Participation and Perception: Looking at Home Schooling through a Multicultural Lens

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Home education as a movement is not only growing and expanding in terms of the number of participants involved, but it also is increasing in

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terms of its credibility as a viable educational alternative, as the very existence of this special issue of the *Peabody Journal of Education* would seem to attest. When considering this burgeoning home schooling population, a simple question arises: What is the participation of differing ethnic groups within this particular educational movement? The answer is a surprising one, especially when considered in light of national demographics.

According to President Bill Clinton (1997) in his *One America: The President's Initiative on Race*, the "face of America is 72.7% White, 11% Hispanic, 12.1% Black, 3.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.7% American Indian." As the home education community is currently approximately 96% White, 1.5% Hispanic, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.5% American Indian, and only 0.5% Black (Ray, 1997, p. 41),[1] it is evident that the participation of ethnic groups within the home schooling community is highly disproportionate to the larger society (see Figure 1). Why? What are the perceptions of these differing ethnic groups as to the efficacy of home schooling? Is there a difference in perceptions of ethnic groups within the confines of the general, non-home schooling population as to the efficacy of home schooling? What do they believe about those families who choose to home school and

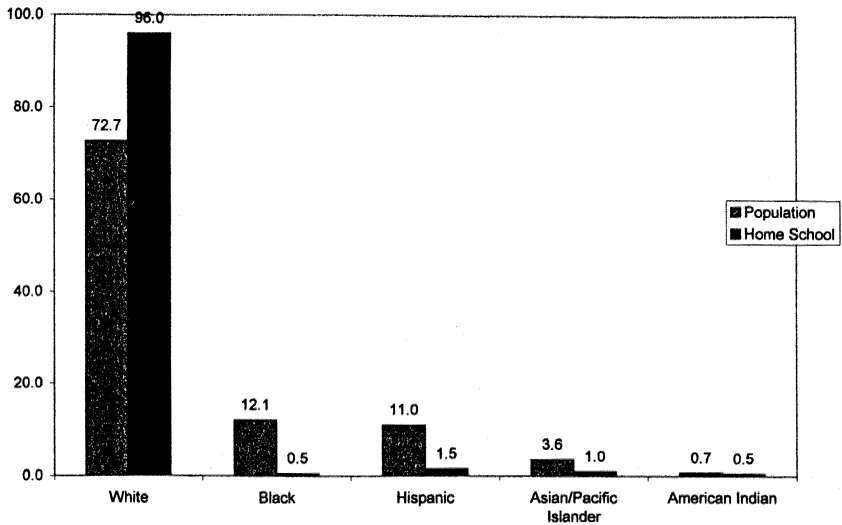*Figure 1.* 1997 U.S. ethnic populations and home schooling population.

[1]Given the difficulties inherent in researching the home school population (see, e.g., Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995; McDowell, 1998; Page, 1996; Ray, 1997; Schnaiberg, 1996), no statistical data exist at this point that claims to be 100% accurate and/or representative of the entire home schooling population.

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the reasons for their choice? If significant differences in perception between and among ethnic groups do exist, could these differences explain the disparity in participation?

This article attempts to address many of these questions by (a) presenting the current statistical level of participation of differing ethnic groups in home schooling (see Ray, 1997); (b) exploring the perceptions of these groups through an examination of the extant literature; and (c) presenting the surprising results of an exploratory research study that examines the perceptions of differing ethnic groups—within the non-home schooling general population—concerning those families that choose to home school, and the efficacy of the home schooling movement itself. In the course of examining this research study, we, of course, (a) discuss the methodology used in the study of perceptions of ethnic groups within the general population, (b) present findings, (c) discuss said findings, and (d) offer appropriate conclusions.

Having detailed the current participation of differing ethnic groups in the home schooling movement, we continue with a look at the extant research on multicultural home schooling, as well as other pertinent literature.

A Look at the Literature

Given the size of the population involved, it should not be at all surprising, perhaps, that very little research or literature dealing with home schooling's multicultural participants exists. One such study, which provides important information as to the participation of ethnic groups, already has been detailed (Ray, 1997). It also should be noted that although multicultural home schooling web sites (e.g., Jewish Home Educators Network, http://snj.com/jnen; Muslim Home Education, http://home.ici.net/customers/taadah/foyer.html) may be found on the Internet and are certainly of interest, they provide very little in the way of answers to the questions driving this study. Fortunately, however, two important sources of information do exist—a dissertation research study (Romm, 1993) and a book on African American home schoolers (Llewellyn, 1996)—both of which provide a fascinating and often disturbing glimpse of home schooling as seen through a multicultural lens.

The Dissertation Research Study and Freedom Challenge

One of the most interesting aspects of these two sources is their striking similarity. Both sources—when exploring ethnic minorities in home

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schooling—deal almost exclusively with the African American popula-
tion, and both detail (a) the differences between African American home
schoolers and the larger home schooling population, (b) the existence of ra-
cial tension within the home schooling community, and (c) the unhappy
paradoxes that explain both the probable reason why many African Amer-
icans consider home schooling to be an unacceptable educational alterna-
tive and why the majority of African American home schoolers feel the
need to follow a highly structured and traditional curriculum.

The differences.   For his 1993 research study, *Home Schooling and the
Transmission of Civic Culture,* Romm interviewed eight home schooling
families in the Atlanta, Georgia, area. Four of the families interviewed were
White, and four were African American. According to Romm (1993), one of
the most significant findings of his study was the discovery

> that there appears to be a set of concerns which are held in common by
> African-American home schoolers and which distinguish them from
> European-American home schoolers. ... Despite their strong religious
> backgrounds, these parents were more likely to describe their decision
> to home school as motivated by political beliefs than were Euro-
> pean-Americans. These beliefs have their root in parents' perceptions of
> the negative status of African-Americans in the society and of the contri-
> bution of schools to perpetuating it. Thus their goals emphasize the ne-
> cessity of developing a secure cultural identity, the skills of critical anal-
> ysis and communication to counter stereotypes of African-Americans,
> and the ability to cope effectively with experiences of racial discrimina-
> tion. (pp. 359–360)

In *Freedom Challenge: African American Homeschoolers,* Llewellyn (1996)
acted as editor for a collection of 15 essays written by African American
home schooling parents and their children. In her introduction, Llewellyn
also detailed some of the differing reasons why African Americans decide
on home schooling as an educational alternative:

> As the writers in the book show, African Americans homeschool for all
> these [standard] reasons and then some. Some homeschool because they
> see that racial integration in the schools has not always worked for their
> benefit. (Among other things, they feel that it has disrupted community
> life and thrust children into hate-filled classrooms where few people en-
> courage or hope for their success.) Some homeschool because they see
> that schools perpetuate institutionalized racism. Some homeschool be-

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cause they are tired of curriculums emphasizing Europe and excluding Africa. Some homeschool because their children are overwhelmingly treated as problems, and quickly labeled Attention Deficit Disordered or Learning Disabled. Some homeschool because they want to continue the Civil Rights struggle for equal educational rights, and they feel that they can best do so by reclaiming their right to help their own children develop fully—rather than by working to get them equal access to conventional schooling. (p. 15)

What other elements are different for the African American home schooling parent? According to both Romm and Llewellyn, problems often arise within the home schooling community itself, as is evidenced in the following section.

Racism within the home schooling community. Apparently, some African American home schoolers find that elements of racism

extend to interactions with others within the home schooling movement as well. The problem described was not so much one of outright racism, but of a more subtle variety. On the one hand, this takes the form of an assumption that all home schoolers are white, middle class, and Christian. This comes across when books at home schooling conferences or the texts used by curriculum publishers focus on Western European literature and history to the exclusion of other cultures and perspectives. It also comes across when the African-American home schoolers in attendance overhear remarks made by other parents that strike them as racially-biased or when they feel excluded socially at these events. (Romm, 1993, pp. 345–346)

Detra Rose Hood, one of the contributors to Llewellyn's (1996) collection, also felt uncomfortable with the available curriculum, especially when she

picked up the A Beka [a widely used home schooling curriculum] math book ... and began to go through it carefully. I had noticed that many private schools used A Beka books, but I felt, at the time, that by using a Christian curriculum that I would be pushing religion, and I didn't want to do that. At first glance the math book seemed interesting, though, so I continued to look. It was presented in a colorful fashion, but the majority of the images of people were white; the few people of color were illustrated in a caricature kind of way. (p. 213)

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Feeling "unsatisfied" with the home schooling networks available to them, as they were often "the only Black people" (Llewellyn, 1996, p. 223) present, many African American home schoolers began their own home schooling groups, as Donna Nichols-White—who began such a group, as well as a multicultural newsletter— explained,

> In the homeschooling world, I have noticed that white families have sup-
> ports that are non-existent for Black families. Our history, needs, and de-
> sires are different. No matter how much equality society thinks we en-
> joy, we are still far from equal in opportunity. In order to improve our
> lives as homeschoolers, we must again pave our own path. (Llewellyn,
> 1996, p. 72)

Two unhappy paradoxes.   One of the most enlightening findings arising from this brief look into the existing literature was the discovery of what may be termed "unhappy paradoxes." The first paradox may be explained as follows: Although African Americans believe that the current public school system is failing their children in record numbers—and current sta-tistics certainly support this belief (see, e.g., Bankston & Caldas, 1997; "Event, Status, and Cohort Dropout Rates," 1998; Hu, 1997; Lewis, 1992; Nadler, 1998)—it is this very system that "has historically been associated with the ideology of upward mobility for cultural minorities in America" (Romm, 1993, p. 341). "Education has historically provided a central means of access to personal and social advancement for the African American community" (p. 315), Romm continued, and many parents believe that "their children cannot afford the 'luxury' of a totally experimental peda-gogy" (p. 315). In essence, then, despite the fact that the very system they have trusted to pull them up the socioeconomic "ladder" is the same sys-tem that has failed them extraordinarily badly, many African Americans choose not to pursue home education as an educational alternative because of fear of lack of acceptance.

Perhaps this particular belief can be summed up most effectively by "Michael," a young African American student who had just heard Grace Llewellyn give a talk detailing the virtues of home schooling. Llewellyn (1996) related the encounter after her speech:

> The final bell rang, and most of the students hoisted their textbook-filled
> backpacks and went home. But several stayed and clustered around me,
> their eyes intense. Among them stood a young man whose voice wa-
> vered between resignation and longing. He told me his name was Mi-
> chael. "I totally see what you're saying about school, how it's a waste of

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time," he said, "and I know there's a lot more I could learn and do on my own. But I can't do it, because I'm black. I walk into some business to get a job, they want to see my diploma, I tell them I educated myself according to my own interests, and it's over. They say, 'Right. Another dropped out nigger.'" (p. 12)

Interestingly, elsewhere in Llewellyn's book, a young home-schooled African American woman's experience seems at once to both confirm and repudiate Michael's perception:

I have actually been turned down for some jobs because they don't understand the concept of being unschooled. And even when I do get a job, they sit there and they just constantly ask questions. It winds up not being an interview about me, but about my schooling. That prejudice is not a problem because I can overcome those hurdles. (p. 54)

Clearly, the decision to home school for African American parents contains a great many critical and diverse elements that are simply not a factor for Euro-Americans.

Sadly, those African Americans who do choose to home school often find themselves the victim of a second unhappy paradox, specifically: Although home schooling by its very nature offers participants a great deal of freedom both in implementation and curriculum, the majority of African American home schoolers believe that they must adhere to a more standard, "tight" curriculum so that their efforts—and their children—will be accepted by society in general. In essence, then, even though the experience of home schooling is a freeing one in theory, in actuality it still can retain elements of "bondage" for those African Americans participating in it.

As Romm (1993) explained, African Americans as a group "are inclined toward a more rigorous curriculum than an 'unschooling' family would be" (p. 315):

[They] are considerably more structured in their home schooling than the European-American Pedagogues. They are not "unschoolers," even though they may incorporate similar methods into their programs such as self-directed and experiential learning. They are far more likely to look to educational authorities for their guides, however, and to establish a regimen which must be adhered to by their children–students. Such firmness is portrayed as a "necessity" in working with African-American children in general, the sense of which may be heightened among African-Americans pursuing an educational alternative such as home schooling. (p. 344)

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Llewellyn's (1996) experience would seem, again, to echo that of Tracy Romm, as she relates in her introduction:

> Several African American homeschoolers have told me that black peo-ple are much more likely than whites to emphasize academics and a structured curriculum. And their observations were indeed borne out by my contact with some of the essayists and potential essayists for this book. ... If more black homeschoolers (than white) follow a structured curriculum, it's *not* necessarily because they value conformity or be-cause they don't trust their children to acquire the skills they need to be-come happy, well-educated adults. Rather, for obvious reasons, they don't trust *society* to recognize their kids' intelligence without benefit of, at least, a list of textbooks completed or classes taken through an aca-demic summer program. (Llewellyn, 1996, pp. 15–16)

Despite the seemingly overwhelming trend toward highly structured home schooling, at least one African American home schooling parent has adopted a different approach:

> Over the years I have discovered that [conventional schooling] is how children are *taught*—not necessarily how they *learn*. I have concluded that it's schooling, rather than "learning disabilities," that impinges on a child's learning. I have also decided I will not waste precious time competing with the schools. Schooling damages Black students the most; no other group of students fail in school at the rate they do. Why copy failure? (Llewellyn, 1996, p. 62)

Why, indeed? We must echo Llewellyn's (1996) hope

> that this somewhat school-like approach to education [as currently adopted by the majority of African American home schoolers] is a tempo-rary trend among black homeschoolers. Where a strong emphasis on con-ventional academics is based on fear, I hope that this fear will give way to the joyous confidence that many white unschoolers enjoy. (Largely, but not completely, what this boils down to is that I fervently hope *society* will get a lot saner and make it easier for black homeschoolers to feel that it's safe for them to give their kids more freedom.) (p. 16)

Summary

This brief look at the scant available literature on multicultural home schooling informs us of the following: (a) powerful differences exist be-

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tween African American home schooling families and the larger home schooling population, (b) these differences extend—sometimes uncomfortably—into the home schooling community itself, and (c) the existing relationship between African Americans and institutionalized learning often seems to paralyze their choices in the education realm—including both the decision to home school itself and the decision as to how to home school.

There is a difference, then, among some ethnic groups within the home schooling population. What about ethnic groups within the general population? Do they, too, perceive the home schooling movement in significantly different ways? Does this perception, in turn, affect their willingness to consider home schooling as a viable educational alternative? In the following sections, the details of an exploratory study whose purpose it was to investigate these and other questions are presented, beginning with the methodology used.

Methodology

Sample

The rationale. The units of analysis for this research study were college students. The reasons for this particular choice were twofold. First, access to a broad spectrum of different ethnic groups within the general population was critical to the study's success, and the chosen population—college students attending either Vanderbilt University or Nashville State Tech—provided the necessary ethnic diversity. Clearly, it is not possible to discover why different ethnic groups choose to stay away from or participate in home schooling—according to current participation levels—without surveying members of these ethnic groups. The young adults that make up the college student sample population are authentic members of their respective ethnic groups and, as such, comprise a valid population for research.

Second, and most important, college students (especially undergraduates) may be seen to constitute a group that—if they have not done so already—will in the near future most probably get married, start families, and make important educational decisions for their children. They form a pool of possible future home schooling parents, and, as a result, the perceptions of this particular population in regard to the efficacy of the home education movement are of particular interest.

Using a sample population comprised of students enrolled at Vanderbilt University or Nashville State Tech ensured appropriate diversity. These institutions have widely divergent goals and serve distinctly different student populations, as the following details reveal.

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The institutions: Vanderbilt University and Nashville State Tech. The histories, missions, costs, and entrance requirements are but a few of the areas in which these two institutions differ. One of the areas in which they diverge most sharply is in the ethnic diversity of their student bodies, as the information provided in Table 1 clearly demonstrates.

A commuter college, Nashville State Tech is a public 2-year college established in 1970, serving a geographic area comprised primarily of metropolitan Davidson County and surrounding counties. However, many foreign countries are represented as well. The institution offers associate's degrees and certificate programs in addition to courses that target business and industry. Nashville State Tech serves a student body that is diverse in age, race, and educational goals by attempting to provide high-quality education that is, at the same time, low in cost (Nashville State Tech Web Site, http://www.nsti.tec.tn.us/oir/ethnicorg.htm).

As the Vanderbilt University Web Site (http://excite.collegeedge.com/details/col..._1260.asp#UndergraduateStudentBodyProfile) reveals, Vanderbilt University is a selective private university, founded in 1873, which serves as a teaching and research university. The university is comprised of 10 schools and offers undergraduate programs as well as a wide range of graduate and professional programs. Students from all 50 states and more than 90 foreign countries attend Vanderbilt.

The average cost of tuition for the 1998–1999 academic year for a full-time undergraduate student attending Vanderbilt is $21,930 (*Vanderbilt University Undergraduate Catalog,* 1998–1999), and the average student at Nashville State Tech can expect to spend $1,086 for tuition (*Nashville State Tech Catalog,* 1998–1999) for the same course load during the same time period.

Table 1
Racial and Ethnic Representation in the Student Body: Fall 1998

Ethnic Group	Nashville State Tech	Vanderbilt Undergraduate
Native American or Alaskan native	29	12
African American	1,494	239
White	5,227	4,462
Hispanic	113	169
Asian or Pacific Islander	318	319
Other unclassified	90	651
Total	7,271	5,852

Note. From Ruben Mercado, Jr., Director of Institutional Research, Nashville State Tech, personal communication, February 1999; Vanderbilt University Web Site (http://excite.collegeedge.com/details/col..._1260.asp#UndergraduateStudentBodyProfile).

Academic entrance requirements differ greatly between the two schools as well. To be admitted into Vanderbilt University, an under-graduate's high school record must contain at least 15 academic units of college preparatory work (a unit being a year of study in one subject). In addition, the student must possess "grades indicating intellectual ability and promise. The pattern of courses should show purpose and continuity and furnish a background for the freshman curriculum offered at Vanderbilt" (*Vanderbilt University Undergraduate Catalog*, 1998–1999, p. 45). Applicants who may be lacking in some of these requirements can re-quest special consideration if they are "applicants of ability and achieve-ment" (p. 45). As is stated in the catalog,

> Admission as a freshman represents a selection based on the personal and academic records of applicants. All available information is consid-ered, including school record, evidence of academic maturity and inde-pendence, extracurricular activities, contributions to the school and community, and scores on standardized tests. (*Vanderbilt University Un-dergraduate Catalog*, 1998–1999, p. 45)

In sharp contrast, Nashville State Tech is an open-door institution into which any student with a high school degree or its equivalent (Graduate Equivalency Diploma) may enter. Entering students 21 years of age or older or those with low ACT scores may be required to take one or more tests to assess academic levels. Students with academic deficiencies based on these assessments are required to complete remedial courses successfully, courses that do not carry college credit, before their college-level study may begin. Unlike Vanderbilt, Nashville State Tech merely recommends that high school students who plan to enter college prepare themselves for these col-lege-level courses by completing two units of algebra, one unit of geometry, and four units of English (*Nashville State Tech Catalog*, 1998–1999, pp. 12–13).

Having examined our sample base in detail at this point, an explanation of the methodological approach used to tap into this sample base is in or-der and is detailed in the following section.

Methodological Details of the Research Study

This research study used a nonprobability sample of the convenience va-riety, with researchers giving 100 surveys to students enrolled at Vanderbilt and 160 to students enrolled at Nashville State Tech. Of those surveys, 5 from Nashville State Tech and 1 from Vanderbilt University were discarded as unusable (lacking responses to 10 or more questions), resulting in a final

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sample size of 254 (N = 254). The different ethnic groups sampled were White (n = 128), African American (n = 53), Asian (n = 29), Hispanic (n = 5), Native American (n = 3), and other (n = 36). Due to the low level of representation in some ethnic groups—and to run the appropriate and necessary statistical analyses—the Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and other ethnic respondents were collapsed into one category, termed "Other." As a result, three primary ethnic groups are dealt with in the data analysis: White (n = 128), African American (n = 53), and Other (n = 73).

The survey itself was composed of three sections: (a) the first section—using close-ended questions—included inquiries designed to gather critical information about the respondent (i.e., gender, educational level, age, income, ethnicity, whether the respondent had ever been home schooled, and respondent belief as to the probability of home schooling his or her own children at some point in the future); (b) the second section—using close-ended questions—asked respondents questions pertaining to their perception of those families who choose to home school their children (i.e., reasons for home schooling, educational level of parents, income, etc.); and (c) the final section—which used a Likert-type format—asked participants to respond to statements concerning home schooled children in both the academic and the social realm.

Method of Data Analysis

Chi-square tests of independence were used to explore the relations between the ethnic groups and their responses in Section II of the survey. This particular set of questions focused on participant perception of the home schooling family's (a) reason for home schooling, (b) annual income, (c) educational level, (d) primary home schooling instructor (i.e., mother, father, or both equally), (e) father's occupation, and (f) mother's occupation. To increase the power of the responses, some response categories within the questions were combined.

A chi-square test of independence also was used to determine the relation between the participants' ethnic group and the response given when asked about the likelihood of their home schooling their own children in the future. This particular question was found in Section I of the survey.

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) tests were chosen to examine the questions in Section III of the survey. The questions in that section dealt with the participant's perception of how the home-schooled child fares both academically and socially. The odd questions were combined to compare the mean responses per ethnic group on the perceived academic performance of home-schooled children, and the even questions

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were combined to compare the mean responses per ethnic group on the perceived socialization of home-schooled children.

Findings

The relation between the ethnic group of the respondents and their perceptions of the primary reason families choose to home school was investigated with a chi-square test of independence (see Table 2). This relation was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 253) = 1.052, p = .591$. However, each ethnic group appeared to believe that most home schooling families choose to home school their children for pedagogical reasons.

Another chi-square test of independence was used to examine the relation between the ethnic group of the respondents and their perceptions of the income of the families participating in home schooling (see Table 3). This relation was highly statistically significant, $\chi^2(4, N = 252) = 30.453, p < .0005$. The largest percentage of perceived income being in the lowest category (less than $29,999) was reported by the Other ethnic group. About the same percentage (just less than 50%) of each ethnic group thought that the incomes of home schooling families would be at the middle income level. The highest percentage of the perceived income being high was reported by the White group.

A third chi-square test of independence evaluated the relation between the ethnic group of the respondents and their perceptions of the educational level of home schooling parents (see Table 4). This relation was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4, N = 253) = 9.498, p = .050$. The majority in each ethnic group believed that the home schooling parents had some college or a bachelor's degree; this category was selected by the largest percentage of the Whites.

The inferential statistical analysis of the relation between the ethnic group of the respondents and their perceptions of the primary home schooling parent was unreliable (see Table 5). However, the numbers were negligible for those who reported thinking that the father alone was the home schooling parent. Both the African Americans and the Whites perceived the mother to be the primary parent involved in the home schooling process. The ethnic group termed *Other* believed that the mother and father shared the responsibilities equally.

The perceived occupation of the father in the home schooling family was reported by the respondents (see Table 6). Using the chi-square test of independence, no statistical significance was found for the relation between the ethnic group of the respondents and their perceptions of the occupations of the father, $\chi^2(4, N = 248) = 7.245, p = .123$.

The perceived occupation of the mother in the home schooling family also was reported by the respondents (see Table 7). Using the chi-square

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Table 2
Participants' Perceptions of the Reason Why Families Choose to Home School Their Children

| | Ethnic Group | | | | | |
| | White | | African American | | Other[a] | |
Reasons	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Ideological	33	26.0	10	18.9	18	24.7
Pedagogical	94	74.0	43	81.1	55	75.3

Note. $\chi^2(2, N = 253) = 1.052, p = .591.$
[a]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

Table 3
Participants' Perceptions of the Annual Gross Income of Home Schooling Families

| | Ethnic Group | | | | | |
| | White | | African American | | Other[a] | |
Income	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Less than $29,999	10	7.9	13	24.5	25	34.7
$30,000 to $49,999	60	47.2	26	49.1	35	48.6
$50,000 and above	57	44.9	14	26.4	12	16.7

Note. $\chi^2(4, N = 252) = 30.453, p < .0005.$
[a]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

Table 4
Participant's Perceptions of the Average Educational Level of Home School Parents

| | Ethnic Group | | | | | |
| | White | | African American | | Other[a] | |
Educational Level	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
High school	19	14.8	13	24.5	19	26.4
Some college/Bachelor's Degree	97	75.8	31	58.5	41	56.9
Advanced degree	12	9.4	9	17.0	12	16.7

Note. $\chi^2(4, N = 253) = 9.498, p = .050.$
[a]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

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Table 5
Participants' Perception Concerning the Primary Home Schooling Parent

| | Ethnic Group | | | | | |
| | White | | African American | | Other[a] | |
Parent	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Mother	121	94.5	42	80.8	29	40.3
Father	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	5.6
Mother and father share equally	7	5.5	10	19.2	39	54.2

[a]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

Table 6
Participants' Perceptions of the Occupation of the Father in Home Schooling Families

| | Ethnic Group | | | | | |
| | White | | African American | | Other[a] | |
Occupation of Father	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Accountant, engineer, doctor	46	37.1	19	36.5	35	48.6
Small business owner, manager	53	42.7	16	30.8	25	34.7
Technical field, tradesman	25	20.2	17	32.7	12	16.7

Note. $\chi^2(4, N = 248) = 7.245, p = .123$.
[a]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

Table 7
Participants' Perceptions of the Occupation of the Mother in Home Schooling Families

| | Ethnic Group | | | | | |
| | White | | African American | | Other[a] | |
Occupation of Mother	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Homemaker	110	87.3	30	58.8	36	49.3
Nurse, small business owner, doctor, teacher, office worker	16	12.7	21	41.2	37	50.7

Note. $\chi^2(2, N = 250) = 36.127, p < .0005$.
[a]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

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test of independence, high statistical significance was found for the relation between the ethnic group of the respondents and their perceptions of the occupations for the mother, $\chi^2(2, N = 250) = 36.127$, $p < .0005$. Whites overwhelmingly believed that the mother was a homemaker, and more than 50% of the African Americans agreed. About equal percentages of the Other ethnic group perceived the home schooling mother as a homemaker or as having a career.

A one-way ANOVA was run to compare the perceptions held by the ethnic group of the respondents toward the academic performance of home-schooled children (see Table 8). No statistically significant difference in perception was found among the ethnic groups, $F(2, N = 248) = 0.517$, $p = .597$.

Another one-way ANOVA was used to compare the perceptions held by the ethnic group of the respondents toward the socialization of home-schooled children (see Table 9). There was a highly statistically significant difference in perception among the ethnic groups, $F(2, N = 248) = 8.077$, $p < .0005$. The Other group perceived the home-schooled children as

Table 8
Participants' Perception of Academic Performance of Home-Schooled Children

Ethnic Group	n	Mean Response[a]
White	124	16.9919
African American	52	17.2115
Other[b]	72	16.5417

Note. $F(2, N = 248) = 0.517$, $p = .597$.

[a]For the mean response, a range of 7.00 to 28.00 is in effect (midrange = 17.5), with the lower numbers indicating a favorable response to the academic element of home schooling and the higher numbers indicating a negative response. [b]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

Table 9
Participants' Perception of Socialization of Home-Schooled Children

Ethnic Group	n	Mean Response[a]
White	127	19.1339
African American	51	18.7451
Other[b]	70	16.7714

Note. $F(2, N = 248) = 8.077$, $p < .0005$.

[a]For the mean response, a range of 7.00 to 28.00 is in effect (midrange = 17.5), with the lower numbers indicating a favorable response to the academic element of home schooling and the higher numbers indicating a negative response. [b]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

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Table 10
Participants' Response When Asked if They Would Home School Their Own Children in the Future

	Ethnic Group					
	White		African American		Other[a]	
Response	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	6	4.7	7	13.2	14	19.4
Maybe	22	17.2	17	32.1	34	47.2
No	100	78.1	29	54.7	24	33.3

Note. $\chi^2(4, N = 253) = 40.109, p < .0005$.
[a]Includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

adequately socialized, followed by the African Americans. The Whites were less inclined to believe that the home schooling environment provided adequate socialization.

An additional chi-square test of independence was used to determine the relation between the ethnic group of the participants and their response when asked whether they would choose to home school their own children in the future (see Table 10). This relation was highly statistically significant, $\chi^2(4, N = 253) = 40.109, p < .0005$. The largest percentage (78.1%) of the Whites did not appear to plan to home school their children. A little more than half (54.7%) of the African Americans did not seem to be interested in home schooling either. A little less than half (47.2%) of the Other group reported that they might consider home schooling their children in the future.

The findings presented in this section are not only of interest, but they were also altogether unexpected. How do respondents' perceptions about home schooling families and the effectiveness of the home schooling process compare with what is known about these differing elements? Are their perceptions accurate, and does their ethnicity seem to affect their response in important ways? What conclusions, if any, may be appropriately gleaned from this research? In the following section, these and other components of the findings are explored in detail.

Discussion

Respondent Perceptions Versus the Research

One of the more surprising aspects of the data analysis was the fact that often respondents' beliefs about certain aspects of home schooling families

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and the home schooling process aligned exactly with what is known about the population, and at other times their perceptions were completely "off base," so to speak. For instance, when asked about the annual gross income of home schooling families, the majority of respondents judged correctly when they chose the $30,000 to $49,999 range (see Table 3); current research indicates that the median income is $43,000 (Ray, 1997, p. 30). Respondents were also correct when ascertaining the average educational level of home schooling parents as being "Some college/Bachelor's Degree" (see Table 4; see also Ray, 1997, pp. 28–30). Respondents discerned correctly once again when most of them perceived the mother to be the primary instructor (see Table 5; see also Ray, 1997, p. 28). Perhaps not surprisingly, the bulk of respondents were also correct in their perception of the primary occupation of home schooling mothers as being "Homemaker" (see Table 7). Indeed, the research indicates that approximately 88% of home schooling mothers fall into this category (Ray, 1997, p. 39).

Respondents' perceptions did not always line up so precisely with the facts, however. For instance, when asked why they believed families chose to home school their children (see Table 2), the vast majority of each ethnic grouping (Whites, 74.0%, African Americans, 81.1%, and Other, 75.3%) chose the "Pedagogical" response. This is in sharp contrast to what is known about the population, as the research data indicate that ideological concerns, rather than pedagogical ones, are the primary reason parents choose to home school their children (see, e.g., Mayberry, 1988; Mayberry et al., 1995; McDowell, 1998; Wartes, 1987, 1988a).

Another instance in which respondent response differed somewhat from the known data occurred when participants indicated their beliefs about the occupation of the father in home schooling families (see Table 6). The current research indicates that the highest percentage of home schooling fathers (34%) pursue a career or occupation that falls into the "professional" category (i.e., accountant, engineer, banker, doctor, lawyer, professor, etc.; see Ray, 1997, p. 28). Interestingly enough, although no statistical significance exists between the ethnicity of respondents and their choice, the majority of African Americans (36.5%) and Other (48.6%) judged correctly that home schooling fathers' occupations fell in the realm of the "professional" category, whereas the majority of Whites (42.7%) believed the correct response to be "Small business owner, manager."

Perhaps the most telling misperceptions of the participants had to do with their response to statements dealing with the academic and social aspects of the home schooling process (see Tables 8 and 9). Research abounds that details the fact that in academic matters, home-schooled children perform at least as well as, and usually better than, their public school counterparts (see, e.g., Medlin, 1994; Ray, 1990, 1997; Ray & Wartes, 1991;

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Richman, 1988; Wartes, 1988b, 1990). However, the mean response of all ethnic groups to questions concerning the academic performance of home-schooled children was basically "lukewarm," in that their perceptions were neither strongly positive nor strongly negative (see Table 8). Participant response to questions concerning the socialization of home-schooled children tended to be slightly more negative, but not strongly so (see Table 9), despite the fact that current research informs us that such children are socialized at least as well as, if not better than, their public/private schooled counterparts (see, e.g., Delahooke, 1986; Kelley, 1991; Montgomery, 1989; Shyers, 1992; Smedley, 1992; Taylor, 1986).

From this detailed examination and comparison of respondent perceptions and the known data about the population, the following conclusion may be safely drawn: The respondents taking part in this study seemed to be rarely well informed, often misinformed, and totally uninformed about many aspects of the home schooling community and, most important, the efficacy of the home schooling process itself. This finding is particularly important in light of participant response when asked if they would choose to home school their own children in the future. If, as a group, they had been better informed about the home schooling movement and its participants, would that have altered their response to this particular question? More important—especially when considering the questions driving this study—did the respondents' ethnicity have any bearing on their response to this and other questions? As we see in the following section, data analyses revealed that ethnicity had a significant bearing on participant response in five areas of inquiry and no bearing at all in the four remaining areas.

Participant Response and Ethnicity

When analyzing participant response, it was most interesting to note that ethnicity had no impact on perceptions of (a) why families choose to home school their children, (b) the primary home schooling parent, (c) the occupation of the father in home schooling families, and (d) the academic performance of home-schooled children. More interesting still is the fact that ethnicity did have a very real impact on perceptions of (a) the annual gross income of home schooling families, (b) the average educational level of home school parents, (c) the occupation of the mother in home schooling families, (d) the socialization of home-schooled children, and (e) whether respondents would choose to home school their own children in the future.

What, precisely, does this mean? It means that our African American and Other respondents—despite the fact that the majority of both chose the "$30,000 to $49,999" category—were more likely than Whites to believe that the annual gross income of home school parents was "Less than

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$29,999"; Whites, as it turns out, were also more likely than the other ethnic groups to choose the "$50,000 or above" category (see Table 3). It also means that our African American and Other respondents—despite the fact that the majority of both chose the "Some college/Bachelor's Degree" category—were more likely than Caucasians to believe that the average educational level of home school parents was "High school" or "Advanced degree" (see Table 4).

Whites and African Americans were much more likely than the Other category to believe that the occupation of the home schooling mother was "Homemaker"; indeed, the respondents in the Other ethnic grouping were almost evenly divided in their beliefs as to whether the mother was a homemaker or employed outside the home (see Table 7). The socialization of home-schooled children was another area of inquiry in which the ethnicity of the respondent was statistically significant. The Other ethnic group seemed to perceive home-schooled children as being adequately socialized, whereas African Americans were more negative in their perceptions. More negative still, however, were the Whites, who gave the highest (and therefore, the most negative) response (see Table 9).

The final area in which ethnicity made a statistically significant difference in response was the question concerning whether respondents would choose to home school their own children in the future (see Table 10). The Other ethnic group had the highest percentage of any ethnicity answering in the affirmative to this question (19.4%); they also had the highest percentage answering in the "Maybe" category (47.2%), and the lowest percentage giving a negative response (33.3%). Interestingly enough, African Americans (13.2%) were more than twice as likely as Whites (4.7%) to indicate that they would home school their children in the future and also almost twice as likely (African Americans, 32.1%; Whites, 17.2%) to indicate that they might home school in the future. Perhaps the most interesting finding of all is that the vast majority of Whites (78.1%) seemed to be quite firm in their belief that they would not choose to home school their children in the future.

Summary

What conclusions can be appropriately drawn at this point? It should be noted again that—given the exploratory nature of this research study, as well as the nonprobability, convenience-type sampling used—the generalizability of the findings is limited in the extreme. That having been said, however, it is certainly appropriate to draw conclusions about our particular sample and their responses.

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Given the "hit-or-miss" aspect of the correctness of their responses—as compared to what is known about the population—it is clear that our sample population was both misinformed and uninformed about several different aspects of the home schooling movement. It is also clear that in (a) the area of socialization of home-schooled children and (b) the choice as to whether to home school in the future, Whites were much more strongly inclined to be negative than were their African American and Other counterparts. Why?

Given the current participation of Whites in the home education movement—especially as compared to other ethnic groups (see Figure 1)—this finding was completely unexpected. Not only were Whites not the most positive in their responses, but they were more negative than any other ethnic group. Given the "unhappy paradox" of African Americans and the educational system cited in the literature review, one naturally would have expected African Americans to be the most ardently opposed to certain aspects of home schooling. Why, then, would it seem to be Whites who are more negative in their perceptions? Why are the African American and Other groups more positive?

We can, of course, only make suppositions at this point. Perhaps those participants with the more negative response simply presuppose that their children will learn best and be happiest in a public/private school environment. Or, perhaps—as this sample population was made up of college students—current and/or future career plans seem more real right now than do children and family issues. The possibility also exists that these findings represent the beginnings of a subtle, positive shift among African American and Other populations in favor of home schooling. Finally, and most simply, perhaps if the sample as a whole had been better educated about the home schooling movement and its effectiveness, the responses would have been more positive.

Some Concluding Thoughts

As might be expected with an exploratory study, it seems we are left with more questions than answers. Why did the White group respond so negatively to some questions, and, by the same token, why did the African American and Other ethnic groups respond so positively? Are age, educational level, and/or economic level significant factors in participant response? As a very high percentage of the home schooling population is Christian in their religious affiliation (see, e.g., Mayberry et al., 1995; Ray, 1997), is it possible that the religious affinity—or lack thereof—of the participants played a significant role in their response? Do the often surprising results of this re-

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search study indicate a subtle turning within certain ethnic groups toward home schooling? So much more needs to be known, and more re-search—with a bigger and more diverse sample population, including larger numbers of differing ethnic groups—needs to be conducted.

Again, why is the ethnic breakdown of the home schooling community so highly disproportionate to the larger society? This is an important question, and it is one that this research study has taken a first step toward answering. It will be fascinating to see what future research uncovers and discovers about differing ethnic groups and their perception of—and participation in—the educational alternative known as home schooling.

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