children because learning for their children is interactive. Abuzandah found that adapting teaching skills to the needs of children resulted in making learning more enjoyable and enforced social skills through stronger bonds between children and their parents. Participants in the current study reported that they felt a very close bond with their children that they explained was created and nurtured by having the daily connections that are natural to the homeschooling environment.

Socialization and Making Friends

The literature review in Chapter 2 addressed socialization as a primary factor in homeschooling practices. The first theme, providing the opportunity to get along with

people from all walks of life, confirmed this. For instance, Guterman and Neuman (2017), Baili (2017), and Perlman-Avnion and Grayevsky (2019) all found that homeschooled children interact with a large array of individuals on a regular basis in numerous venues. After interviews with 140 homeschooling parents, Guterman and Neuman reported that many homeschooled children made friends and developed their social aptitude from engaging in activities with peers of similar interests. Guterman and Neuman also found that these interactions were based on common interests rather than age or demographic because homeschooled children were involved in a vast number of social activities with peers and adults alike. My research confirmed Guterman and Neuman's findings.

Like the participants in the study by Guterman and Neuman (2017), the participants in the current study consisted of parents of homeschooled children. These parents were able to lend knowledge and understanding into the specifics of their children's daily lives by explaining the how and why of their children's social interactions. For example, Guterman and Neuman found that homeschooled children advanced their social aptitude by socializing with individuals of varied ages, cultures, and socio-demographic circumstances. The participants in the current study also reported that their homeschooled children have made friends based on parallel interests, which was due to the numerous daily opportunities given to them by the very nature of home-based education.

After conducting a quantitative study with 100 survey respondents, Baidi (2019) found that homeschooled children were given the opportunity to interact with a large

array of individuals due to their exposure and daily array of activities. The participants in the current study reported the same as evident in the themes that emerged from data analysis. The first theme emerged from codes such as "opportunity to socialize with all genders," "friends with all ages," and "interacting with people from different cultures." Baidi found that social awareness and positive social skills are developed through the experience of being around different people.

In their mixed-method study involving 78 participants, Perlman-Avnion and Grayevsky (2019) found that homeschooling parents made socialization a priority through both routinely organized activities and enabling natural social setting experiences like encouraging children to play with neighbors and peers from commonly shared activities. In addition, Perlman-Avnion and Grayevsky discovered that homeschooled children were perceived by parents to show the same or similar interest in civic duties and overall social aptitude as their peers from public school.

A recent study by Abuzandah (2020) indicated that homeschooling can enhance children's social skills provided that their parents facilitate constructive social interactions with peers. Abuzandah used 12 case studies consisting of 12 participants, six of whom were students currently being homeschooled at the time of the study and six parental instructors. Abuzandah's findings confirmed the importance of peer interaction for homeschooled children while also confirming the importance and value of the homeschool environment in order to enable peer interaction.

Freedom of Environment

Firmin et al. (2019), Mazama (2015), Medlin (2013), Grant (2011), and Romanowski (2006) all indicated that a free environment was the number one reason for enabling homeschooled children to have a diverse demographic of friends and peers. Whether it was organized or organic, participants in the current study indicated that socialization has been enriched for their homeschooled children because they have an environment free of unnecessary restrictions, such as "limiting the age of classmates as is done in conventional learning environments," according to one participant. Freedom of environment was confirmed as a primary factor in homeschooling in all five themes; however, it was most evident in Theme 3: Self-development, Theme 4: Organized socialization, and Theme 5: Organic socialization.

Medlin (2013) found that homeschooling practices were based on the premise that parents should have the ability to arrange for optimal social interactions through freedom of environment and natural circumstance. Freedom was a code identified in Themes 3, 4, and 5. The third theme, self-development and freedom, emerged because participants reported that their children were able to develop themselves because they have the freedom to discern who they are in the world. Themes 4 and 5 both indicated freedom codes.

The results of Firmin et al.'s (2019) research also echoed Medlin's (2013) findings regarding the importance of freedom in the focus area of socialization. Firmin et al. conducted a qualitative study of 15 homeschooling parents and found that their participants who were homeschooling parents took great care to arrange for free

environments in order for their children to socialize. Having the ability to freely choose friends based on similar interests was something found to be important to participants in the current study, and they reported considering this freedom fundamental to the socialization practices of their children.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study included the small sample size of eight participants, relying solely on the participants' perceptions, and not interviewing or observing the children in the study. Another limitation of the study was that it was conducted while seven out of the eight parents were actively homeschooling as opposed to how parents' feel about the socialization of their children after the schooling process had been completed. Interviewing only mothers was a limitation in my study as well as a lack of race diversity as all the participants identified as White.

Recommendations For Future Research

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and my findings in this qualitative study, I recommend further research is warranted to extend knowledge on the research topic. Studies containing a larger participant pool is recommended as well as a study of the perceptions of homeschooled children on how homeschooling affects their socialization. In order to better understand the long-term effects of homeschooling on socialization, I recommend that further research is conducted using participants who were involved in homeschooling practices in the past regarding their perceptions of the outcomes and long-term effect on homeschooled children.

Implications

Implications for positive social change resulting from this study may consist of the addition of new knowledge to the discipline as well as the expansion of previously known information. The findings of this study centered on what parents' perceptions of how homeschooling affects the socialization of their elementary school aged children and in what way, if any, do these parents make socialization a component of their homeschooling practices. The findings of this study could increase understanding of how socialization plays a role in the lives of homeschooled children and benefit potential homeschooling parents who are looking to better understand the interconnection of homeschooling and socialization.

The findings from this study could also further positive social change by informing educators and current homeschooling parents on possible ideas on how to integrate socialization into learning objects as well as better understand how children make friends and upon what those friendships may be founded, such as common interests. Positive social change could also take the form of educators and community members stepping away from the common comparison of public schoolers to homeschoolers by directing attention to how each educational venue can learn from the other. Additional implications for positive social change could be in the form of interdisciplinary initiatives in schools or alternative learning environments.

Conclusion

As I undertook this research, I had hoped to provide more insight for homeschooling parents regarding how their children could make friends and have a

strong peer group while learning in a home environment. Stereotyped views of it being a struggle to combat seeming isolation of homeschooled children did not bear out in the findings of this study. The eight mothers who have homeschooled their children and volunteered for this study demonstrated confidence about successfully providing socialization experiences for their children. The emergent themes from data analysis pointed to ways they perceived homeschooling provides the opportunity to interact with people from all walks of life, ways that family creates community and culture that lends children insight into relationships outside the family. The homeschooling parents believed their efforts foster their children's self-development and self-directedness. They chose strategies for organized socialization experiences and encouraged organic socialization. This study adds a focus on socialization with peers to the field's exploration of the similar academic outcomes of homeschooling (Bennet et al., 2019; Yuet al., 2016) or better academic outcomes (Firmin et al., 2019; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Lubienski et al., 2013; Ray, 2015).

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Interviewee Name: _____
Date: _____
Time: _____
Location: (i.e. in person or zoom). _____
Signed Consent: yes___no____

Interview Protocol:
Introduction to interview:

      (Insert Interviewee name) _____, thank you for agreeing to meet with me today and be interviewed on the topic of your homeschooling experience. I appreciate that you signed the consent form and are now taking time from your busy life to speak with me. As mentioned in the consent agreement this interview will be recorded so that I will properly and accurately capture your exact words and sentiments. Let me reiterate, as I mentioned in our initial conversation on the matter, that your privacy is of my utmost concern and maintaining your anonymity is at the forefront of this interview process. I will not directly quote you by proper name unless that is your wish and I have received consent to do so. If at anytime you would like to take a break from answering questions or feel that a question is something you prefer not to answer, please feel free to tell me.

	Interview Question:	**Possible Probes:**	**Interviewer Comments:** (for interviewer use only)
Question 1	Please tell me about your family structure. Number of children, ages, etc.	Have your children always been homeschooled?	
Question 2	What led you to choose homeschooling?	Where there other reasons? Is this still the reason you homeschool or has the reasons changed and if so how?	
Question 3	How did you feel about homeschooling before you tried it? Or 'what were your	Tell me more…	

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	perceptions of it before…"		
Question 4	What was your perception of socialization within homeschooling prior to beginning homeschooling practices? this sounds like a probe, but it's a key question for you. They might have talked about this before.	Were there other aspects of socialization that you thought about? What is your current perception?	
Question 5	Tell me about a typical homeschooling day in your home.	How does socialization playout in your child's daily life? Weekly? Monthly . sporadic?	
Question 6	Was socialization a concern for you prior to homeschooling? Might this have been discussed already ?	What is your current feeling on the topic now?	
Question 7	How would you describe your children's friendships?	Do you make play dates or arrange meetups regularly? Set up so not yes/no Do you direct their friendships?	
Question 8	Tell me about your children's friends.	Healthy? Happy? Close knit? Are they of the same or different ages as your children?	

Question 9	How do you perceive your role in your children's friendships? Maybe ask this before you ask about "do you set up dates?"	Tell me more…	
Question 10	How do you think homeschooling affects the socialization of your kids?	Tell me more….	
Question 11	Has your perception of socialization within homeschooling changed since you started the process, and if so how?	Tell me more…	
Question 12	Tell me about some of the positive experiences of socialization your children have had. Ask this before you ask about 'if you set up dates?" see if they talk about that first?	Were these experiences unique to using the home-schooling method and if yes how so?	
Question 13	Tell me about what specific elements of your homeschooling practices you feel play a strong role in the socialization process of your children?	Tell me more…	
Question 14	What do you wish you had known about socialization within homeschooling prior to starting the process?	Tell me more….	

Question 15	Is there anything else you would like to share with me?	Anything that you think could prove helpful to others who would like to know more about the how homeschooled children make friends and maintain friendships?	

Conclusion:

_____, thank you for your time and attention to answering questions for this study. If you think of any other information that you would like to share, please feel free to reach out in order to meet again or email me your thoughts and comments.