

# EDUCATION AND GODLY TECHNOLOGY

## Gender, Culture, and the Work of Home Schooling

---

*Michael W. Apple*

**Abstract:** The secularity of the state is seen by ‘authoritarian populist’ religious conservatives as imposing a world-view that is out of touch with the deep religious commitments that guide their lives. In the process, authoritarian populists have taken on subaltern identities and claimed that they are the last truly dispossessed groups. To demonstrate their increasing power in educational and social policy, I situate a specific set of technologies—the Internet—within the social context of its use in this community. I focus on the growing home-schooling movement and suggest that to understand the societal meaning and uses of these technologies, we need to examine the social movement that provides the context for their use. I also argue that we need to analyze critically the kind of labor that is required in home schooling, who is engaged in such labor, and how such labor is interpreted by the actors who perform it.

**Keywords:** activism, gender, home schooling, Internet, religion, social movement, subaltern status, technology

In *Educating the “Right” Way* (Apple 2006; see also Apple et al. 2003), I spend a good deal of time examining the ways in which the complicated forces of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism are altering the terrain on which education operates both internally and globally. Key sets of actors currently supporting parts of the neo-liberal and neo-conservative agendas (the plural is important here) in the United States, and increasingly in Latin America and elsewhere, are what I have called ‘authoritarian populists’. In the book, I detail the world as seen through the eyes of authoritarian populists, those who want ‘the people’ to decide policies and practices in the state and civil society but who also have a particular and very conservative vision of which groups actually count as ‘real people’. In the United States in particular, authoritarian populist movements are largely composed of conservative groups of religious fundamentalists and



evangelicals whose voices in the debates over social and educational policies are now increasingly powerful.

In the book, I also critically analyze the ways in which authoritarian populists construct themselves as the ‘new oppressed’, as people whose identities and cultures are ignored by or attacked in schools and the media. The secularity of the state is seen by these groups as imposing a world-view that is totally out of touch with the deep religious commitments that guide the lives of such conservative populist populations. In the process, authoritarian populists have taken on subaltern identities and have (very selectively) reappropriated the discourses and practices of figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King to lay claim to the fact that they are the last truly dispossessed groups.

In this article, I examine the ways in which the claim to subaltern status has led to a partial withdrawal from state-run institutions and to a practice of schooling that is meant to equip the children of authoritarian populist parents both with an armor to defend what these groups believe is their threatened culture and with a set of skills and values that will change the world so that it reflects the conservative religious commitments that are so central to their lives.<sup>1</sup> I shall focus on the ways in which new technologies such as the Internet have become essential resources in what authoritarian populists see as a counter-hegemonic struggle against secular humanism and a world that no longer “listens to God’s word” (Apple 2006). In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that these technologies actually enable the formation and growth of such religious movements and enhance their ability to challenge secularity. Much of my discussion will center around the place of gender in these movements, since conservative women are key actors here and have multiple identities within them, simultaneously able to claim subaltern status based on the history of dominant gender regimes and having dominant status given their positioning in relationship to other oppressed groups.

## **New Technologies in a Changing World**

In order to set the stage for my analysis, I need to say a number of things about the role of new technologies in global movements and about their place socially. There has been an explosion of analyses of the Internet in education, cultural studies, sociology, the social studies of technology and science, and elsewhere. Much of this material has been of considerable interest and has led to a good deal of discussion of the use, benefits, history, and status of such technologies (see, e.g., Bromley and Apple 1998; Cuban 2001; Godwin 2003; Hakken 1999; Jordan 1999). However, much of this debate is carried on with limited reference to the contexts in which the Internet is actually used, or the context is mentioned as an issue but remains relatively unexamined. As one of the more perceptive writers on the social uses and benefits of the Internet has said (Slevin 2000: ix): “We can only understand the impact of the Internet on modern culture if we see that symbolic content and online interaction are embedded in social and historical contexts of various kinds.” As Manuel

Castells (1996: 199) reminds us, rather than having a unitary meaning and use, the new communications networks that are being created “are made of many cultures, many values, many projects, that cross through the minds and inform the strategies of the various participants.”

New technologies both have been stimulated by and have themselves stimulated three overlapping dynamics: the intensification of globalization; the de-traditionalizing of society; and the intensification of social reflexivity (Slevin 2000: 5). In the process, technologies such as the Web have provided the basis for new forms of solidarity as groups of people seek to deal with the transformations brought about by these dynamics. Yet the search for such forms of solidarity that would restore or defend ‘tradition’ and authority can itself lead to the production of new forms of social disintegration at one and the same time (*ibid.*: 5–6).

In these pages, I examine a growing instance of this paradoxical process of solidarity and disintegration. Focusing on the social uses of the Internet by a new but increasingly powerful group of educational activists—conservative Christian evangelical home schoolers—I want to contribute both to our understanding of how populist conservative movements grow and support themselves ideologically and to the complex ways in which technological resources can serve a multitude of social agendas. I argue that only by placing these technologies back into the social and ideological context of their use by specific communities (and by specific people within these communities) can we understand the meaning and function of new technologies in society and education. In order to accomplish this, I also focus on the labor of home schooling, on how it is organized, on new definitions of legitimate knowledge, and on how all this has been partly transformed by the ways in which technological markets are being created.

The connections between conservative evangelical forms and technologies are not new by any means. Elsewhere, I and others have written about the creative use of electronic ministries both nationally and internationally by the authoritarian populist religious right (see, e.g., Apple 2006). Technological resources such as television and radio have been employed to expand the influence of conservative religious impulses and to make “the word of God” available to believers and “those who are yet to believe” alike.<sup>2</sup> While understanding the increasing range and impact of such efforts is crucial, here I am less interested in such things. I want to point to more mundane but growing uses of technologies such as the Internet in supporting evangelical efforts that are closer to home. And I do mean ‘home’ literally.

## Home Schooling as a Social Movement

Home schooling is growing rapidly. But it is not merely the result of additive forces, nor is it simply an atomistic phenomenon in which, one by one, isolated parents decide to reject organized public schools and teach their children at home. Home schooling is a social movement. It is a collective project, one with a history and a set of organizational and material supports (Stevens 2001: 4).

While many educators devote a good deal of their attention to reforms such as charter schools, and such schools have received a good deal of positive press, there are many fewer children in charter schools than there are being home schooled. In 1996, home-school advocates estimated that there are approximately 1.3 million children being home schooled in the United States. While more current US government statistics place the figure at 1.1 million (Princiotta, Bielick, and Chapman 2006), ascertaining the accuracy of data on home schooling is clearly difficult. Indeed, estimates by the National Home Education Research Institute put the figure even higher—1.7 to 2.1 million students being home schooled (Ray 2005). Given the almost reverential and rather romantic coverage in national and local media of home schooling (with the *New York Times* [see Ellin 2006; Gross 2003] and *Time*, with a cover story in its 27 August 2001 issue, providing a large amount of very positive coverage, for example), the numbers may in fact be much higher than this, and the growth curve undoubtedly is increasing. At the very least, more than 2.2 percent of school-age children in the United States are home schooled (Sampson 2005).

The home-schooling movement is not homogeneous. It includes people of a wide spectrum of political/ideological, religious, and educational beliefs, and cuts across racial and class lines (Sampson 2005). As Stevens (2001: 4) notes, there are in essence two general groupings within the home-school movement, “Christian” and “inclusive.” There are some things that are shared across these fault lines, however: a sense that the standardized education offered by mainstream schooling interferes with children’s potential; that there is a serious danger when the state intrudes into the life of the family; that experts and bureaucracies are apt to impose their beliefs and are unable to meet the needs of families and children. These worries tap currents that are widespread within American culture, and they too cut across particular social and cultural divides.

Yet it would be wrong to interpret the mistrust of experts by many home schoolers as simply a continuation of the current of ‘anti-intellectualism’ that seems to run deep in parts of the history of the United States. The distrust of science, government experts, and ‘rationality’ spread into the common sense of society during the Vietnam War, when attacks on scientists for their inhumanity, on government officials for lying, and on particular forms of instrumental rationality for the loss of values and ethics were prevalent. This was often coupled with a wariness of authority in general (Moore 1999: 109). Home schoolers not only are susceptible to such tendencies, but combine them in creative ways with other elements of popular consciousness concerning the importance of education in times of rapid change and economic, cultural, and moral threat.

Although the demographic information on home schoolers is limited, in general they seem to be somewhat better educated, slightly more affluent, and considerably more likely to be white than the population in the state in which they reside (Stevens 2001: 11). While it is important to recognize the diversity of the movement, it is just as crucial to understand that the largest group of people who home school have conservative religious commitments. Given the dominance of conservative Christians in the home-schooling movement, this

picture matches the overall demographic patterns of evangelical Christians in general (Smith 1998).

Based on a belief that schooling itself is a very troubled institution (but often with widely divergent interpretations of what has caused these troubles), home schoolers have created mechanisms whereby ‘horror stories’ about schools are shared, as are stories of successful home-schooling practices. The metaphors that describe what goes on in public schools and the dangers associated with them, especially those used by many conservative evangelical home schoolers, are telling. Stevens (2001: 53) puts it in the following way: “Invoking the rhetoric of illness (‘cancer’, ‘contagion’) to describe the dangers of uncontrolled peer interaction, believers frame the child-world of school as a kind of jungle where parents send their kids only at risk of infection. The solution: keep them at home, away from that environment altogether.”

Given these perceived dangers, home-schooling advocates, through groups that have been formed at both regional and national levels, press departments of education and legislatures to guarantee their rights to home school their children. They have established communicative networks—newsletters, magazines, and increasingly the Internet—to build and maintain a community of fellow believers, a community that is often supported by ministries that reinforce the “wisdom” (and very often godliness) of their choice. And as we shall see, increasingly as well the business community has begun to realize that this can be a lucrative market (Stevens 2001: 4). Religious publishers, for-profit publishing houses of all sizes, conservative colleges and universities, Internet entrepreneurs, and others have understood that a market in cultural goods—classroom materials, lesson plans, textbooks, religious material, CDs, and so forth—has been created. They have rushed both to respond to the expressed needs and to stimulate needs that are not yet recognized. But the market would not be there unless what created the opportunity for such a market—the successful identity work of the evangelical movement itself—had not provided the space in which such a market could operate.

## **Understanding Social Movements**

Conservative Christian home schoolers are part of a larger evangelical movement that has been increasingly influential in education, politics, and cultural institutions such as the media (Apple 2006; Binder 2002). Nationally, white evangelicals constitute approximately 25 percent of the adult population in the United States (Green 2000: 2). The evangelical population is growing steadily (Smith 1998), as it actively provides subject positions and new identities for people who feel unmoored in a world where, for them, “all that is sacred is profaned” and where the tensions and structures of advanced capitalism do not provide a satisfying emotional or spiritual life. In the face of major threats to what is perceived as accepted relations of gender/sex, of authority and tradition, of nation and family, the search for a ‘return’ is the guiding impulse behind the growth of this increasingly powerful social movement (Apple 2006).

Social movements often have multiple goals that may or may not be reached. Yet it is important to understand that they also can produce consequences that are much broader than their avowed goals and that are not always foreseen. Thus, social movements that aim at structural transformations in state policies may produce profound changes in the realms of culture, everyday life, and identity. The mobilizations around specific goals can strengthen internal solidarities, cement individual and collective identity shifts, create a new common sense, and ultimately lead to perceptible changes in public attitudes about a given issue (Giugni 1999: xxi–xxiii). They also create ‘innovative action repertoires’ and have an influence on the practices and culture of mainstream organizations (Amenta and Young 1999: 34). As we shall see, this is exactly what is happening within the lives of home schoolers and in the ways in which organized public school systems have responded to the perceived threat to their financial well-being by a growing home-school population.

A key to all this is the importance of identity politics. For social movements to prosper, they must provide identities that constantly reinforce the reasons for participating in them. They must, hence, have an emotional economy in which the costs of being ‘different’ are balanced by the intense meanings and satisfactions of acting in opposition to dominant social norms and values. This does not happen all at once. People are changed by participating in oppositional movements such as home schooling. As social movements theorists have widely recognized, there are crucial biographical impacts of participating in movements: people become transformed in the process (see, e.g., McAdam 1999). This point is clearly made by Meyer (1999: 186): “By engaging in the social life of a challenging movement, an individual’s experience of the world is mediated by a shared vision of the way the world works and, importantly, the individual’s position in it. By engaging in activism, an individual creates himself or herself as a subject, rather than simply an object, in history and ... is unlikely to retreat to passive acceptance of the world as it is.”

## **Technology and Home Schooling**

A large portion of social movement activity targets the state (Amenta and Young 1999: 30), and this is especially the case with the home-schooling movement. While there is often a fundamental mistrust of governmental bodies among many religiously conservative home schoolers, there are a considerable number of such people who are willing to compromise by employing state programs and funds for their own tactical advantage. One of the clearest examples of this is the growing home-schooling charter school movement in states such as California. Even though many of the parents involved in such programs do not want their children to be “brainwashed by a group of educators” and do not want to “leave [their] children off somewhere like a classroom and have them influenced and taught by someone that [they are] not familiar with” (Huerta 2000: 177), a growing number of Christian conservative parents have become quite adept at tapping into government resources for their own benefit.

By taking advantage of home-school charter programs that connect independent families through the use of the Internet and the Web, they are able to use public funding to support schooling that they had previously had to pay for privately (*ibid.*: 179–180).

But it is not only the conservative evangelical parents who are using the home-schooling charter possibilities for their own benefit. School districts themselves are actively strategizing, employing such technological connections to enhance their revenue flow by maintaining existing enrollments or by actively recruiting home-school parents to join a home-school charter. For example, by creating a home-school charter, one financially pressed small California school district was able to solve a good deal of its economic problems. Over the first two years of its operation, the charter school grew from 80 students to 750. The results were striking (Huerta 2000: 180):

Along with the many new students came a surge of state revenue to the small district, increasing the district's budget by more than 300 percent. [The home-schooling charter] garnered home school families by providing them with a wealth of materials and instructional support. In exchange for resources, families would mail monthly student learning records to the school. Learning records are the lifeline of the school and serve a dual purpose—outlining the academic content completed by students and serving also as an attendance roster from which [the charter school staff] can calculate average daily attendance ... Thus, parents' self-reported enrollment data permit [the school district] to receive full capitation grants from the state.

In this way, by complying with the minimal reporting requirements, conservative Christian parents are able to act on their desire to keep government and secular influences at a distance, while at the very same time, school districts are able to maintain that the children of these families are enrolled in public schooling and are meeting the requirements of secular schooling.

Yet we should be cautious of using the word 'secular' here. It is clear from the learning records that the parents submit that there is a widespread use of religious materials in all of the content. Bible readings, devotional lessons, moral teachings directly from online vendors, and so on were widely integrated by the parents within the 'secular' resources provided by the school. "Write and read Luke 1:37, memorize Luke 1:37, prayer journal" are among the many very non-secular parts of the sample learning records submitted by the parents (Huerta 2000: 188).

Such content, and the lack of accountability over it, raises serious questions about the use of public funding for overtly conservative religious purposes. It documents the power of Huerta's (2000: 192) claim that in "an attempt to recast its authority in an era of fewer bureaucratic controls over schools, the state largely drops its pursuit of the common good as public authority is devolved to local families." In the process, technologically linked homes are reconstituted as a 'public' school, but a school in which the very meaning of the word 'public' had been radically transformed so that it mirrors the needs of conservative religious form and content.

## Home Schooling as Gendered Labor

Even with the strategic use of state resources, home schooling takes hard work. But to go further, we need to ask an important question: who does the labor? Much of this work is hidden from view. Finding and organizing materials, teaching, charting progress, establishing and maintaining a 'proper' environment, the emotional labor of caring for as well as instructing children—all of this requires considerable effort. And most of it is done by women (Stevens 2001: 15).

Because home schooling is largely women's work, it combines an extraordinary amount of physical, cultural, and emotional labor—and this should not surprise us. As Stambach and David (2005) have powerfully argued, and as Andre-Bechely (2005) and Griffith and Smith (2005) have empirically demonstrated, assumptions about gender and the ways in which mothers as 'caretakers' are asked to take on issues such as educational choice, planning, and, in the case we are discussing here, actually doing the education itself underpin most of the realities surrounding education. Home schooling constitutes an intensification of women's work in the home, since it is added on to the already extensive household responsibilities that women have. This is especially the case within conservative religious homes in which men may be active but are seen as 'helpers' of their wives, who carry the primary responsibility within the domestic sphere. The demands of such intensified labor have consistently led women to engage in quite creative ways of dealing with their lives. New technologies, as labor-saving devices, have played key roles in such creative responses.<sup>3</sup>

This labor and the meanings attached to it by women themselves need to be situated into a much longer history and a much larger context. A number of people have argued that many women see rightist religious and social positions and the groups that support them as providing a non-threatening, familiar framework of discourse and practice that centers directly upon what they perceive to be issues of vital and personal concern: immorality, social disorder, crime, the family, and schools. Yet the feelings of personal connection are not sufficient. Rightist action in both the 'public' and the 'private' spheres (see Fraser 1989 regarding how these concepts themselves are fully implicated in the history of gendered realities, differential power, and struggles) empowers them as women. Depending on the context, they are positioned as "respectable, selfless agents of change deemed necessary, or as independent rebels" (Bacchetta and Power 2002a: 6).

Historically, right-wing women have consistently exalted the family. It is seen as a privileged site of women's self-realization and power, but one that is threatened by a host of internal and external 'Others'. For them, 'the' family is the pillar of society, the foundation of a society's security, order, and naturalized hierarchy that is given by God (Bacchetta and Power 2002a: 8).

Usually, fundamentalist and evangelical women are depicted as essentially dedicated to acting on and furthering the goals of religiously conservative men (Brasher 1998: 3). This is much too simplistic. Rather, the message is more



complex and compelling—and connected to a very clear understanding of the realities of many women's lives. Women are to have not a passive but a very active engagement in their family life and the world that impinges on it. They can and must "shape their husband's actions and alter disruptive family behaviors" (ibid.). The latter tasks are becoming especially important since this is a time when all too many men are abdicating their family responsibilities, often impoverishing women and their dependent children (ibid.). Further, only a strong woman could mediate the pressures and the often intensely competitive norms and values that men bring home with them from the 'world of work'. Capitalism may be 'God's economy' (see Apple 2006), but allowing its norms to dominate the home could be truly destructive. Women, in concert with 'responsible' men, could provide the alternative but complementary assemblage of values so necessary to keep the world at bay and could use the family as the foundation for both protecting core religious values and sending forth children armed against the dangers of a secular and profane world. To conservative religious women, what from the outside may look like a restrictive life guided by patriarchal norms feels very different on the inside. It provides an identity that is embraced precisely because it improves women's ability to direct the course of their lives and empowers them in their relationships with others. Thus, intense religiosity is a source of considerable power for many women (Brasher 1998: 4–5).

Based on her extensive research on conservative Christian women, Brasher is very clear on this. As she puts it (1998: 6), "[Although such women] insistently claimed that the proper relationship between a woman and her husband is one of submission, they consistently declared that this submission is done out of obedience to God not men and is supposed to be mutual, a relational norm observed by both spouses rather than a capitulation of one to the other ... Submission increases rather than decreases a woman's power within the marital relationship." Divine creation has ordained that women and men are different types of beings. While they complement each other, each has distinctly different tasks to perform. Such sacred gender walls are experienced not as barriers but as providing and legitimating a space for women's action and power. Interfering with such action and power in this sphere is also interfering in God's plan (ibid.: 12–13).

Echoes of this can be found in other times and in other nations. Thus, an activist within the British Union of Fascists—an anti-Semitic and proto-Nazi group before World War II—looked back on her involvement and said that her active membership demonstrated that she had always been "an independent, free thinking individual" (Gottlieb 2002: 40). This vision of independence and of what might be called 'counter-hegemonic thinking' connects with today's belief among conservative, religiously motivated home schoolers that the world and the public school have become too 'politically correct'. Bringing conservative evangelical religion back to the core of schooling positions secular schooling as hegemonic. It enables rightist women to interpret their own actions as independent and free thinking—but always in the service of God. Let me say more about this here.

## Resolving Contradictions: Religious Activism and Domesticity

One of the elements that keeps the Christian Right such a vital and growing social movement is the distinctive internal structure of evangelical Protestantism. Evangelicalism combines orthodox Christian beliefs with an intense individualism (Green 2000: 2). This is a key to understanding the ways in which what looks like never-ending and intensified domestic labor from the outside is interpreted in very different ways from the point of view of conservative religious women who willingly add the labor of home schooling to their already considerable responsibilities in the domestic sphere. Such conservative ideological forms do see women as subservient to men and as having the primary responsibility of building and defending a vibrant, godly ‘fortress-home’ as part of ‘God’s plan’ (Apple 2006). Yet it would be wrong to see women in rightist religious or ideological movements as only being called upon to submit to authority per se. Such ‘obedience’ is also grounded in a call to act on their duty as women (Enders 2002: 89). This is what might best be seen as activist selflessness, in which the supposedly submerged self re-emerges in the activist role of defender of home, family, children, and God’s plan. Lives are made meaningful and satisfying—and identities are supported—in the private and public spheres reconstituted in this way.

There is an extremely long history in the United States and other nations that connects religious activism and domesticity.<sup>4</sup> This has consistently led to mobilizations that cut across political lines bridging the public and private spheres. In Koven and Michel’s words (1993: 10): “Essential to this mobilization was the rise of domestic ideologies stressing women’s differences from men, humanitarian concerns for the conditions of child life and labor, and the emergence of activist interpretations of the gospel ... [including] evangelicalism, Christian socialism, social Catholicism, and the social gospel. Women’s moral vision, compassion, and capacity to nurture came increasingly to be linked to motherliness.” Often guided by a sense of moral superiority, when coupled with a strong element of political commitment, this became a powerful force. Maternalism could be both progressive and retrogressive, often at the same time. While it is the conservative elements of this ideological construction that have come to the fore today, forms of maternalism have had a major impact on many of the progressive programs and legislation that currently exist (see, e.g., Kessler-Harris 2001; Koven and Michel 1993; Ladd-Taylor 1994).

The restorative powers of domesticity and “female spirituality” could be combined with a strong commitment both to democratic principles and education and opportunities for women (Koven and Michel 1993: 17). The key was and is how democracy, a sliding signifier, is defined. Protecting and educating one’s children, caring for the intimate and increasingly fragile bonds of community and family life, worries about personal safety—and all of this in an exploitative and often disrespectful society—these themes are not only the province of the Right and should not be only the province of women. Yet we have to ask how identifiable people are mobilized around and by these themes, and by whom.

The use of a kind of ‘maternalist’ discourse, and a focus on women’s role as ‘mother’ and as someone whose primary responsibility is in the home and the

domestic sphere, does not necessarily prevent women from exercising power in the public sphere. In fact, it can serve as a powerful justification for such action and actually reconstitutes the public sphere. Educating one's children at home so that they are equipped to transform their own and others' lives outside the home establishes the home as a perfect model for religiously motivated ethical conduct for all sets of social institutions (see Apple 2006). This tradition, what has been called 'social housekeeping', can then claim responsibility for non-familial social spaces and can extend the idealized mothering role of women well beyond the home. In Marijke du Toit's words (2002: 67), it was and can still be used to forge "a new, more inclusive definition of the political." Such maternalism has historically enabled women to argue for a measure of direct power in the redefined public arena. One could extol the virtues of domesticity and expand what counts as a home at the same time. Thus, the state and many institutions in the public sphere were "a household where women should exercise their ... superior skills to create [both] order [and a better society]" (ibid.).<sup>5</sup>

All of this helps us understand why many of the most visible home-school advocates devote a good deal of their attention to "making sense of the social category of motherhood." As a key part of "a larger script of idealized family relations, motherhood is a lead role in God's plan" for authoritarian populist religious conservatives (Stevens 2001: 76). Again in Stevens's words (ibid.: 83): "One of the things that home schooling offers, then, is a renovated domesticity—a full-time motherhood made richer by the tasks of teaching, and [by] some of the status that goes along with those tasks."

Yet it is not only the work internal to the home that is important here. In terms of women's tasks, home schooling is outward looking as well. In many instances, home schooling is a collective project, requiring organizational skills to coordinate connections and cooperative activities (support groups, field trips, play groups, time off from the responsibilities that mothers have, etc.) and to keep the movement itself vibrant at local and regional levels. Here, too, women do the largest amount of the work. This had led to other opportunities for women as advocates and entrepreneurs. Thus, the development and marketing of some of the most popular curriculum packages, management guides, self-help and devotional materials, and so on has been done by women. Indeed, the materials reflect the fact that home schooling is women's work, with a considerable number of the pictures in the texts and promotional material showing mothers and children together (Stevens 2001: 83–96). A considerable number of the national advocates for evangelically based home schooling are activist women as well.

## Marketing God

Advocacy is one thing, but being able to put the advocated policy into practice is quite another. In order to actually do home schooling a large array of plans, materials, advice, and even solace must be made available. 'Godly schooling' creates demand. Even with the burgeoning market for all kinds of home

schooling, it is clear that conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists have the most to choose from in terms of educational and religious (the separation is often fictional) curricula, lessons, books, and inspirational materials (Stevens 2001: 54). Such materials not only augment lessons that home-schooling parents develop, but increasingly they become *the* lessons in mathematics, literacy, science, social studies, and all of the other subjects that are taught. This kind of material also usually includes homework assignments and tests, as well as actual teaching plans. Thus, a complete ‘package’ can be assembled or purchased whole in a way that enables committed parents to create an entire universe of educational experiences that is both rigorously sequenced and tightly controlled—and prevents unwanted ‘pollution’ from the outside world.

The A Beka Book program provides a clear example. An offshoot of Pensacola Christian College, it markets material for nursery school up to the end of secondary school, offering the home schooler a curriculum in which Christian teachings are woven into every aspect of knowledge. Little is left to chance. Pre-school children learn through the use of Bible story flannelgraphs. At the age of five, they begin a complete “Bible Curriculum,” and as they move up in age, their texts include *Bible Doctrines for Today* and *Managing Your Life Under God*. The elementary-level science textbooks, *God’s World*, are based in an inerrantist approach to the Bible and a literalist reading of Genesis and creation, one in which evolution is dismissed. The difference between right and wrong is seen as answerable only through reference to biblical teachings (Stevens 2001: 55).

Easily ordered on the Web, similar kinds of material are made available by other religiously based publishers: Bob Jones University Press, Christian Liberty Academy, Alpha Omega Publications, KONOS, the Weaver Curriculum Series, and a number of others. While there are pedagogic differences among these sets of materials, all of them are deeply committed to integrating biblical messages, values, and training throughout the entire curriculum. Most not only reproduce the particular biblically based world-views of the parents, but also create an educational environment that relies on a specific vision of ‘appropriate’ schooling, one that is organized around highly sequenced formal lessons that have an expressly moral aim. Technological resources such as videos are marketed that provide the home schooler with both a model of how education should be done and the resources for actually carrying it out (Stevens 2001: 56).

The organizational form that is produced is very important here. As I have argued elsewhere (Apple 2006), since much of the religiously conservative home-schooling movement shares a sense of purity and danger in which all elements of the world have a set place, such an organization of both knowledge and pedagogy embodies the ideological structure underlying the evangelical universe. As Bernstein (1977) reminds us, it is often in the form of the curriculum that the social cement that organizes our consciousness at its most basic level is reproduced. While the form of the curriculum is clearly a collection code in key ways (*ibid.*), its content is partly integrated, with project methods also being used in many conservative home schoolers’ practices. For example, while parents may use the detailed sequential curriculum purchased from the Weaver Curriculum Series because it enables lessons to be related to

a sequential reading of the Bible, these same parents also approve of the ways in which such curricular material includes creative ideas for student projects. Thus, one parent had her children engage in brick making as part of the study of the Tower of Babel. She also used the genealogies of the Old Testament to stimulate her children's study of their family tree (Stevens 2001: 58).

This kind of integration is found in nearly all of the widely used material. Stevens clearly describes a common situation (2001: 58–59):

By creative elaboration, curriculum authors spin out a wide range of lessons from biblical passages. Every word and phrase can be a metaphor for a revered character trait, a starting point for a science lesson. In this instance the first line of the first verse of the Sermon on the Mount, "Seeing the crowds, he went up the mountain," commences lessons on sight, light, and the biological structure of the eye, as well as character studies on the virtues of alertness. [The parent] noted that her children's "entire curriculum will be Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Through high school." Detailed lesson plans provide project descriptions and learning guides for children of various ages, so that the whole family can do the same lesson at once. "Our part in this," [the parent] explained, "is to read through the booklet."

This sense of the importance of structured educational experiences that are infused with strong moral messages is not surprising, given the view of a secular world filled with possible sins, temptations, and dangers. The emphasis, then, on equipping children with an armor of strong belief supports a pedagogical belief that training is a crucial pedagogic act. While children's interests have to be considered, these are less important than preparing children for living in a world where God's word rules. This commitment to giving a shield of "right beliefs" "nourishes demands for school material" (Stevens 2001: 60). A market for curriculum materials, workbooks, lesson plans, merit badges to reward good work, videotapes and CDs, and so many other things that make home schooling seem more doable is created not only out of a strategy of aggressive marketing and of using the Internet as a major mechanism for such marketing. It is also created and stimulated because of the ideological and emotional elements that underpin the structures of feeling (Williams 1977) that help organize the conservative evangelical home schooler's world (see Apple 2006).

## **Technology and the Realities of Daily Life**

Of course, parents are not puppets. While the parent may purchase or download material that is highly structured and inflexible, by the very nature of home-schooling parents are constantly faced with the realities of their children's lives, their boredom, their changing interests. Here, chat rooms and Internet resources become even more important. Advice manuals, prayers, suggestions for how one should deal with recalcitrant children, and biblically inspired inspirational messages about how important the hard work of parenting is and how one can develop the patience to keep doing it—all of this provides ways

of dealing with the immense amount of educational and especially emotional labor that home schooling requires.

The technology enables women who may be rather isolated in the home due to the intense responsibilities of home schooling to have virtual but still intimate emotional connections. It also requires skill, something that ratifies the vision of self that often accompanies home-schooling parents: we do not need 'experts'; with hard work and creative searching we can engage in a serious and disciplined education by ourselves. Thus, the technology provides for solace—acknowledging and praying for each other's psychic wounds and tensions—while at the same time enhancing one's identity as someone who is intellectually worthy, who can wisely choose appropriate knowledge and values. What may seem like a form of anti-intellectualism is in many ways exactly the opposite. Its rejection of the secular expertise of the school and the state is instead based on a vision of knowledgeable parents, and especially mothers, who have a kind of knowledge taken from the ultimate source—God.

Thus, one of the most popular of the evangelically oriented Web sites that markets products for home schoolers sells such things as the Go-to-the-Ant Chart. The wall chart contains pictures of common situations along with biblical passages that speak to them. A list of the topics that the chart covers addresses the realities that home-schooling parents often face: serving God, gratefulness, honesty, perseverance, obedience, thoroughness, responsibility, initiative, consideration, and redeeming time. In language that not only home-schooling parents will understand, it says: "This chart arms parents with Scripture for working with the easily distracted or 'less than diligent' child. The chart covers every area of laziness we could think of, plus a Bible verse for each problem for easy reference when they are driving you crazy! Take your child to the chart, identify his slothful action or attitude, read what God says about it, and pray for His strength to obey."<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that the Internet is not only an effective tool for marketing, for movement building, and, as I have just noted, for dealing with the emotional and intellectual labor that home schooling requires. Just as importantly, it has become an extremely powerful tool for advocacy work and lobbying. Thus, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) has been at the forefront of not only home schooling but also active and aggressive efforts to coordinate lobbyists inside and outside the Washington Beltway. The HSLDA's Congressional Action Program has proven how powerful and responsive a tool the Internet can be in mobilizing for and against congressional and state laws and in defending the interests of HSLDA's conservative positions (Stevens 2001: 178–179).<sup>7</sup> However, once again, such mobilizing about home schooling needs to be situated within a larger context if we are not to miss some crucial connections between conservative-oriented home schooling and the more extensive authoritarian movement of which it is a key part.

In this regard, it is worthwhile noting that one of the most visible leaders of the home-school movement nationally is Michael Farris, who plays a crucial leadership role in the HSLDA (Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000) and is the president of Patrick Henry College. Patrick Henry is a college largely for religiously

conservative home-schooled students that until recently had only one major—government. The principles that animate its educational activities are quite clear in the following description:

The Vision of Patrick Henry College is to aid in the transformation of American society by training Christian students to serve God and mankind with a passion for righteousness, justice and mercy, through careers of public service and cultural influence. The Distinctives of Patrick Henry College include practical apprenticeship methodology; a deliberate outreach to home schooled students; financial independence; a general education core based on the classical liberal arts; a dedication to mentoring and disciplining Christian students; and a community life that promotes virtue, leadership, and strong, life-long commitments to God, family and society. The Mission of the Department of Government is to promote practical application of biblical principles and the original intent of the founding documents of the American republic, while preparing students for lives of public service, advocacy and citizen leadership.<sup>8</sup>

These aims are both laudable and yet worrisome. The goal is to create an environment where students learn to play active roles in reconstructing both their lives and the larger society, but to make certain that the society they wish to build is based wholly on principles that themselves are not open to social criticism by non-believers. Only those anointed by their particular version of God and only a society built upon the vision held by the anointed is legitimate. All else is sinful.

One can get a sense of how close students with this vision are to the seat of power in the United States from the little-known fact that Patrick Henry interns are working in Karl Rove's office in the White House (Rosin 2005). Rove, one of the most powerful and controversial figures in the current Bush administration, is at the center of a good deal of rightist strategy nationally. Thus, Patrick Henry is more than a little effective in its goal of placing students as apprentices to positions of authority in which they can indeed "promote practical application of biblical principles."

Thus, for all of its creative uses of technology, its understanding of 'market needs' and how to fill them, its personal sacrifices, its appeal to the women who are primarily engaged in the work of actually doing it, and its rapid growth fostered by good press and creative mobilizing strategies, a good deal of home schooling speaks the language of authoritarian populism. There is an inside and an outside, and for many authoritarian populists, the only way to protect the inside is to change the outside so that it mirrors the religious impulses and commitments of the inside. Doing this is hard political, educational, and emotional work, and new technologies clearly are playing a growing role in such personal and social labor.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have examined a number of the complexities involved in the cultural and political efforts within a rapidly growing movement that has claimed

subaltern status. This has involved critically analyzing a set of technological resources—available principally over the Internet—and situating it within the social context of its use within a specific community and by specific people within that community. In so doing, I have suggested that in order to understand the social meaning and uses of these technologies, we need to examine the social movement that provides the context for their use and the identities that are being constructed within that social movement. I have also argued that we need to critically analyze the kind of labor that is required in home schooling by determining who is engaged in such labor, and how such labor is interpreted by the actors who perform it. Only in this way can we understand the lived problems that such technologies actually solve. I have also pointed to how the space for production of such ‘solutions’ is increasingly occupied by ideological and/or commercial interests who have responded to and enlarged a market to ‘fill the needs’ of religiously conservative home schoolers.

A good deal of my focus has been on the work of mothers, of ‘Godly women’ who have actively created new identities for themselves (and their children and husbands)<sup>9</sup> and have found in new technologies solutions to a huge array of difficult personal and political problems in their daily lives. Such Godly women are not that much different from any of us, but they are “dedicated to securing for themselves and their families a thoroughly religious and conservative life” (Brasher 1998: 29). And they do this with uncommon sacrifice and creativity.

The picture I have presented is complicated, but then so too is the reality. On the one hand, one of the dynamics we are seeing is social disintegration, that is, the loss of legitimacy of a dominant institution that supposedly bound us together—the common school. Yet, and very importantly, what we are also witnessing is the use of the Internet not to de-traditionalize society, but rather, in the cases I have examined here, to re-traditionalize parts of it. However, to call this phenomenon simply re-traditionalization is to miss the ways in which such technologies are also embedded not only in traditional values and structures of feeling. They are also participating in a more ‘modern’ project, one in which self-actualized individualism intersects with the history of social maternalism, which itself intersects with the reconstitution of masculinities as well.

But such maternalism needs to be seen as both positive and negative, and not only in its partial revivification of elements of patriarchal relations, although obviously this set of issues must not be ignored in any way. We need to respect the labor and the significant sacrifices of home-schooling mothers (and fathers as well, since the question of altered masculinities in home-schooling families is an important topic that needs to be focused upon in a way that complements what I have done here; see Connell 1995). This sensitivity to the complexities and contradictions that are so deeply involved in what these religiously motivated parents are attempting is perhaps best seen in the words of Jean Hardisty (1999: 2–3), when she reflects on populist rightist movements in general: “I continue to believe that, within that movement, there are people who are decent and capable of great caring, who are creating community and finding coping strategies that are enabling them to lead functional lives in a cruel and uncaring late capitalist environment.”



However, recognizing such caring, labor, and sacrifice—and the creative uses of technologies that accompany them—should not make us lose sight of what this labor and these sacrifices also produce. Godly technologies, godly schooling, and godly identities can be personally satisfying and make life personally meaningful in a world in which traditions are either destroyed or commodified. But at what cost to those who do not share the ideological vision that seems so certain in the minds of those who produce it?

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Harry Brighthouse, Kurt Squire, and the members of the Friday Seminar for their comments on this article. An earlier draft was presented at the Wisconsin-London-Melbourne Joint Seminar on New Technologies, Madison, Wisconsin, on 6 October 2003.

---

Michael W. Apple is John Bascom Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Professor of Educational Policy Studies at the University of London, Institute of Education. He has written extensively about the relationship between knowledge and power in education. Among his recent books are *Educating the “Right” Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality* (2006), *The Subaltern Speak* (2006), and *Democratic Schools* (2007).

## Notes

1. This article is based on a briefer treatment in Apple (2006).
2. The Right has been in the forefront of the use of the Internet, not only in creating linkages among existing members on key issues of concern. In understanding that youth are among the heaviest users of the Internet, conservative organizations have creatively employed such technology to build sophisticated Web sites whose form and content appeal to youth (Hardisty 1999: 46).
3. In fact, many of these technologies were ultimately not labor saving. See Schwarz Cowan (1983) and Strasser (1982).
4. Much of this literature, however, draws upon the experiences of white women. The meaning of domesticity and the discourses of motherhood among black women cannot be understood from the standpoint of dominant groups. For more on this crucial point, see Boris (1993). Since the vast majority of right-wing home schoolers are indeed white, I have drawn here upon a literature that is based in their experiences.
5. I would like to thank Rima D. Apple for her helpful comments on this section.
6. Taken from [http://doorposts.net/go\\_to\\_ant.htm](http://doorposts.net/go_to_ant.htm).
7. One of the most powerful figures in HSLDA is Michael Farris. He acts as both a public spokesperson for conservative home schoolers and as a legal advocate in court cases around the country. Farris has a long history of rightist activism. He ran for lieutenant governor of Virginia in 1993 on a strikingly conservative platform. Interestingly enough,

he did not receive the endorsement of a number of other conservative Christian groups and national figures who believed that his public positions might alienate swing voters and actually harm the rightist cause. See Rozell and Wilcox (1996). For more on rightist campaigns, see Wilcox and Rozell (2000).

8. Taken from <http://www.phc.edu/about/FundamentalStatements.asp>. In 2006, another major, classical liberal arts, was added to the curriculum.
9. I am not assuming the normative heterosexual family here. There is no literature on gay and lesbian home schoolers. Given the ideological position that the vast majority of conservative evangelicals take on the question of sexuality, I am simply reflecting their own assumptions.

## References

- Amenta, Edward, and Michael P. Young. 1999. "Making an Impact: Conceptual and Methodological Implications of the Collective Goods Criterion." Pp. 22–41 in Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999.
- Andre-Bechely, Lois. 2005. *Could It Be Otherwise? Parents and the Inequalities of Public School Choice*. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, Michael W. 2006. *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, Michael W., Petter Aasen, MiSook Kim Cho, Luis Gandin, Anita Oliver, Hannah Tavares, and Ting-Hong Wong. *The State and the Politics of Knowledge*. New York: Routledge.
- Bacchetta, Paola, and Margaret Power. 2002a. "Introduction." Pp. 1–15 in Bacchetta and Power 2002b.
- \_\_\_\_\_, eds. 2002b. *Right-Wing Women*. New York: Routledge.
- Bernstein, Basil. 1977. *Class, Codes, and Control*. Vol. 3. 2nd ed. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Binder, Amy. 2002. *Contentious Curricula*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Boris, Eileen. 1993. "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the 'Political.'" Pp. 213–245 in *Mothers of a New World*, ed. S. Koven and S. Michel. New York: Routledge.
- Brasher, Brenda. 1998. *Godly Women*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bromley, Hank, and Michael W. Apple, eds. 1998. *Education/Technology/Power*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The Rise of Network Society*. Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Connell, Robert W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cuban, Larry. 2001. *Oversold and Underused*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- du Toit, Marijke. 2002. "Framing Volksmoeders." Pp. 57–70 in Bacchetta and Power 2002b.
- Ellin, Abby. 2006. "Physical Culture: Home Schoolers Learn ABC's of Keeping Fit." *New York Times*, 25 May.
- Enders, Victoria. 2002. "And We Ate Up the World." Pp. 85–98 in Bacchetta and Power 2002b.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1989. *Unruly Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Giugni, Marco. 1999. "How Social Movements Matter: Past Research, Present Problems, and Future Developments." Pp. xiii–xxxiii in Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999.
- Giugni, Marco, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly, eds. 1999. *How Social Movements Matter*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Godwin, Mike. 2003. *Cyber Rights*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gottlieb, Julie. 2002. "Female 'Fanatics.'" Pp. 29–41 in Bacchetta and Power 2002b.
- Green, John. 2000. "The Christian Right and 1998 Elections." Pp. 1–19 in Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000.
- Green, John, Mark Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, eds. 2000. *Prayers in the Precincts*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Griffith, Alison, and Dorothy Smith. 2005. *Mothering for Schooling*. New York: Routledge.

- Gross, Jane. 2003. "Unhappy in Class, More are Learning at Home." *New York Times*, 10 November.
- Hakken, David. 1999. *Cyborgs@Cyberspace*. New York: Routledge.
- Hardisty, Jean. 1999. *Mobilizing Resentment*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Huerta, Luis. 2000. "Losing Public Accountability: A Home Schooling Charter." Pp. 177–202 in *Inside Charter Schools*, ed. B. Fuller. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jordan, Tim. 1999. *Cyberpower*. New York: Routledge.
- Kessler-Harris, Alice. 2001. In *Pursuit of Equity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Koven, Seth, and Sonia Michel. 1993. "Introduction: 'Mother Worlds.'" Pp. 1–42 in *Mothers of a New World*, ed. S. Koven and S. Michel. New York: Routledge.
- Ladd-Taylor, Molly. 1994. *Mother-Work*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- McAdam, Doug. 1999. "The Biographical Impact of Activism." Pp. 119–146 in Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999.
- Meyer, David S. 1999. "How the Cold War Was Really Won: The Effects of the Antinuclear Movements of the 1980s." Pp. 182–203 in Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999.
- Moore, Kelly. 1999. "Political Protest and Institutional Change." Pp. 97–115 in Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999.
- Princiotta, Daniel, Stacey Bielick, and Christopher Chapman. 2006. *Homeschooling in the United States: 2003*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education.
- Ray, Brian. 2005. *Worldwide Guide to Homeschooling*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman.
- Rosin, Hanna. 2005. "God and Country." *New Yorker* (27 June): 44–49.
- Rozell, Mark, and Clyde Wilcox. 1996. *Second Coming*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Sampson, Z. C. 2005. "Home Schools Are Becoming More Popular among Blacks." *New York Times*, 11 December.
- Schwartz Cowan, Ruth. 1983. *More Work for Mother*. New York: Basic Books.
- Slevin, James. 2000. *The Internet and Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smith, Christian. 1998. *American Evangelicalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stambach, Amy, and Miriam David. 2005. "Feminist Theory and Educational Policy: How Gender Has Been 'Involved' in Family School Choice Debates." *Signs* 30, no. 2 (Winter): 1633–1658.
- Stevens, Mitchell. 2001. *Kingdom of Children*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Strasser, Susan. 1982. *Never Done*. New York: Pantheon.
- Wilcox, Clyde, and Mark Rozell. 2000. "Conclusion: The Christian Right in Campaign '98." Pp. 287–297 in Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION



**Title:** Education and Goldy Technology: Gender, Culture, and the Work of Home Schooling

**Source:** Soc Anal 50 no3 Wint 2006 p. 19-37

**ISSN:** 0155-977X

**Publisher:** Berghahn Books

150 Broadway, Room 812, New York, NY 10038-4307

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher:  
<http://journals.berghahnbooks.com/sa/index.php>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.