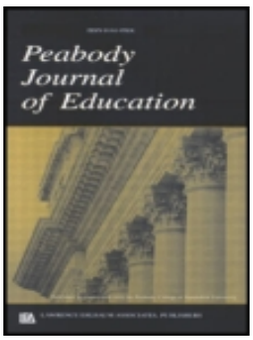

Peabody Journal of Education

ISSN: 0161-956X (Print) 1532-7930 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hpje20

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Cheryl Fields-Smith & Monica Wells Kisura

To cite this article: Cheryl Fields-Smith & Monica Wells Kisura (2013) Resisting the Status Quo: The Narratives of Black Homeschoolers in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC, Peabody Journal of Education, 88:3, 265-283, DOI: 10.1080/0161956X.2013.796823

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2013.796823

PEABODY JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, 88: 265–283, 2013

ISSN: 0161-956X print / 1532-7930 online
DOI: 10.1080/0161956X.2013.796823

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SECTION 1: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

Resisting the Status Quo: The Narratives of Black Homeschoolers in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC

Cheryl Fields-Smith
University of Georgia

Monica Wells Kisura
Trinity Washington University

Trends suggest that homeschooling continues to increase among black families. Yet, research on contemporary Black homeschooling remains scarce. Given black educational history, the phenomena of Black families choosing homeschooling over public and private schools in the post-Desegregation era is worthy of investigation. Further, documenting the ways in which black homeschool families engage their children in learning will inform the needs of black education in conventional schools, public and private. The phenomenon of increasing black home education represents a radical transformative act of self-determination, the likes of which have not been witnessed since the 1960s and '70s. This work highlights the primacy of agency among black homeschooling families. Thus, contrary to the negative depictions of black families as disengaged from the educational pursuits of their children, we evoke hooks's (1990) notion of homeplace to argue that black home education represents a vehicle of resistance to institutionalized racism and ideological mismatches between black families and their children's educational needs.

Homeschooling is on the rise in the United States. Using multiple data sources, Ray (2011) recently estimated that between 1,734,000 to 2,346,000 children in the United States are homeschooled compared to a 1999 estimate of just 850,000 children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009); approximately 15% (260,100 to 351,900) of these homeschooled students are black. Trends further suggest that homeschooling will continue to increase among black families.

Dr. Fields-Smith is grateful for the Spencer Foundation, which supported her initial research through a small research grant. A special note of thanks to Dr. Natalie Zur Nedden of Toronto, a home education researcher and entrepreneur who brought the work of Cheryl Fields-Smith to my attention.

Correspondence should be sent to Cheryl Fields-Smith, University of Georgia, Educational Theory and Practice, 624 Anderhold Hall, Athens, GA 30602. E-mail: cfields@uga.edu

Yet research on contemporary black homeschooling remains scarce. Given black educational history, the phenomena of black families choosing home education over public and private schools in the post-Desegregation era is worthy of careful, systematic investigation. Further, documenting the reasons and the ways in which black homeschool families engage their children in learning will inform the needs of black education in conventional schools, public and private.

The phenomenon of increasing black home education represents a radical transformative act of self-determination, the likes of which have not been witnessed since the 1960s and '70s. This work highlights the primacy of agency among black homeschooling families. Thus, contrary to the negative depictions of black families as disengaged from the educational pursuits of their children, we evoke hooks' (1990) notion of *homeplace* to argue that black home education represents a vehicle of resistance to institutionalized racism and ideological mismatches between black families and their children's educational needs.

This article presents data from two independently conducted studies on black home education. Each of the studies investigated the motivations, beliefs, and attitudes of black home educators. The studies were conducted in two different regions of the United States. The first study queried black homeschooling in the Metro-Atlanta area, whereas the second examined black home educators residing in the Metro-DC area. This article addresses the question, What were some of the common themes that emerged from interviews with black home educators in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Central to the unfolding of this exercise is the exploration of the personal stories, thoughts, feelings, and desires of black mothers who are forgoing career advancement and financial gain to personally provide an education for their children within the context of their *homeplace*. According to hooks (1990), *homeplace* is a space where "Black people strive to be subjects, not objects, where we [can] be affirmed in our minds and hearts . . . where we restore ourselves to the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world" (p. 42). In this study, *homeplace* is a space where black mothers make meaning of their choice to stay at home to educate and pass along (reproduce) cultural and social values to their children while "appropriating and resisting traditional cultural notions" (p. 42). Because of this, the *homeplace* has the capacity to be both transformative and transgressive.

Our standpoint defines black homeschooling as a radical space of self-actualization with the potential for positively impacting the family life and educational outcomes of the black community. This space is made possible through the vehicle of the *homeplace*, which, for black families, is both a private and collectively shared space. This transgressive space is a safe haven and creative space with psychological, physical, and political dimensions. Members of these submerged and marginal networks forge place, belonging, and empowerment in their families and broader homeschooling communities. These spaces are not ones of victim-hood, but they are imbued with the capacity for forging new identities and ways of being in the world. For Davis (1999), the "kitchen" is the specific physical site in the *homeplace* that black women have historically used to simultaneously perform acts of "subversive kitchen strategies" (p. 367) as well as to transform the site into a space of ritual, nurturance, and African American community identity (p. 370).

In the primarily white homes where they worked as "the help," black women strove toward equality. They took this "segregated space of *otherness*" and created the *kitchen legacy*, wherein they passed on "survival skills to their daughters," as well as provided them with strategies for coping with oppressive conditions, as they fought for change (pp. 368–369). As Davis (1999) noted,

> From the arrival of African American women onto the American canvas of history, space provided a marker, a symbol of limits, a metaphor for *outsider*; spaces defined the dialectical nature of white and black. These spaces of beingness and non-beingness, respectively, were translated into acts of degradation and inhumanity. . . . Once situated on American soil, slavery's system of subjugation and oppression further relegated black women to kitchen spaces, sites of domesticity and silence. (p. 366)

It could be argued that today, black homeschooling mothers are "flipping-the-script" on their previously ascribed roles as "domestic-other" and "working-mother" and they are instead powerfully reclaiming domesticity as their personal choice and individual right.

In her exploration of black female activists in Newark, New Jersey, Isoke (2011) expanded the boundaries of *homeplace* to include the public sphere when she suggests that the creation of *homeplace* stretches beyond the private "sphere of domesticity" to include the construction of *homeplaces* in the public sphere. These *homeplaces* are "political spaces that black women create to express care for each other and their communities, and to re-member, revise and revive the scripts of political resistance" (p. 117). The process by which *homeplaces* are created is via "homemaking," which is a political act that extends beyond the confines of individual households to encompass safe spaces that are located in the public sphere. *Homemaking* is a "critical form of spatial praxis" that entails "reconfiguring a hostile and deeply racialized landscape" to foster "relationships of trust, positive reciprocity, cooperation, and care within and between black people" (p. 118). One way that this is demonstrated in the homeschooling community is through the creation of co-operative shared learning opportunities or co-ops. Many of the homeschooling mothers in our studies expressed their reliance upon fellow homeschooling mothers (and networks) for academic, pedagogical, and emotional support. In this manner, co-ops can be viewed as an extension of the domestic *homeplace*.

BLACK HOMESCHOOLERS IN THE LITERATURE

The literature celebrating the achievements and chronicling the lives of homeschoolers continues to grow, and a few academic journals have devoted some special issues to the subject of homeschooling, including *Education and Urban Society* (1988), *Peabody Journal of Education* (2000), and *Evaluation and Research in Education* (2003). Ironically, the academic community has been slow to take notice of the black homeschooling community, even though black homeschoolers are reported to be the fastest growing among homeschool groups (Marech, 2006). Some attempts have been made to redress this issue. In 2000, McDowell, Sanchez, and Jones made a noteworthy contribution to the homeschooling literature with their discussion about the multicultural dimensions of homeschooling. However, their article included reviews of only two pieces of literature that focused upon black homeschoolers: a dissertation by Romm (1993) and an edited volume of essays written by 15 black and interracial homeschooling children and their parents (Llewellyn, 1996). One notable shortcoming is that McDowell et al. did not interview

actual homeschoolers. Rather, they surveyed 254 participants from diverse racial backgrounds, who were attending Vanderbilt University and Nashville State Tech, to ascertain the student's perceptions of homeschoolers. Thankfully, some progress has been made since that time. There are four scholarly research studies that focus exclusively on black families, and black women have written three of them. These studies include an article by Fields-Smith and Williams (2009), a dissertation by Kisura (2009), and a dissertation by Muhammad (2011). The fourth academic study is a capstone thesis by Kraychir (2003). Romm (1993) identified the unhappy paradoxes faced by black families who decide to homeschool because doing so stands in opposition to a black cultural tradition of looking to publics schools as the source of uplift and because, although homeschooling should provide academic freedom, black families frequently experience pressure to provide their children with extensive structure to ensure that their children will be well perceived in society. Taylor (2005) and Apple (2006) also made noteworthy contributions to the discussion of homeschooling, but no original research. Considering the underdeveloped nature of the literature on black homeschoolers, this article aims to bridge the egregious gap within the homeschooling literature that continues to obfuscate the experiences of black home educators.

To fully grasp the lives of black homeschoolers, it is necessary to move beyond academic literature and into the realm of popular media, as the vast majority of literature chronicling the lives of black homeschoolers is located in this domain. These conversations include an autobiography (Penn-Nabrit, 2003), an edited volume of essays by black and interracial families (Llewellyn, 1996), three book chapters written by black and interracial/multicultural Canadian and American homeschool mothers (Lande, 2000), a book chapter on black homeschoolers written by a White unschooler[1] (Wimsatt, 2003), three articles in *Home Education Magazine* (Weldon, 2003, Ekoko, 2004a, James, 2004), articles in *Parenting* (Ralston, 2000), *Life Learning Magazine* (Zur Nedden, 2006a, 2006b), *The Village Voice* (Hilliard, 2008), two articles in the Homeschool Legal Defense Association's (2001a, 2001b) July/August 2001 edition of *The Home School Court Report*, and a large number of newspaper articles (Badie, 2006; Marech, 2006; Sampson, 2005), to name a few. Black-focused popular magazines like *Ebony*, *Essence*, and *Jet* were the first media to feature black homeschoolers. These magazines carried a combined total of nine articles from 1991 through 2005 (Caviness, 2002; García-Barrio, 1991; Henderson, 2005; Hill, 2003; Hughes, 2004; Lord, 2003; Malveaux, 2000; Souljah, 2003; Yarbrough, 2003). Black newspapers like *The Chronicle* (Walker, 2005) and Howard University's *The Hilltop* (McLain, 2003) have also featured articles about black homeschoolers. Although these popular sources have at least acknowledged black homeschoolers, the discussion is virtually absent, and if it is present is not seriously debated, in black-focused academic and policy journals. A few exceptions are include *Black Issues in Higher Education* (Malveaux, 1996); *The Crisis*, which devoted two articles to the topic (Peoples, 2001; Wakhisi, 1995); Black *Enterprise* (Simon, 2007); and the *Journal of Black Studies* (Levy, 2007).

A further review of radio and television media archives uncovered the following: one brief CNN broadcast featuring African American homeschoolers (Nurenberg, 2006); five 2-min broadcasts conducted by the Homeschool Legal Defense Association with Joyce and Eric Burgess, cofounders of the National Black Home Educators Resource Association (NBHERA[2]); six

[1]Unschooler refers to a homeschooler engaged in an approach espoused by John Holt, which promotes child-led learning such that children choose what to learn, when to learn it, and how.

[2]NBHERA has since changed their name to National Black Home Educators.

National Public Radio broadcasts including a commentary by homeschooling father and Johns Hopkins University professor Dr. Lester Spence (2005; Chideya & Gordon, 2005); two interviews with Jenice View, a black homeschooling mother living in Washington, DC (Zwerdling, 1998, 1999); and two interviews with *Morning by Morning* author Paula Penn-Nabrit (Bates & Chadwick, 2003; Cox, 2003). There was also a weekly XM satellite radio broadcast hosted by Brian Higgins, featuring segments with Courtney Walton, founder of African American Unschoolers (http://www.afamunschool.com/); two programs devoted to Black Canadian homeschoolers on the weekly *Radio Free School* program, hosted by Black homeschooling mother Beatrice Ekwa Ekoko (2004b, 2006); five Black Entertainment Television broadcasts (Gordon, 2002; Latifah, 2001; Miller & Reid, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) These broadcasts featured discussions with Joyce and Eric Burges of the NBHERA, which musical performing artist Queen Latifah (2001) hosted. Miller and Reid (2003b) conducted an interview with the Director of the National African American Homeschool Alliance mom and activist Jennifer James, also of the North Carolina African American Homeschoolers.

Because record numbers of black homeschooling families did not garner media attention until the 1990s, nearly 20 years after most scholars agree that contemporary homeschooling began (Farenga, 1999; Knowles, Marlow, & Muchmore, 1992), one could have the false impression that black families are latecomers to the contemporary scene. In actuality, testimonials by Raymond Moore and Jennifer James and current research show that black families have been homeschooling alongside their mainstream counterparts since or before the early 1980s (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; James, 2004; Moore, 2001). Unfortunately, there exists a noticeably imbalanced academic scholarship and media focus on the negative dimensions of the black experience, particularly in relationship to education. Much of literature written about black families, and even work written by black authors, portrays them as disadvantaged and somewhat passive agents. This study contrasts sharply with these widely held beliefs by identifying some ways that black homeschoolers are actively engaged in the lives of their children.

METHODOLOGY

This article represents a synthesis of two independently conducted studies of black families engaged in the practice of homeschooling—one study situated in Metro-DC and the other in Metro-Atlanta. In total, this work represents the voices of 54 black home educators. In this section we provide an overview of each study and describe our synthesis process.

In Fields-Smith's Metro-Atlanta study, the author conducted interviews and focus group sessions with 36 black home educators over a 2-year period, with each representing a different family. Table 1 demonstrates the diverse demographics among the Metro-Atlanta black home educators, disaggregated by single- and two-parent families. The 36 black home educators, who resided in Metro-Atlanta, included three single-parent families. Participating home educators also ranged from having no college education to having a professional degree, but the majority (17) of the parents held undergraduate degrees. Black home educators ranged in age from 26 to 54 years old, and the mean age of participating home educators was 40 overall. The three single-parent black home educators were 26, 34, and 44 years old. Income ranges are annual incomes that were self-reported by home educators in their surveys. Families represented in this study have been homeschooling from less than 1 year to up to 18 years. At the time of the study, two

TABLE 1
Demographics of Metro-Atlanta Black Home Educators

	Two-Parent Homeschool Families[a]	Single-Parent Homeschool Families[b]	Total[c]
Income range	Under $15,000 = 2	Under $15,000 = 2	4
	15,001 – 35,000 = 3	15,001 – 35,000 = 1	4
	35,001 – 55,000 = 8	35,001 – 55,000 = 0	8
	55,001 – 75,000 = 14	55,001 – 75,000 = 0	14
	75,001+ = 9	75,001+ = 0	9
Education level	High school = 4	High school = 1	High school = 5
	Some college = 6	Some college = 1	Some college = 7
	Undergraduate = 17	Undergraduate = 0	Undergraduate = 17
	Master' = 7	Master's = 1	Master's = 8
	Professional/Ph.D. = 2	Professional/Ph.D. = 0	Pro/Ph.D. = 2
Years of homeschooling	1 year or less = 7	1 year or less = 1	1 year or less = 8
	2–5 years = 16	2–5 years = 1	2–5 years = 17
	6–10 years = 6	6–10 years = 0	6–10 years = 6
	10+ years = 4	10+ years = 1	10+ years = 5
	Veterans = 2	Veterans = 0	Veterans = 2
No. of children	1 child = 4	1 child = 2	1 child = 6
	2–3 children = 25	2–3 children = 1	2–3 children = 26
	4–5 children = 5	4–5 children = 0	4–5 children = 5
	6–8 children = 0	6–8 children = 0	6–8 children = 0
	9 children = 2	9 children = 0	9 children = 2
	Split schooling = 5	Split schooling = 1	Split schooling = 6

[a]$n = 36$. [b]$n = 3$. [c]$n = 3$.

additional home educators had homeschooled their children from pre-K to 12th grade and they were no longer homeschooling. These two home educators have been designated as veterans to distinguish them from current practicing home educators. In addition, six black home educators reported that they homeschooled only one of their multiple children; in the table, this situation has been reported as split schooling.Table 2

In the Kisura study, the author conducted interviews and one focus-group session with 29 black home educators, with each representing a different family. The author collected the data between April 2005 and November 2005. Sixty-two percent of the Metro-DC home educators ($n = 18$ out of a possible 29) returned surveys by mail. Seventeen percent of all families represented one-parent households ($n = 3$), whereas 83% ($n = 15$) represented two-parent households. The upcoming data reflect statistics from the survey respondents, who were the mothers in all cases. In regards to educational attainment, participating home educators ranged from having no completed college degree to having a doctoral or professional degree. Sixty-seven percent of mothers in one-parent families held a bachelor's or master's degree,[3] while nearly 33% of mothers in two-parent families held a bachelor's degree and 53% had

[3]Thirty-three percent held a bachelor's degree and an equal percentage held a master's (33.3%) and trade/specific degree (33.3%).

TABLE 2
Demographics of Metro-DC Black Home Educators

	Two-Parent Homeschool Families[a]	Single-Parent Homeschool Families[b]	Total[c]
Income range[d]	Under $15,000 = 0	Under $15,000 = 1	Under $15,000 = 1
	15,001–35,000 = 0	15,001–35,000 = 1	15,001–35,000 = 1
	35,001–55,000 = 1	35,001–55,000 = 0	35,001–55,000 = 1
	55,001–75,000 = 3	55,001–75,000 = 1	55,001–75,000 = 4
	75,001+ = 11	75,001+ = 0	75,001+ = 5
Education level	High school = 0	High school = 0	High school = 0
	Some college = 2	Some college = 0	Some college = 2
	Undergraduate = 5	Undergraduate = 1	Undergraduate = 6
	Master's = 6	Master's = 1	Master's = 7
	Professional = 1	Professional = 0	Professional = 1
	Ph.D. = 1	Ph.D. = 0	Ph.D. = 1
	Trade/Skills Spec. = 0	Trades/Skills Spec. = 1	Trades/Skill Spec. = 1
Years of homeschooling	1 year or less = 6	1 year or less = 2	1 year or less = 8
	2–5 years = 9	2–5 years = 1	2–5 years = 10
	6–10 years = 0	6–10 years = 0	6–10 years = 0
	10+ years = 0	10+ years = 0	10+ years = 0
	Veterans = 0	Veterans = 0	Veterans = 0
No. of children[e]	1 child = 2	1 child = 1	1 child = 3
	2–3 children = 10	2–3 children = 0	2–3 children = 10
	4–5 children = 3	4–5 children = 1	4–5 children = 4
	6–8 children = 0	6–8 children = 1	6–8 children = 1
	9 children = 0	9 children = 0	9 children = 0
	Split schooling = 2	Split schooling = 1	Split schooling = 3

[a]$n = 15$. [b]$n = 3$. [c]$n = 18$. [d]Income data for the DC study was originally configured in a range of $10,000 increments. The number reported here is the total combined household income of both the mother and father as reported on their 2004 income tax statements. If the mother reported less than $24,000 but not zero, her income was counted at $12,000. The father's income was the mean of his reported income bracket. For example, if the income was reported as between $60,000 and $69,999, then the number $65,000 was used. [e]Number of children reported is the total number of children, including those living at and away from home.

a master's, doctorate, or professional degree.[4] Black home educator mothers ranged in age from 32 to 57 years old and the mean age of participating home educators was 42 overall. The median age for one-parent families was 43 and the median age for two-parent families was 42. Sixty-seven percent of mothers in one-parent families were between the ages of 45 and 55, whereas in two-parent families, 53% of parents were between the ages of 35 and 45.

The three single-parent black home educators were 32, 45, and 53 years old. Table 1 demonstrates the diverse demographics among the Metro-DC black home educators disaggregated by single-parent and two-parent families. Income ranges are annual incomes self-reported by home educators via surveys. Families represented in this study included students who had been homeschooling between less than 1 year and not more than 13 years. Participants in the DC Metro

[4]About 13% of two-parent household mothers had taken but not completed coursework for an undergraduate degree.

study had to have been actively homeschooling one or more of their children from pre-K to 12th grade at the time the study was conducted. Educators who had previously homeschooled but were no longer homeschooling fell outside of the scope of the study. Only three of 18 families reported that they homeschooled some but not all of their children. These situations are reported as split schooling. Children not homeschooled but who lived at home attended either private or public schools. Families with children younger than 4 were not considered in this calculation as most families felt they were not homeschooling.

To synthesize the findings from each of these independent studies we focused our analysis on the motives of black home educators in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC. We compared the themes that emerged in our separate studies. Even though the initial studies employed different theoretical lenses, we found significant overlap and only minor differences. The overlapping themes in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC black homeschool families' motivations are presented in the findings section.

FINDINGS

Analysis of themes across the Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC studies resulted in several common factors contributing to black home educators' decisions to homeschool. Five of these key motivations have been divided into two categories (Negative Experiences in Schools and Positive Opportunities in Home Education), and they are featured in this section.

Negative Experiences in Schools

Black home educators across both regions reported that negative experiences in schools represented a motivating factor in their decisions to homeschool. These negative experiences included direct confrontations with school staff in public or private schools; perceptions of "bad schools" as reported in media (low-performing schools with incidents of school violence or drugs) and home–school interactions as experienced in traditional schools by friends and neighbors within black home educators' social networks. Negative school experiences, in effect, pushed black families out of public and private schools toward pursuing home education. These "push factors" are explored in the following three subthemes: (a) the "culture of low expectations," (b) the Plight of black boys, and (c) the Psychology of Safety.

Culture of Low Expectations

Each of the black home educators in the Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC areas described encounters with the "culture of low expectations" within schools. Black parents' reports defined the culture of low expectations in a variety of ways, including a lack of rigor in the curriculum, teacher acceptance of mediocre work, and teacher racial stereotyping. Black home educators determined that schools lacked rigor in their curriculum through direct observations while volunteering at the school as well as through comparisons between assignments given to their children in traditional schools and the type of work completed by homeschooled children of families within their network of friends and community members. In addition, Atlanta area home educators

were asked if they consulted the state curriculum standards as they planned their instruction for their children's grade levels. The majority of home educators (31 of 36) reported that the state standards were one to two grade levels below the materials and content used in their homeschool practice. Moreover, describing her son's experiences, Venus, a homeschooling parent from the Metro-DC area who was homeschooling her elementary-aged son, reported the following about her older son, who exclusively attended public schools: "I watched him as a high school student get 'coloring sheets.'" Linking the lack of rigor in the curriculum to an overall culture of low expectations among students, she continued,

> He was in Upward Bound, and several programs. But, by then, this very bright son that I had who wanted to learn everything and be everything, ended up being somebody who just wanted to get stuff done and learning was something you did only if you had to and under a gun. The expectations for him were so low because he wasn't a thug, raping, robbing or stealing . . . so therefore, he was a star.

To counter these negative incidences of "low expectations," black parents relied upon the wisdom of the black cultural adage, which states that black people have to be twice as good as their white peers to be accepted or successful. Kim, an Atlanta area mother and veteran home educator of two children, remarked,

> Our children are becoming less concerned with education by choice and are just as happy to pass as they are to pass high. They will choose average to mediocre as opposed to excellent and above average. I mean you can talk until you are purple in the face, and they will tell you, and my children included, but ma, my friends, you know my friends, they're not, they don't . . . you push too much. But, even with that push, I said, do you not understand . . . you live in two worlds and you have to do a little bit more. Whereas Bobby over here may be able to get by with getting a B, you can't say, well it was a B, a low B, and it wasn't a C. . . . But, you my brown skin little fellow, I love you dearly and you need that high B or A because if it is going to be between you and Bobby with both of you having a B, Bobby might get it before you. Even though we say that everything is equal, equal opportunity employers and there is no racism, everything is the same, we are still not equal.

As a parent, Kim expected her children's schools to share in the responsibility to push them toward their full potential. She perceived that the combination of peer pressure to not do too well in school combined with limited expectations in school caused her children to set the bar low for themselves. Instead of creating school communities that valued academic excellence, black home educators perceived that their children' schools established environments that fostered attitudes that conflict with being successful in school. Nyla, a Metro-DC mother of one homeschooled child and one student in public schools, reported, "The kids weren't that enthusiastic about learning. The idea was that you weren't supposed to study. You didn't want to appear like you were trying too hard to be smart or to please the teacher." Home educators posited that their children were not reaching their full potential in traditional schools. In addition, many home educators noted that their motivation to homeschool was a direct function of low teacher expectations due to negatively held race-based stereotypes.

Camille explained that she found homeschooling necessary "because children of color tend to be not expected to excel and so teachers, and to be fair sometimes [even] Black teachers [don't expect black children to excel], it doesn't really matter the race of the teacher." Camille pulled both of her children out of private schools to homeschool them. She further interpreted the culture of low expectations related to stereotypical beliefs about social class as follows: "If you are black

and middle class, you may have high expectations, but if they [teachers] can't figure out your class; they may make negative assumptions."

For black home educators in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC, the combination of misconceptions of race and class, negative stereotypes ascribed to black students, and peer pressure against habits associated with successful students essentially lowered the standard of expectations adhered to by both teachers and students. This, coupled with the cultural proverb requiring black people to be twice as prepared as other individuals, pushed participating black families to choose homeschooling for their children.

Plight of Black Boys

Across both regions represented in this study, the negative experiences of black male children in schools pushed families toward homeschooling. Home educators demonstrated a belief that black male children experienced the culture of low expectations more severely than their female counterparts, Nyla, a Metro-DC home educator, shared,

> I think for my daughter, it's more acceptable for a girl to be smart. I've talked to parents with boys and it doesn't seem to be acceptable for boys to be the same. So he [her son] never found a niche where he was comfortable. He was sort of like on this rollercoaster. He would do enough work to get a B and then he'd stop doing work and he'd have to do work more seriously to bring his grade back up.

Gender differences also influenced which children within a family would be homeschooled in both regions. In both studies, a faction of families choosing homeschool decided to engaged in split schooling, where parents homeschooled only one of their children instead of engaging in homeschooling for the entire family. Both studies included a portion of black homeschool families who engaged in split schooling with black male children usually homeschooled while their siblings, both male and female, attended traditional schools. When asked why she chose to homeschool only one of her children, a single-parent home educator expressed that one of her sons displayed behaviors that conformed to school norms such as following directions, completing assignments, and observing school rules most of the time. But, she referred to other son as a nonconformist who the public schools did not know how to, or did not want to, deal with. The shared belief among home educators who engaged in split schooling included a sense of urgency in the need to rescue their black sons in particular from institutional structures and norms that labeled their male children in destructive ways.

The dilemma faced by black boys whose parents turned to homeschooling included conflicting interpretations of behavior in schools, as well as how school personnel chose to handle the misbehaviors of black male students compared to others. Carla, home educator of two male children in the Metro-Atlanta region remarked,

> I think sometimes some negative behavior if it's handled appropriately or well, can be diffused, but I think sometimes in the school environment it's not dealt with appropriately. People go overboard, especially with males, with our males. That's more destructive. It's not a perfect world. I don't expect that, but I will take every advantage I can give my kids to grow up with a good sense of who they are in this world . . . without other people dumping on them.

In this example, mishandling of behavior issues pushed the black male child's family out of the public school, and the ability to learn in an environment where children are edified pulled the family toward homeschooling. Other representative examples demonstrated that black parents' observations of their sons' schooling experiences led them to doubt that the nurturing they desired for their children could be obtained in public or private schools. Relating her reasons for deciding to homeschool her children, Tamara, a homeschooling mother of one kindergarten-aged son, stated,

> I just thought that it was important for me as his mother and his father as well to give him a strong foundation, a positive sense of self and not to be penalized for being a boy and being made to sit still and sit down and just do things that just aren't developmentally appropriate for little boys.

Tamara's statements, and similar comments from black families of male children, documented the contradiction between the so-called normed behaviors of "successful" students within school settings and the perceived natural characteristics of and parental desires for young black boys. Black home educators of male children expressed their motivations to homeschool as a need to avoid having their children labeled troublemakers in public and private schools. Black home educators in both regions described the challenges surrounding their male students in schools as an issue of schools not being able to adapt to their son's learning style, which may have required physical movement or time to transition between learning activities. Considering this, schools' decisions to eliminate or drastically reduce recess may have also pushed Black families to home education.

In addition, black parents frequently decided to homeschool their male children to avoid having a special education label placed on them for academics or behavior. Katie, a home educator in Metro-Atlanta, explained,

> I have African American boys and I think particularly African American Boys are very distanced in school often, especially if they're not that typical bright student and they're immediately tagged as being slow or maybe they need to be in the special needs class. So, having African American boys I just wanted them to be freer; I wanted them to take the initiative more and be creative and critical thinkers and I just don't think these are things they necessarily accept even in many private schools.

She further articulated that homeschooling black male children also required an element of accountability and a sense of urgency that challenged her ability to be completely flexible with her homeschooling practices. Explaining her inability to fully embrace unschooling, she shared the following:

> The problem with unschooling, particularly for African American Boys, is that they must go into the unforgiving world to think that in the other profile of Americans . . . like, if my husband gets laid off then I will have to go back to work, I just can't totally distance myself from the possibility that they may have to enter school. . . .I need them to be at a certain point and I have to try to make sure that we have lessons at least three times a week that are somewhat on target with where their peers would be.

This sentiment expressed by most black home educators, particularly homeschool families of black male children, corroborated the unhappy paradoxes described in Romm (1993), Llewellyn (1996), and McDowell et al. (2000), where black homeschool families often do not completely experience the full freedom and flexibility associated with home education because they feel a

strong need to adhere to traditional schooling structures to ensure that their children's education achievements will be accepted beyond the homeschool experience.

Psychology of Safety

Black parents' negative school experiences also included issues related to school safety, which contributed to their decisions to homeschool. Factors that contributed to the psychology of safety related to attending public schools, in particular, included school climate issues, reports of declining test scores, school violence, and schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. In addition, local news media reports of violent events surrounding and occurring in local schools also fueled parents' decisions to home educate. Moreover, negative sentiments from members of the community stirred concerns for school safety and confirmed their decisions to homeschool. For example, after purchasing a new home in a Metro-Atlanta community, a real estate agent advised a black homeschool family, "Oh you are lucky you are homeschooling because it is a really rough school over here," reported Karen, a homeschooling mother. Karen further explained, "So you've got the issue of facing, do I want to send my child to school, let's not even think about things that go on in school. It is not necessarily the safest or best place to be, not the best environment anymore."

In addition, student-to-student interactions and relationships characterized as teasing, ostracizing, and bullying promoted black home educators' decision to homeschool. Home educators' descriptions of these experiences in school sometimes overlapped with the peer pressure factor discussed in the culture of low expectations theme. In one such example, Nasreen, a Metro-DC home educator and mother of five, shared that she decided to homeschool after her fifth-grade daughter experienced ridicule in school. She stated, "The situation with my fifth-grader, she was doing well in school, but did not have the peer interaction that supported what we teach at home and so that was a huge decision for us to make because you can't undo what gets done." Continuing, she explained,

> My daughter picked up a nickname in school, which was Einstein, and she had no idea who he [Einstein] was. That's not an insult to me and it wasn't even to her. It was just the idea that the people who were calling her names probably didn't even know who he was either. So, we did some research and he had a very fascinating life.

Homeschool critics have frequently suggested that homeschooled children lack socialization skills. Yet, in this quote, representative of black homeschool families in this study, the type of socialization experienced in a traditional school created a situation perceived as potentially damaging to their children's self-image.

Positive Opportunities in Home Education

Black home educators perceived that home education offered many positive opportunities that benefited their children in ways that they did not expect would be possible in traditional schools. In comparison to the push factors presented previously, these perceived benefits functioned as pull factors that effectively lured black homeschool families towards homeschooling. Two of these positive opportunities (Imparting black/African American Culture and Seeking a Global

Perspective) represented key findings in both the Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC study and are featured in this section.

Imparting Black/African American Culture

The ability to prioritize and integrate the African American, or black, perspective within instruction contributed tremendously to black home educators' decisions to homeschool. Rabia explained,

> A black positive focus is central to my curriculum. I think it's important for our young children to know who they are . . . know what they can do, know their history before they can study and understand another country. By doing that they are more confident. They have more focus and direction. We went to the WWII memorial. But, I had them read about the Tuskegee Airmen to understand how the Tuskegee Airman contributed to the success of WWII. When we go to the Native American museum, I want them to understand how the slaves joined the Seminoles too and helped them conquer what they needed to do before they were forced to move to Oklahoma.

She continued, "We are a part of history. We are a part of world history. In regular school curriculum we are marginalized. In our support group, I make sure that our appearance is broader."

A review of state standards would corroborate Rabia's perception of school curriculum as limited in instruction on the African American perspective and their contributions to history. The deep connections of African Americans to historical events and contexts do not appear on standardized tests and therefore connections to this culture is limited from many public school curriculums (Irvine, 1991).

Conversely, home education enabled these black parents to provide their children with a multicultural perspective instead of a mono-cultural view of history. Moreover, black home educators valued their ability to impart an African American perspective in their instruction as a means of countering the negative images of African Americans found in the world outside of their homes. Perhaps Tamara summed it up best: "Home schooling is a sense of self-determination, especially when it comes to knowledge of self and learning about [other] cultures." This suggests that for black home educators the ability to instill an African American perspective in their children's educational process extends beyond the act of disseminating educational information but also includes creating *homeplace* for their children and themselves.

Seeking a Global Perspective

Contrary to a popular critique of home educators who are accused of sheltering their children (Malveaux, 1996), black homeschool families choose home education in order to provide their children with an international worldview. They introduce their children to these diverse perspectives through their homeschooling curriculum and by exposing them to multicultural experiences. In fact, our findings indicate that black families intentionally arrange cross-cultural interactions for their children. They either incorporated the study of specific countries and cultures into their

curriculum and/or included more than American accounts of history. For example, while studying the American Civil War, one home educator of three children also researched and taught her children about events that were occurring around the world during the same period. Some black homeschool families included study abroad experiences for their school-aged children as well. Rabia, founder and a leader of a cultural and educational homeschool support group in the Metro-DC, and a homeschooling mother of a daughter and son shared this:

> We have studied China, Korea, Japan, the Gullah Islands, Native American Culture and Russia. . . . I'm planning a study abroad trip for the group, for the kids to live in Bangkok for one month with a family. For them to understand how we all connect. We have more in common than less than common. Multicultural training is so very important in relation to teaching children about critical thinking, but also getting them to appreciate other cultures and in turn understanding and in turn understanding and appreciating themselves.

In the Metro-Atlanta area, black parents reported that home education enabled them to provide their children with a global perspective that was not being offered in their "re-segregated" public schools. Candice, home educator of four explained,

> I think they [children] need to be exposed to all races because I don't want them to feel that they're in a world with only African-Americans and then when okay, I'm finished with school and I'm heading into the real world, who's this? What do these people?

She continued, "But when they were at [district- assigned school] 95% of the students were black and the majority of the teachers were as well so how can they get exposure to a diverse group of people there?" Black home educators frequently stressed the importance of developing their children's ability to "interact with all types of people."

They also demonstrated the importance of acknowledging, and being at ease with, worldwide diversity through the extracurricular activities such as participation in particular sports or music related activities. Parents reported that as home educators they purposefully enrolled their children in tennis or golf lessons during the day. Doing so created opportunities to learn, play, and bond with racially diverse families. Donna, a home educator whose son participated in a golf program, described their bond with another homeschool family of Japanese descent like this: "We met on the golf course. I found out, that's how I found out about a couple of homeschool programs." Whether competing competitively or for leisure, golf courses, tennis courts, swimming pools, and gymnastic centers served as sources of cross-cultural interaction between homeschooled and sometimes private-schooled children and their parents.

For decades, scholars have espoused the importance of engaging with people who are culturally different in order to better understand not only others but also one's self (Martin & Nakayama, 2011). Some of these views were used to support desegregation. Instinctively, black home educators understood the value of extended, meaningful interaction with people who are culturally different from one's self.

DISCUSSION

In this study we examined what were the "push–pull" factors that motivated black families in the Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC regions to exit traditional schools in favor of homeschooling

their children. Our findings provided a snapshot into the lives and experiences of these families as narrated by black female home educators. We discovered parallel precipitating factors and motivations in the homeschooling narratives across both regions. The "push factor" findings can be summed up as "negative experiences in schools." These were not surprising discoveries given the existent literature that chronicles the disturbing impact of institutional racism upon the academic achievements and overall well-being of black, school-aged children (Fassett & Warren, 2005; Kunjufu, 1982; Penn-Nabrit, 2003; Taylor, 2005).

One of the chief concerns voiced by these homeschooling mothers was that schools fostered a "culture of low expectations." Several felt that schools were simply passing black male children through school, rather than preparing them academically for their futures. All of the parents in this study expressed their personal disappointment with the state of private and public schools, and they even recalled specific incidents that galvanized their decision, albeit regrettably, to leave them. They clearly understood the historical sacrifices that were born on the backs of their forebears who had lived through the era of segregation and who had also endured many hardships to make public education available to all black children. And although some of these families had exited public schools, they remained ardent supporters of them. In fact, some were still actively engaging with public schools because they were involved in "split schooling," wherein one or more of their children remained enrolled in public or private schools. Although these parents continued to espouse the valuable role of conventional schools in their personal lives and in the lives of black Americans as a whole, they also recognized that there was another way.

Black homeschoolers recognized the uniqueness of the present *zeitgeist* moment. They felt equipped and empowered with the necessary tools and skills to be successful home educators. In the 21st century, parents such as these have adequate financial income levels, the Internet, and social networks at their disposal, and these tools support their ability to provide a high-quality education for their children. In addition to the push factors, there were also pull factors that anchored parents in their decision to homeschool. These factors can be summed up as the "benefits of homeschooling," and they not only made homeschooling more attractive than conventional schooling but also seemed to reinforce the efficacy of parents' decisions to homeschool.

Our data suggest that black home educators are experiencing a positive payoff for taking on the sometimes arduous task of homeschooling, and this provides much of the primary motivation for engaging in this practice. Black parents are able to impart black cultural values to their children while exposing them to a global perspective. Throughout the study, parents acknowledged that homeschooling also allowed them to "slow down" their children's exposure to what could be deemed as unsavory elements of school socialization (e.g., racism, violence, drugs, etc.) This was not a matter of sheltering them from "real-world" experiences but rather what parents expressed as engaging in "parenting," which required that they play an active role in facilitating their child's growth. In the words of homeschooling activist and mother Jennifer James (2006): "African-American families are taking a dramatic approach to the educational future of their children by adopting a collective and renewed stance on family-led learning." Our research supports this assertion. But perhaps the significance of this research is that it transcends the discussion about the motivational factors and the benefits of homeschooling for black families.

What this study draws into sharp relief is a rare yet positive portrayal of black family life. Much of popular media and academic representations stereotypically depict blacks as largely living in one-parent, matriarchal, poor, and undereducated households. Contrastingly, most of the families in our studies were overwhelmingly two-parent, well educated, and middle class. In addition to

offering this alternative narrative about black family life, this research also suggests that the very existence of black homeschoolers, coupled with their mass exodus from conventional schools is a noteworthy sociopolitical statement. This is what makes homeschooling such a powerful and social declaration for black people. Considered in this way, homeschooling may be the most provocative and courageous act of self-determination and resistance undertaken by blacks since the decolonization and civil rights movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Ekoko, 2006).

For many black families, homeschooling is both an act of rescuing children from the harmful effects of and resistance to the negative consequences of public schooling. In our interviews, several parents expressed a desire to emphasize black history and affirm black culture in their pedagogical practices as a way to reinforce a positive self-esteem among their children. These parents are proactively and intentionally engaged in passing on their values, particularly their cultural ones, to the next generation. In many ways, this can be read as resistance to the long legacy of "cultural imperialism" that occurs within U.S. borders. Rather than an outright frontal assault against the State, via marches, rallies, and protests, much like the nonviolent tactics employed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., other coactivists or even today's Occupy Wall Street movement, homeschooling is a more subtle "revolution" (Chin & Mittleman, 1997; Lyman, 2000). This is a notable paradigmatic shift, because unlike their foremothers and forefathers, black homeschoolers are standing outside of the doors of State-sanctioned public education, which is the very institution that many civil rights leaders sought equal access to on behalf of black Americans.

The mere presence of black homeschoolers in growing numbers challenges the "commonsense" assumption that access to desegregated schools would automatically bring equity in instruction and opportunity. The increasing numbers of homeschoolers could be signaling the failure of *Brown v. Board of Education* and an end to the hegemonic integrationist's and assimilationist's ideals that fostered a belief in the ameliorative effects of public education (Bell, 2004; Cashin, 2004). Further, the fact that black home educators are operating outside the conventional school private/public dichotomy inadvertently calls for black communities to reexamine their "commonsense" relationship to conventional schools (Priesnitz, 2004). Many communities are prodding themselves to ask whether the "costs" of remaining within the confines of conventional education outweigh the benefits of homeschooling. Perhaps the price, which has primarily been born on the backs of black children, has become too high. Joyce Burges, cofounder of National Black Home Educators, asserted that "school integration was needed 50 years ago, and it opened doors for blacks . . . but home schooling is needed today. Right now we need equal options" (Turay, 2003, p. A1).

In closing, this research contributes to the existing literature on black homeschoolers by relating the contemporary black homeschool phenomenon to the concept of *homeplace*. Black homeschooling can be conceived of as a form of resistance to the racial stereotyping and the marginalization of black youth in conventional schools, which is pushing black families to move towards alternative educational options. Homeschooling mothers have reported that in doing so, they have discovered the personal, familial, and communal benefits of homeschooling, and that for them these benefits provide edification for their children, and they outweigh the challenges associated with homeschooling (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Kisura, 2009; Muhammad, 2011). However, the nationwide economic changes over the past several years have likely impacted these black homeschooling communities. A rich future research agenda could include some of the following questions: Where are these families today? Are they still homeschooling in the face of this global economic recession? If their children have returned to conventional schools,

how are they fairing academically? Are their children prepared to deal with the negative factors of schooling (e.g., racism, peer pressure, "the culture of low expectations") that initially drove them away from schools? How are parents engaging these schools? Is this different or similar to the way they engaged them prior to homeschooling? Have mothers reentered the workforce? If so, how are they adjusting and how has this impacted their families? These are a just a few salient questions that could deepen our understanding of black homeschoolers in the South, the Mid-Atlantic, and across America.

AUTHOR BIOS

Cheryl Fields-Smith, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Elementary Education in the College of Education at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. She earned her doctorate from Emory University in 2004. Her research interests include family engagement and homeschooling among Black families. Dr. Fields-Smith consults and conducts professional development workshops related to cultivating home–school partnerships among diverse communities. Dr. Fields-Smith is also a founding board member of the International Center for Home Education Research.

Monica Wells Kisura, Ph.D., has dedicated her life to advancing educational innovation, access and equity; and to building bridges of mutual understanding across cultures. Dr. Wells Kisura was named a 2005–2006 Canada–U.S. Fulbright Fellow and has conducted pioneering research at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto) among Black/African Canadian home educators living in Ontario, Canada. Dr. Wells Kisura received her B.A. in Communication from Seattle Pacific University (1988), her M.A. in International Political Economy from American University (2005), and her Ph.D. in International Relations from American University (2009). She currently teaches applied human communication courses at Trinity Washington University in Washington, DC.

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