

African American Homeschool Parents’ Motivations for Homeschooling and Their Black Children’s Academic Achievement

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This study explores the motivations of African American parents for choosing homeschooling for their children and the academic achievement of their Black homeschool students. Their reasons for homeschooling are similar to those of homeschool parents in general, although some use homeschooling to help their children understand Black culture and history. The average reading, language, and math test scores of these Black homeschool students are significantly higher than those of Black public school students (with effect sizes of .60 to 1.13) and equal to or higher than all public school students as a group in this exploratory, cross-sectional, and explanatory nonexperimental study.

KEYWORDS *homeschooling, African American, Black students, motivation, academic achievement, school choice, parents as teachers, parent involvement, educational policy*

Federal researchers (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013; United States Department of Education, 2010) found that the rate of Black families homeschooling their children in the United States nearly doubled from 1999 to 2012. Very few studies, however, have focused on this population. The purpose of this study is to examine the motivations of African American parents for homeschooling and the academic achievement of their Black children.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Commentators are noting a substantial rise in the percentage of Black parents who are intentionally seeking alternatives to conventional institutional public schools for a better education for their children (Hess, 2010; Lomotey, 2012). African Americans have been some of the most vociferous supporters over the past 10 to 15 years of public charter schools and vouchers as ways to improve their children's educational lot (Cooper, 2005; Williams, 2002). Some have even tried establishing schools for Black students only (Jesse, 2010). This comes 60 years after of the U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that many hoped would be the key to equalizing academic opportunity or performance between Black and White children. Nevertheless, many researchers still find great disparities between White children and those of Color, specifically African Americans¹ (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009), despite the fact that institutional racism might have notably subsided (Ogbu, 2004; Williams, 2011). Either way, many Black parents have become "active school choice-makers and educational advocates" (Cooper, 2007, p. 508).

One educational alternative to which African Americans are gravitating is parent-led home-based education, that most call homeschooling. "Homeschooling is a form of private education that is parent led and home based" and "homeschooling does not rely on either state-run public schooling or institutional private schooling for a child's education" (Ray, 2013, p. 324). Although homeschooling was quite common from colonial times until about 1920 (Ray, 2012), by the 1960s homeschooling was nearly extinct (Lines, 1991). Beginning in the late 1970s homeschooling began to grow again. It is estimated that by early 2014 there were about 2.2 million K–12 homeschool students in the United States (Noel et al., 2013; North Carolina, Department of Administration, 2013; Ray, 2011).

Entrance of Blacks to the Modern Homeschool Movement

Few studies have addressed the ethnic/racial makeup of the homeschool population despite the fact that homeschooling has spread well beyond White non-Hispanic families. African American children comprised about 8% (Noel et al., 2013, p. 17) of the roughly 2.04 million K–12 students homeschool students in the spring of 2010 (Ray, 2011). In 1999, only 1.0% of Black children were homeschooled but by 2010 it had grown to 1.9% (Noel et al., 2013; United States Department of Education, 2010). This suggests a 90% increase in the rate of Blacks home educating their children over the course of 11 years. This prominent increase is consistent with what I have been told by grassroots homeschool organizations across the nation. This trend raises important questions. Why are these parents choosing homeschooling when so many African Americans and others

fought hard for so long to have access to and be mainstreamed into the nation's public schools? What impact might homeschooling have on their children's academic achievement? I now offer a synopsis of homeschool research, while the reader may find more extensive reviews by Murphy (2012) and Ray (2013).

Reasons for Home Educating

Most parents and youth decide to homeschool for more than one reason, and their reasons often change over time (Resetar, 1990). The most common reasons given by parents or youth for homeschooling are to (a) customize or individualize the child's education, (b) accomplish more academically, (c) use pedagogical approaches other than those typical in institutional schools, (d) enhance family relationships, (e) provide guided and reasoned social interactions with peers and adults, (f) provide a safer learning environment, (g) avoid negative experiences parents had in institutional schools, and (h) fulfill the parents' job to teach and impart a particular set of values, beliefs, and worldview to their children and not delegate such to schools (Murphy, 2012; Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013; Stevens, 2001). Only a few studies to date have focused on African Americans and their motivations for homeschooling.

Taylor's (2005) view is that improved academic achievement and increasing expectations of every child are perhaps the key reasons for Blacks homeschooling. She wrote the following:

The legacy of the *Brown* decision is not only about access but is also about options. We African Americans owe it to our children to exercise all available opportunities to ensure their current and future success. We are not obligated to wait for schools to improve to better meet our needs; we are obligated to provide our children the best education available. (pp. 131–132)

In addition, some scholars have found that race/ethnicity plays a part in motivations for Black homeschool parents (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). They studied 24 Black parents via surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Their report focused on two motivators for homeschooling. One was "the role of ethnicity" (p. 376). "Black families' perceived that institutional norms and structures within schools created destructive, rather than supportive, learning environments for children of African descent" (p. 376). The other motivator was the "role of religion" (p. 379). A majority of the parents reported that religious beliefs influenced their decisions to homeschool. Some "directly shared a belief that God had actually led them to home schooling" while others "described home schooling as a complement and support to their religious beliefs" (p. 379).

Fields-Smith and Kisura (2013) presented a synthesis of two independently conducted studies of Black homeschool families; one was situated

in Metro-DC and the other in Metro-Atlanta. Their findings, based on interviews and focus groups, represent the voices of 54 Black home educators. The researchers focused on five “key motivations” (p. 272) in their article. These were the negative experiences in schools of a “culture of low expectations” (p. 272), the “plight of Black boys” (p. 274), the “psychology of safety” (p. 276), and the “positive opportunities in home education” (p. 276) of “imparting Black/African American culture” (p. 277) and “seeking a global perspective” (p. 277). Fields-Smith and Kisura (2013) theorized as follows:

Thus, contrary to the negative depictions of black families as disengaged from the educational pursuits of their children, we evoke hooks’ (1990) notion of *homeplace* to argue that black home education represents a vehicle of resistance to institutionalized racism and ideological mismatches between black families and their children’s educational needs. (p. 266)

Mazama and Lundy (2013b) interviewed 74 Black parents, and surveys, focus groups, and participant observations of Black homeschooling parents were also done. Regarding reasons for homeschooling, they found that:

most parents gave two to three reasons for homeschooling and rarely were they motivated by a single cause. Among the many reasons given was a concern with the quality of education provided in brick and mortar schools, which was most often mentioned (23.2%). . . . The second most cited factor was the desire to strengthen family bonds (13.7%), which respondents felt schools systematically undermined. (pp. 131–132)

The third most-mentioned reason (by 12.6 % of the subjects) was “the desire on the part of parents to teach their children using a curriculum that positively reflects African American culture” (p. 132) and the fourth most frequently cited motive (by 10% of the parents) was racism. Mazama and Lundy concluded that “many African American homeschoolers believe that a Eurocentric curriculum is bound to gravely interfere with their children’s self-esteem and sense of purpose” (p. 123). Motivations for Blacks homeschooling have many similarities to others’ motivations and some research suggests that other catalysts are also at play.

Learning and Academic Achievement

Numerous studies by various researchers have examined the academic achievement of home-educated students, and state departments of education have provided relevant data that show homeschool students score, on average, at the 65th to 80th percentile on standardized tests (Martin-Chang, Gould, & Meuse, 2011; Murphy, 2012; Oregon Department of Education,

1999; Ray, 1990a, 1994, 1997, 2000b, 2005, 2010, 2013; Rudner, 1999; Van Pelt, 2004; Wartes, 1990; Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1985). Some scholars have carefully posited that the elements of pedagogical practice, lifestyle, and philosophy of education that are generally systemic to home-based education might be causally related to higher academic achievement (Murphy, 2012; Ray, 1990b, 1997, 2000b, 2013). Several academics (e.g., Murphy, 2012; Ray, 2013) have cautioned, however, about the methodological limitations of many studies on homeschooling so that readers do not conclude that homeschooling necessarily causes high (or low) academic achievement. Most of the studies involve serious sampling challenges and have been descriptive and cross-sectional, and not causal-comparative, in design (Johnson, 2001; Murphy, 2012). Researchers have had considerable difficulty in getting guaranteed representative samples.

Social, Emotional, and Psychological Development

Many ask, related to homeschooling, “What about socialization?” “This question arises mainly in societies in which the institutionalization of children has been the norm for several generations of children between the ages of 6 to 18” (Ray, 2013, p. 327). Medlin’s (2013) review of research found that homeschooled children are acquiring the “skills, behavior patterns, values, and motivations” they need to function competently as members of society:

In fact, some indicators—quality of friendships during childhood, infrequency of behavior problems during adolescence, openness to new experiences in college, civic involvement in adulthood—suggest that the kind of socialization experiences homeschooled children receive may be more advantageous than those of children who attend conventional schools. (p. 293)

Medlin found there is no empirical evidence that adults who were home educated are somehow less able than those who attended institutional schools to civically interact with individuals and their communities. These research findings might make homeschooling more attractive to Black parents than if such discoveries were not available.

Adults Who Were Home Educated

Many also ask, “How will the home-educated person do once in the ‘real world’ of adulthood?” Research generally shows that the home educated are faring well, compared to those who attend public and private schools, in their adulthood (Belfield, 2005; Cheng, 2014; Cogan, 2010; Galloway & Sutton, 1995; Gloeckner & Jones, 2013; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; Knowles & Muchmore, 1995; Montgomery, 1989; Murphy, 2012, p. 148; Oliveira, Watson,

& Sutton, 1994; Ray, 2004; Sheffer, 1995; Sutton & Galloway, 2000; White, Moore, & Squires, 2009; White et al., 2007). Some have wondered, for example, whether the homeschooled will learn to be tolerant or willing “to extend civil liberties to people who hold views with which one disagrees” (Cheng, 2014, p. 49). Surprisingly to many critics of homeschooling, Cheng found that “greater exposure to homeschooling is associated with more political tolerance” (p. 49). There is no research showing a negative long-term effect of homeschooling. These research findings might also make home education more attractive to African Americans than if they were not available.

Society in General and Black Community and Culture

Some posit that if millions of children and youth are individually benefited by home-based education then the overall society will be benefitted (e.g., Howell, 2005; Ray, 2000a, 2013). Others argue that the common good is advanced if more parents put their children into state institutional schools rather than seek their children’s good via home-based education (e.g., Apple, 2000, 2006; Evans, 2003; Lubienski, 2000). Apple (2000) and Lubienski (2000), for example, associate the choice to homeschool with selfishness on the part of parents. Scholars have found, however, that Black homeschool parents are highly motivated to proactively seek out and construct the best education possible for their children, for their children’s sake (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Taylor, 2005). There is still relatively little known about homeschooling by Black families. A few researchers have examined African Americans’ motivations for homeschooling and apparently no findings on the academic achievement of Black homeschool students had been published when this study commenced.

Purpose and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic achievement of Black homeschool students in Grades 4 to 8 as it relates to various demographic features of the students and their families and to better understand these parents’ motivations for homeschooling. I expected to find that the academic achievement of Black homeschool students is, on average, higher than that of Black public school students (see reviews, e.g., Murphy, 2012; Ray, 2000b, 2005, 2013). I also hypothesized that Black homeschool students might not perform as well on these tests as do White homeschool students. Many studies and national data on the performance of Black students in public schools on standardized achievement tests show they score lower than Whites, regardless of the reasons for such disparity in public schools, than do Whites (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Vanneman et al., 2009). Also, the Black homeschooling community is relatively new and has not had as much time

to develop support infrastructure. Finally, I hypothesized that Black parents' reasons for homeschooling are similar to those of homeschool parents in general, except that they might mention shielding their children from race-based or racist behaviors in public schools (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012, 2013a, 2013b).

METHODOLOGY

Design

This is a cross-sectional, explanatory nonexperimental study (Johnson, 2001), or causal-comparative study (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 537). The design controlled for limited background independent variables for the homeschool and public-school students in a way that very few studies to date have accomplished. Data were collected from homeschool parents and students at only a single point in time. One objective of this study was to identify potential causal factors that produce differences in academic achievement, if any, between homeschool and public-school Black students.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in this study:

1. "Academic achievement" is the amount learned in terms of knowledge, skills, and understanding as measured by a well-recognized, nationally normed, standardized academic achievement test (e.g., *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills [ITBS]*).
2. A "homeschool student" is a person who is in Grades 4 to 8 during the collection of data (roughly ages 9 to 14) and engaged or enrolled in private home-based education and not enrolled in public or private institutional (or classroom) schooling for 50% or more of his or her Kindergarten through current grade-level years.
3. A "public school student" is a person in Grades 4 to 8 enrolled in public schooling/education when he or she took the academic achievement test and used by the publisher of the ITBS to establish norms.
4. "Black," when referring to the homeschool students in this study, is defined as the parent having identified the child as "Black (or African American)" and both of the child's parents were identified as "Black (or African American)" regarding race/ethnicity. Black and African American will be used interchangeably in the general narrative of this article.
5. "Parent was teacher certified" means the student's mother or father is/was (ever) certified to teach in any state.
6. "Degree of structure" in the practice of home education varies greatly. It ranges from a very unstructured learning approach, (e.g., centered upon

the child's interests or the eclectic nature of the teaching parent) to the use of a preplanned, structured, and highly prescribed curriculum. To the statement, "The main method used for this child during his/her school-age homeschool years has been," the parent made a choice from a 7-point list from *very unstructured* to *very structured*.

7. "Structured learning" is time during which the child is engaged in learning activities planned by the parent; it is a time during which the child is not free to do whatever he or she chooses. The parent was asked, "On average, how many hours per day has this child been engaged in structured learning?"
8. "Formal instruction" is considered to be planned or intentional instruction in areas such as reading, writing, spelling, or mathematics; it is done to meet a learning objective. The parent was asked at what age formal instruction began for this child.
9. Whether the child was eligible for "free or reduced lunch" (per United States Department of Agriculture, 2011) served as a proxy for the family's socioeconomic status.
10. "Cost per child" is the amount of money that was spent on the student's education during the conventional school year for textbooks, lesson materials, tutoring and enrichment services, testing, counseling, evaluation, and so forth.

The dependent variable of concern is academic achievement as measured by a nationally normed standardized academic achievement test (i.e., ITBS). The independent variables are type of education/schooling (i.e., public schooling, homeschooling), gender of student, and socioeconomic status.

Population and Sample

The homeschool target population was primarily middle-class Black homeschool families with students in grade levels 4 to 8 (roughly ages 9 to 14) who had been home educated at least half of their K–12 grade-level school years. I accessed these families via several sources. The main effort to gain participants was through a nationwide support organization that serves mainly African American homeschoolers, National Black Homeschoolers (NBH; only pseudonyms are used in this paragraph). NBH is the oldest and best-known support group of its kind. NBH promoted the study to their approximately 140 member families, and to a larger list that included anyone who wanted to be on it (e.g., of any race/ethnicity, pedagogical preference, or religious affiliation, and homeschooling or not). Any child in a member household or on the list who the parents might consider Black would qualify for this study only if the child fit the definition given previously (i.e., number 2). The study was also promoted to all Black homeschool support groups that could be identified as such. An announcement about the study

also went out to statewide homeschool support organizations (e.g., those listed by The Teaching Home, 2014) and a well-known nationwide organization (Homeschool Protection Group) with a history of decades of support to the homeschooling community with respect to many topics; all of these lists, however, included a small minority of Black families. The study was also promoted to African American families via word of mouth. I contacted various support organizations and they assisted me in contacting Black homeschool families who might be willing to participate in the study. These organizations and I firmly encouraged any and all Black families to participate, regardless of their reasons for homeschooling, socioeconomic status, or prediction of how their children might score on a standardized academic achievement test.

It was very challenging to obtain the sample of the families and their 81 students who fit the criteria for this study. There were several reasons for this. First, it was not easy to find active support groups that included or focused on serving African American homeschool families. Second, homeschool families are difficult to study (e.g., resistance to engage with researchers) and wary of researchers (Murphy, 2012). They like privacy for their families and many of them have experienced criticism and harsh treatment from government agencies, academics, and others. From doing this study, my experience is that Black homeschool parents are extra cautious about participating. Third, I found out that restricting my study to only children for whom both of the child's parents identified as "Black" notably reduced the pool of who might participate in the study. Fourth, organizing and managing (from 50 to 3,000 miles away and on a very limited budget) volunteer local test managers in several cities to find and/or organize several homeschool families on a mutually agreeable testing date is a very demanding logistical challenge. As many studies by various academics have shown, homeschool parents and their children are not a group of people who are constrained by a regular daily schedule and a location that easily fit the needs of a researcher who wants to work with a group all at one time, rather than a single family or one student at a time. The resource-intensive nature of this kind of research likely explains why few have undertaken it.

Data from 1,299 Black public school students are used in this study as a comparison group. These data were provided by the publisher, Riverside Publishing, of the ITBS (i.e., the same test administered to the Black homeschool students). The publisher provided fully anonymized data for these public school students. The only variables included in the dataset that were usable for this study were test scores, grade level of test, sex, race/ethnicity, and whether the student's family qualified for free or reduced lunch. Table 1 provides some comparative demographic statistics for the homeschool and public school students.

TABLE 1 Some Comparative Information for the Black Public School and Black Homeschool Participants

Variable	Public school (total sample <i>n</i>)	Homeschool (total sample <i>n</i>)
Students gender, male/female	51.3%/48.7% (1287)	39.5%/60.5% (81)
Free or reduced lunch qualified	2.2% (1299)	40% (75)
Both parents Black?	Not available	100% (81)
Number children in family	Not available	mean, 4.15; median, 4.00
Household income	Not available	median = \$70,000 (76) \$0 to \$29,999 less, 11.8% \$30,000 - \$89,999, 52.7% \$90,000 or more, 35.5%
Family structure	Not available	Married couple, 98.8% Divorced parent, 1.2%

Instruments, Data, and Data Analysis

I administered a 39-item, paper-and-pencil survey to homeschool parents that was comprised of items on topics such as parent and family demographics, student’s demographics and schooling history, approach to homeschooling, and parents’ motivations or reasons for homeschooling their children. Most items were identical or similar to those used in previous studies (e.g., Noel et al., 2013; Ray, 2004). Family eligibility for free or reduced lunch (United States Department of Agriculture, 2011) served as a proxy for the socioeconomic status of the student’s family. Data gathered by the survey were used to categorize homeschool students’ families as “free lunch” or not and data provided by the test publisher (on students’ “free lunch” status) were used for comparison with public school students.

The standardized academic achievement tests used in this study were the ITBS (Form A, levels 10–14, Grades 4 to 8). The ITBS is published by Riverside Publishing Company. The tests were designed and developed by University of Iowa professors to measure skills and standards important to growth across the curriculum in the nation’s public and private schools. The ITBS reflects many years of test development experience and research on measuring achievement and critical thinking skills in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and information sources. These tests are considered to have strong and well-established validity and reliability (e.g., Iowa Testing Programs, 2005). The tests were administered during the Spring of 2012 by publisher-qualified test administrators; all tests administered for the study were used in the data analysis (i.e., none were rejected).

The statistical software *IBM SPSS Statistics* (IBM SPSS, 2013) was used for data analysis. Students’ scores on tests were handled in the following manner. Percentile equivalents were converted to z-scores (Hopkins, Glass, & Hopkins, 1987). Means were calculated and statistical tests were performed

using z-scores (Loveless, 2002; Pattison, Grodsky, & Muller, 2013; Tallmadge & Wood, 1978; Yin, Schmidt, & Besag, 2006). Missing data were handled listwise. In many cases, simple descriptive statistics and frequencies were appropriate and reported. Stepwise regressions were used (with p-level-in set at .05 and p-level-out set at .10). Indicator (dummy) variables (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) were used for categorical variables such as free/reduced lunch, gender, and study group. Hopkins' (2000) qualitative terms regarding the amounts of variance explained in correlations or regressions were used; his terms that range from least to most significant are trivial, small, moderate, large, very large, nearly perfect, and perfect.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

I assumed that parents accurately answered the survey items and that they were honest, that the publisher-qualified test administrators properly administered the academic achievement tests to the students, and that the data I received from the test publisher regarding public-school students were dependable. I was not studying whether these parents and their children were successful at meeting various objectives related to their reasons for homeschooling. This study is not designed to compare Black homeschool students' achievement to all homeschool students' achievement in preceding studies. It is not known whether this sample is representative of all U.S. Black homeschool families, and therefore one should be cautious regarding generalizations. There is no comprehensive list of Black homeschool families from which to sample. This should be considered as part of groundwork in studies of its type, focusing on African American families who homeschool.

This is a cross-sectional, explanatory nonexperimental study (Johnson, 2001) and controlled for limited background independent variables for the homeschool and public-school students in a way that very few studies (if any) have accomplished using the limited data available to any researcher with the fairly limited resources available. It is not an experimental study that is designed, in and of itself, to establish causation. This is meant to be a simple, efficient, and hardy study of Black homeschool parents and children. This study is designed to uncover findings that might develop perceptions and increase understanding of fitting policies or outlooks on homeschooling in general, and homeschooling by African Americans in particular.

A study such as this of Black homeschool students' academic achievement might raise the issues of stereotype threat (American Psychological Association, 2005) or the Hawthorne effect (McCarney et al., 2007). Regarding the stereotype threat, I have no reason to believe that either parents or test administrators said anything about the students' race or ethnicity in connection with the testing and I did not instruct them to do so. Further, if the effects of stereotype threat were involved in this study, it would mean that the Black homeschool students performed worse on the tests than their

actual abilities would predict, and their scores would have been higher had there been no stereotype effect. Regarding the Hawthorne effect, it is possible that these homeschool students tried harder than normal because they were being tested or perhaps knew that they were part of a study. I have no evidence that the parents or test administrators promoted to the students that they were being watched, so to speak. I think, however, that it is also possible that public school students in the norming groups for standardizing the tests might have tried just as hard during their testing as did these homeschool students. It would be difficult to confidently argue one way or another on this point.

FINDINGS

Characteristics of Students and Families

The Black homeschool students in the study lived in 15 states and the District of Columbia. The 81 students were from all four regions of the United States, as follows: Northeast (8), Midwest (14), South (52), and West (7). Regarding gender, 39.5% of the students were male. Their mean age was 11.62 ($SD = 1.617$) and the mean grade level was 5.96 ($SD = 1.495$). The mean number of children, ages 21 and under, in the home was 4.15 ($SD = 2.122$). There were 5 or more children in 39.5% of the families. Eighty students were tested by a qualified test administrator other than the student's parent; one was tested by his/her parent who was a qualified test administrator. The mother was the main home-education teacher for 79 of the students. Some 11.1% of the mothers had ever been certified to teach in any state. Of the fathers, 12.7% had ever been certified to teach in any state. [Table 1](#) provides some comparative demographic statistics for the homeschool and public school families and students.

Most studies find close to a one-to-one gender ratio among homeschool students (e.g., Ray, 2010; Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). Some have found homeschooled students to be somewhat disproportionately female (e.g., United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010: 58% female), and this was consistent with the present study (60% female). Aud, Fox, and Ramani (2010) found that that 74% of Black public school 4th graders were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in 2009. Perhaps, then, the present study included Black public school students who were, on average, from wealthier Black families than the general population of Black families with school-aged children.

Reasons for Homeschooling

Parents were asked to mark all the reasons or motivations why they homeschool their child. They chose from a list of 21 reasons, including

other/another. Their responses are noted in Table 2. The six reasons most commonly selected for homeschooling by these Black parents were (a) the parents “prefer to teach the child at home so that you [parent] can provide religious or moral instruction” (chosen by 96.3% of parents), (b) “for the parents to transmit values, beliefs, and worldview to the child” (95.1%), (c) “develop stronger family relationships between children and parents and among brothers and sisters” (87.7%), (d) “to customize or individualize the education of each child” (80.2%), (e) “accomplish more academically than in conventional schools” (76.5%), and (f) “want to provide religious or moral instruction different from that taught in public schools” (76.5%).

Parents were also asked to list “the three main reasons, from [the] previous [list], for homeschooling this child.” Their responses are tabulated in

TABLE 2 Reasons Parents Gave for Homeschooling Their Children

Reason ^a	Frequency	Percent
1. Prefer to teach the child at home so that you can provide religious or moral instruction.	78	96.3
2. For the parents to transmit values, beliefs, and worldview to the child.	77	95.1
3. Develop stronger family relationships between children and parents and among brothers and sisters.	71	87.7
4. To customize or individualize the education of each child.	65	80.2
5. Accomplish more academically than in conventional schools.	62	76.5
6. Want to provide religious or moral instruction different from that taught in public schools.	62	76.5
7. Concerned about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure.	59	72.8
8. Provide guided and reasoned social interactions with youthful peers and adults.	56	69.1
9. Dissatisfied with the academic instruction at other schools.	43	53.1
10. Use pedagogical (teaching) approaches other than those typical in institutional schools.	43	53.1
11. Provide safety from teasing, ostracizing, bullying, and pressures toward premarital sex.	42	51.9
12. The child's parents should be his/her main teachers.	37	45.7
13. Give the child a more international perspective or worldview.	32	39.5
14. Give the child more instruction on African American/Black culture and history.	32	39.5
15. You are interested in a nontraditional approach to children's education.	32	39.5
16. You have another reason for homeschooling your child.	19	23.5
17. Desire to avoid racism in public schools.	16	19.8
18. Would prefer private school but cannot afford the tuition.	4	4.9
19. Child has other special needs that you feel the school can't or won't meet.	3	3.7
20. Child has a physical or mental health problem that has lasted 6 months or more.	0	0.0
21. Child has a temporary illness that prevents (him/her) from going to school.	0	0.0

^aParents were told: “Please mark all the reasons that apply for this child.”

TABLE 3 Parents' Main Reasons for Homeschooling This Child

Reason ^a	Frequency	Percent
Prefer to teach the child at home so that you can provide religious or moral instruction.	38	46.9
Accomplish more academically than in conventional schools.	31	38.3
For the parents to transmit values, beliefs, and worldview to the child.	28	34.6
To customize or individualize the education of each child.	23	28.4
Want to provide religious or moral instruction different from that taught in public schools.	22	27.2
Develop stronger family relationships between children and parents and among brothers and sisters.	19	23.4
Concerned about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure.	18	22.2
The child's parents should be his/her main teachers.	15	18.5
You have another reason for homeschooling your child.	14	17.3
Provide safety from teasing, ostracizing, bullying, and pressures toward premarital sex.	8	9.9
Dissatisfied with the academic instruction at other schools.	7	8.6
Provide guided and reasoned social interactions with youthful peers and adults.	5	6.2
Give the child a more international perspective or worldview.	3	3.7
Use pedagogical (teaching) approaches other than those typical in institutional schools.	3	3.7
Desire to avoid racism in public schools.	2	2.5
Give the child more instruction on African American/Black culture and history.	2	2.5
Child has a physical or mental health problem that has lasted 6 months or more.	1	1.2
Would prefer private school but cannot afford the tuition.	1	1.2
You are interested in a nontraditional approach to children's education.	1	1.2
Child has a temporary illness that prevents (him/her) from going to school.	0	0.0
Child has other special needs that you feel the school can't or won't meet.	0	0.0

^aParents were asked to list the "three main reasons" for homeschooling this child. Responses are arranged in descending order according to reasons most frequently given by parents.

Table 3. The five reasons most often chosen were (a) "prefer to teach the child at home so that you can provide religious or moral instruction" (selected as one of the "three main reasons" by 46.9% of parents); (b) "accomplish more academically than in conventional schools" (38.3%); (c) "for the parents to transmit values, beliefs, and worldview to the child" (34.6%); (d) "to customize or individualize the education of each child" (28.4%); and (e) "want to provide religious or moral instruction different from that taught in public schools" (27.2%).

The five most frequently cited important reasons for homeschooling in a nationwide study (that included fewer options for reasons from which parents could choose but included all the reasons used in the present study,

Noel et al., 2013) were “a concern about environment of other schools” (91% of parents chose this), “a desire to provide moral instruction” (77%), “a dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools” (74%), “a desire to provide religious instruction” (64%), and “a desire to provide a nontraditional approach to child’s education” (44%). In the same study, the four most important reasons chosen most often were “a concern about environment of other schools” (25%), “other reasons” (21%), “a dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools” (19%), and “a desire to provide religious instruction” (16%).

Academic Achievement

Following are descriptive statistics about and relationships between the homeschool and public school students’ academic achievement.

HOMESCHOOL STUDENTS

Table 4 shows the mean z-scores for Black home-educated students on the reading total, language total, and mathematics total, and core subtest scores and according to the family’s free/reduced lunch status. These Black homeschool students scored at or above the 50th percentile in reading, language, math, and core (i.e., a combination of reading, language, and math) subtests. By definition, the 50th percentile is the mean for all students nationwide. The effect sizes were .47 for reading ($SD = .81$), .15 for language

TABLE 4 Black Homeschool Students’ Mean z-Scores and Corresponding National Percentile by Subject Area and Free/Reduced Lunch Status

Subject area	<i>N</i>	Mean z-score ^a	Standard deviation, z-score	Percentile, Black homeschool ^b	Percentile, national mean, all races/ethnicities
Reading total	81	.4694	.8071	68	50
Language total	81	.1473	.7731	56	50
Math total	81	.0096	.8533	50	50
Core ^c	81	.2080	.7742	58	50
Free/Reduced Lunch? ^d					
	Yes			No	
Reading total	66 (.4210, .7016, 30)			71 (.5400, .8563, 45)	
Language total	46 (−.1037, .6527, 30)			63 (.3447, .7511, 45)	
Math total	44 (−.1440, .8564, 30)			57 (.1678, .8254, 45)	

^aFollowing are a few z-score/percentile equivalents: $-0.67 = 25$ th percentile, $0.00 = 50$ th percentile, $0.20 = 58$ th percentile, $0.67 = 75$ th percentile, $1.00 = 84$ th percentile for comparative purposes.

^bPercentiles in this study were converted from z-scores using <http://www.measuringusability.com/pcalcz.php> and confirmed with Hopkins, Glass, and Hopkins (1987). The corresponding percentiles shown in the table are the within-grade percentile scores for the nation that correspond to the given z-scores.

^cCore is comprised of combination of a student’s reading, language, and mathematics scores.

^dPercentile (z-score, z-score standard deviation, sample size).

TABLE 5 Black Public School Students' Mean z-Scores and Corresponding National Percentile by Subject Area and Free/Reduced Lunch Status

Subject area	N	Mean z-score ^a	Standard deviation, z-score	Percentile, Black public school	National percentile mean, all races/ethnicities
Reading total	1240	-.6830	.8840	25	50
Language total	1238	-.5105	.9356	30	50
Math total	1219	-.5831	.9220	28	50
Free/Reduced Lunch? ^b					
	Yes			No	
Reading total	24 (-.7207, .7074, 28)			25 (-.6821, .8879, 1212)	
Language total	18 (-.9107, .7032, 27)			31 (-.5016, .9384, 1211)	
Math total	17 (-.9657, .7295, 28)			28 (-.5741, .9244, 1191)	

^aFollowing are a few z-score/percentile equivalents: -0.67 = 25th percentile, 0.00 = 50th percentile, 0.20 = 58th percentile, 0.67 = 75th percentile, 1.00 = 84th percentile for comparative purposes.
^bPercentile (z-score, z-score standard deviation, sample size).

(s.d. = .77), .01 for math (s.d. = .85), and .21 for core (s.d. = .77), compared to the norm group of all races/ethnicities nationwide in public schools.

PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

Table 5 shows the achievement test scores of Black public school students in this study by subtest subject and whether or not the student's family qualified for free/reduced lunch. They scored at or below the 30th percentile in reading, language, and math. The simple effect sizes of Black homeschool students compared to Black public school students were, therefore, roughly 1.15 for reading, .66 for language, and .59 for math in the present study.

Explaining Variance in Achievement Scores

I examined which independent variables, if any, explain these Black students' achievement scores. First only the home educated were considered, and then both the homeschooled and public schooled were considered.

WITHIN HOMESCHOOLING SAMPLE

A regression analysis of the independent variables of (a) gender of the student, (b) certification status of the mother, (c) certification status of the father, (d) household income, (e) cost per child, (f) degree of structure, (g) amount of structured time, and (h) age at which formal instruction began on the dependent variables of the homeschool students' reading, language, and math scores revealed no significant relationships. That is, the eight independent variables were not statistically significantly helpful in explaining variance in homeschool students' achievement scores.

WITHIN PUBLIC SCHOOLING AND HOMESCHOOLING

A regression analysis of the independent variables of (a) gender of the student, (b) socioeconomic status of the student's family (i.e., free/reduced lunch), and (c) type of schooling (i.e., public school or homeschool) on the dependent variables of reading, language, and math scores revealed some significant relationships. Regarding reading scores, only the type of schooling was a significant independent variable ($F = 118.84$; $df = 1,1211$; $p = .000$); gender and socioeconomic status were not significant. While controlling for gender and socioeconomic status, type of education explained 8.9% of the variance in the reading score, a moderate amount of variance. While controlling for the other variables, being homeschooled had an effect size of about 42 percentile points higher ($B = 1.13$; i.e., an effect size or change in z-score of 1.13; e.g., $-.68$ to $.45$).

All three independent variables explained significant amounts of variance in language scores. Type of education explained the most variance in language scores and the first regression model included only that variable ($F = 35.20$; $df = 1,1211$; $p = .000$). Model 2 included type of schooling and socioeconomic status ($F = 10.36$; $df = 1,1210$; $p = .001$). Finally, the third model, with type of schooling, socioeconomic status, and gender all included, was also significant ($F = 6.58$; $df = 1,1209$; $p = .010$). While controlling for gender and socioeconomic status, type of schooling accounted for a small amount of variance (2.7%) in scores, while socioeconomic status and gender explained even smaller amounts of additional variance (0.8% and 0.5%). That is, the homeschooled scored significantly higher than the public schooled while controlling for the other variables. While controlling for the other variables (i.e., regression Model 1), being homeschooled had an effect size of about 26 percentile points higher than if public schooled ($B = .65$; i.e., a change in z-score or effect size of .65; e.g., $-.51$ to $.14$).

Two of the three independent variables (type of schooling, socioeconomic status, and gender) explained significant amounts of variance in math scores. Regression analysis revealed that type of schooling explained the most variance in the math scores without other controls included in the model ($F = 30.74$; $df = 1,1211$; $p = .000$). Model 2 included type of schooling and socioeconomic status ($F = 8.16$; $df = 1,1210$; $p = .004$). While controlling for socioeconomic status, type of schooling accounted for a small amount of variance (2.4%) in scores, while socioeconomic status explained an even smaller amount of additional variance (0.7%). That is, the homeschooled scored significantly higher than the public schooled while controlling for the other variables. With the other variables controlled, being homeschooled had an effect size of about 23 percentile points higher than if public schooled ($B = .60$; i.e., a change in z-score or effect size of .60; e.g., $-.58$ to $.02$).

TABLE 6 Summary of Significance of Independent Variables in Explaining Test Scores

Subject area	Independent variable		
	Type of schooling	Socioeconomic status (SES)	Gender
Reading	Yes, Homeschooling ^a	No	No
Language	Yes, Homeschooling	Yes, Higher SES	Yes, Female
Math	Yes, Homeschooling	Yes, Higher SES	No

^a“Yes” or “no” indicates whether the variable explained significant amounts of variance; if “yes,” then the variable category associated with a positive effect is given.

Table 6 summarizes the regression analyses of the three independent variables of type of schooling, socioeconomic status, and gender of student on reading, language, and math test scores. Schooling type emerged as the only variable that explained variance in all three subject areas and type of schooling explained the most variance in these scores.

CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

This project explores the academic achievement of Black homeschool students in Grades 4 to 8 as it relates to various demographic and educational features of the students and their families and to better understand these parents’ motivations for homeschooling.

Motives for Homeschooling

These parents’ reasons for homeschooling are similar to those of homeschool parents at large in the United States. In addition, some of them mentioned race/ethnicity-related issues as part of their many reasons for homeschooling. Findings in this study offer no solid evidence that this group of Black homeschoolers chose home-based education primarily to promote anything like Afrocentrism or its thinking to their children, even though Mazama and Lundy (2013b) found in their study that “many African American homeschoolers believe that a Eurocentric curriculum is bound to gravely interfere with their children’s self-esteem and sense of purpose” (p. 123). Evidence from the current study, however, indicates that these parents are not promoting Afrocentric essentialism. It may be that they are generally satisfied with the American identity, and the “Euro-American cultural influence” in their children’s lives (Adeleke, 2009, p. 177). At the same time, data from this study show that a notable portion of homeschool Black parents want their children to understand and appreciate the history and value of culture related to Africa and Black Diaspora, but there is no evidence that they are Afrocentric essentialists (Adeleke, 2009, pp. 179–180).

Academic Achievement

The Black homeschool students' relatively high achievement, compared to Black public school students, is consistent with decades of research on homeschooling in general (Murphy, 2012; Ray, 2013). Some will not be surprised since home-based education, by nature, generally involves pedagogical practices and an educational ecology that are conducive to improving achievement (Murphy, 2012; Ray, 1997, 2000b, 2005, 2013). For example, Murphy posited a theory of action—to understand and explain the generally high academic achievement by home-educated students—that includes what he called the three planks of parental involvement (i.e., much), instructional program (e.g., considerable flexibility, extensive two-way dialogue between adults and children), and learning environment (e.g., safe and orderly, less negative peer culture) that are advantageous compared to public and private institutional school settings.

The Black homeschool students in this study performed as well or better than the national average of public school students of all races/ethnicities, while Black students in public schools score, in general, far below average (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Vanneman et al., 2009). The scores of these Black homeschool students were far above the scores of the Black public school norm students in this study. Analysis revealed that having been home educated was a consistent, significant predictor of higher achievement while controlling for gender of student and the socioeconomic status of the student's family. Being homeschooled was associated with a positive effect size of roughly 42 percentile points in reading, 26 percentile points in language, and 23 percentile points in math.

Some studies on homeschooling have reported significant portions of the students out of grade level, on average, compared to institutional school students and their chronological ages. For example, Rudner (1999) found that "25% of home school students are enrolled one or more grades above their age-level public and private school peers" Assuming that the majority of fourth graders in institutional schools in the United States are 9 or 10 years old, and that for each additional grade level students are a year older than this range, only one student (1.2%) in the present study was tested at a grade level one year higher than his or her age and four (4.9%) were tested at a grade level one year lower than their age. No others were out of grade level, on average, compared to public and private school students. That is, these students' chronological ages largely matched their public and private school peers' ages for any given grade level and this finding might make this study more methodologically sound than some other studies.

Within the Black homeschool student group, the independent variables of (a) gender of the student, (b) certification status of the mother, (c) certification status of the father, (d) household income, (e) cost per child, (f) degree of structure, (g) amount of structured time, and (h) age at which formal

instruction began had no significant effect on achievement scores. In addition, and especially considering the especially low academic performance of Black males in public schools, it is noteworthy to consider that gender was not a significant predictor of these homeschool students' achievement. Murphy (2012) and Ray (1997, 2000b, pp. 91–99) have considered whether there might be some traits of home-based education that ameliorate the effect of background factors that are consistently associated with lower academic achievement in public schools (e.g., household income). Factors that are typically systemic to homeschooling and related to improved achievement in institutional schools that were mentioned by one or both of these writers include plenty of one-on-one instruction, low student-to-teacher ratios, holding high and reasonable expectations of students, individualizing or customizing curriculum for each student, increased feedback from teacher to the student, extensive dialogue between adults and children, increased academic learning time (and/or academic engaged time), a safe and orderly learning environment, high parental involvement, and greater amounts of social capital among students and teacher.

Final Comments

I must revisit some important limitations of this study. It is a cross-sectional, explanatory nonexperimental study (Johnson, 2001), or causal-comparative study (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 537). It controls for limited background independent variables for the homeschool and public school students in a way that very few studies (if any) have accomplished using the limited data available to any researcher with the fairly limited resources available. It is not possible to know whether the Black families and students in this study are representative of all Black homeschool families and students in the United States, thus one should be circumspect regarding generalizations. Data were collected from homeschool parents and students and public school students at a point in time and one of the objectives of this study, in which variables were not manipulated, was to identify potential causal factors that produce differences in academic achievement, if any, between groups of Black students.

This is a simple, parsimonious, and robust study of Black homeschool parents and children and there is good reason to believe that these families are demographically like other homeschool families, both Black and otherwise, in general in the United States. There is much overlap between these parents' reasons for homeschooling and those of homeschool parents in general. The Black homeschool students in this study are performing academically above the national average in general and well above Black public school students in particular. Advocates of Black children's education should consider whether homeschooling might have any useful or significant predictive power (Phillips, 2014; Wieman, 2014) regarding improving Black children's achievement. Although we still have little direct evidence on

the academic achievement of Black homeschool students, this study's findings and past research on homeschoolers in general might help us develop insights and increase our understanding of effective policies or attitudes regarding homeschooling.

Quantitative researchers of homeschooling must know that they will face many confounding variables. They might also consider philosopher of education, Phillips' (2014), words here: "In the hard physical sciences, confounding variables can eventually be controlled, but in research in educational settings, these factors are not nuisances but are of great human and educational significance—control here removes all semblance of ecological validity" (p. 10). Erickson (1993) addressed the ecological invalidity he perceived in many attempts to control the variables in private schooling to compare it to public schooling, and Ray (1995, p. 23) used Erickson's analysis to address research on homeschooling. For example, it might be pointless to try to "control for" the amount of parental involvement (i.e., differences between classroom public schooling and homeschooling) in order to determine whether this variable has an effect on achievement because very high parental involvement is near the essence of homeschooling.

In reflecting on the value of predictive power in research, Wieman (2014, p. 13) put forward the following: "In cutting-edge research in the hard sciences, there are always things that one wants to know or measure or control that one cannot, just as there are in education research." I have tried to control some of the most significant variables in this study and I have tried to heed Wieman's warning that "it is possible to be too careful" (p. 13). I think it is likely that this study provides findings "that are reproducible and have adequate predictive power to advance the field" (Wieman, 2014, p. 14). More sound studies of Black families will provide even more predictive power about homeschooling and African Americans. Future research on Black homeschooling and achievement should consider tightly controlled designs that focus on high participation by some local homeschool groups. A matched-pair design could be very useful (c.f., Martin-Chang et al., 2011). Researchers must be prepared to develop personal and trusting relationships to gain participants and execute such studies.

Although some (e.g., Fineman, 2009) argue that the government should control all Black children's education and outlaw homeschooling, or that "individualized atomistic decisions to school one's [Black] child at home" are bad for "for the large scale transformations that are necessary" (Apple, 2006), two African American scholars have posited that "homeschooling may be the most provocative and courageous act of self-determination and resistance undertaken by blacks since the decolonization and civil rights movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s" (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013, pp. 279–280; see also, Ray, 2007).

NOTE

1. I use the terms Black and African American as synonyms in this article.

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