

Why Do Parents Homeschool?

A Systematic Examination of Parental Involvement

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Although homeschooling is growing in popularity in the United States, little systematic research has focused on this population. Grounded in the parental involvement literature, this study examines why parents decide to homeschool. Parents of 136 homeschooled elementary children completed questionnaires assessing constructs derived from the parental involvement literature and personal beliefs identified in the homeschooling literature as important to parents' decisions to homeschool. Results suggest that homeschooling parents appear to be motivated by an active role construction, strong sense of efficacy for helping the child learn, and positive perceptions of life context. Homeschool parents' beliefs about the values, content, adequacy, and methods of public school education appear to be implicated less strongly in their decisions. Findings are discussed with reference to the development of a systematic and theoretically grounded knowledge base on parents' motivations for involvement in their children's education.

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Homeschooling, defined as the education of school-aged children at home rather than in public or private school settings (Basham, 2001), has been the subject of very little empirical work (Cizek, 1993). The scant research that has been done has focused on parents' reasons for homeschooling (Knowles, 1988; Knowles, Marlow, & Muchmore, 1992; Knowles, Muchmore, & Spaulding, 1994; Van Galen, 1988), the academic performance

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of homeschooled students versus public-schooled students (Boulter, 1999; Ray, 2000; Rudner, 1999), and the legal implications of homeschooling (Arai, 1999; Reich, 2002). Because homeschooling is a growing trend in the United States (e.g., up from 850,000 students or 1.7% of K-12 students in 1999 [Bielick, Chandler & Broughman, 2002] to 1.1 million students, or 2.2% of K-12 students in 2003 [Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2004; see also Lines, 2000; Ray, 2000]), it is important to develop more systematic knowledge of parents' motivations for homeschooling.

Homeschooling and Parental Involvement

Considering homeschooling within the context of the parental involvement literature may enhance understanding of parents' motivations for homeschooling. For example, the parental involvement literature suggests that involvement is often best understood as parents' investment of resources in children's education, including parent-child communication about schoolwork, supervision of homework, educational aspirations for children, school contact and participation, and provision of school supplies (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Sheldon, 2002). Applying this definition to homeschooling, it is clear that homeschool parents invest substantial resources (e.g., time, energy, income, knowledge, and skills) into teaching their children at home. The involvement literature also focuses on why parents become involved in their child's education, and this work may also apply to the homeschool population. For example, theorists and researchers have suggested that parental involvement is often motivated by an active role construction for involvement (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Sheldon, 2002; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005) and a relatively strong sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school (e.g., Grolnick et al., 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Kay, Fitzgerald, Paradee, & Mellencamp, 1994), as well as the parent's attraction to (or valence toward) schools (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004; Walker et al., 2005). Consistent with this literature, homeschool parents are typically described as highly active in their child's education and as having a strong sense of efficacy supporting their beliefs that they can teach their children and give them a full education outside of an organized school system (Van Galen, 1988). Some of the homeschooling literature also suggests that parents may decide to homeschool because they have had previous negative experiences with the public school system (Knowles, 1988).

The literature on homeschooling further suggests the importance of a set of constructs not often included in the parent involvement literature: parents' personal beliefs about the values and teaching approaches their children should experience in school. Basham (2001) and Van Galen (1988), for example, noted that the contemporary homeschooling movement in the United States (generally marked as beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, even though homeschooling was not legal in all 50 states until 1993; Basham, 2001) is grounded in parents' ideological beliefs (e.g., children should be taught certain ideas in school, such as religious values) and pedagogical beliefs (e.g., children should be taught in a relatively child-centered, unstructured way). Bielick, Chandler, and Broughman (2002) also identified parental beliefs about education specific to a particular child's needs as a motivator for homeschooling. Recent studies (i.e., Bielick et al., 2002; Collom, 2005) have suggested that ideological reasons for homeschooling appear to be subsiding in importance for this general population, whereas pedagogical and special needs beliefs reasons are becoming increasingly important motivators for parents' decision to homeschool.

Thus, the parental involvement and homeschool literatures provide distinct but complementary perspectives on understanding parents' decisions to homeschool. Taken together, the literatures suggest that a parent's decision to homeschool may be explained in part by psychological motivators (parental role construction, parental efficacy for helping the child learn, and parental beliefs associated with their children's schooling) and in part by their perceptions of personal life context variables (time, energy, knowledge, and skills) that may enable homeschooling.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to examine why parents decide to homeschool and to determine if motivators identified as important in the general parental involvement literature, as augmented by information about parents' personal beliefs regarding their children's education, could explain this decision. It was hypothesized that, in general, parents decide to homeschool for two major reasons: Psychological motivators (parental role construction, parental sense of efficacy for helping the child learn, parental beliefs regarding schooling) suggest the necessity of homeschooling, and life context variables suggest the feasibility of doing so. We also examined variability within the homeschooling group in role construction, efficacy, and parental beliefs. Finally, to better understand how homeschooling parents'

status in role construction, efficacy, and perceptions of life context might compare with public school parents' status in these areas, we compared the homeschooling group with a group of previously reported public school parents (Walker et al., 2005).

Procedures and Measures

Participants

A sample of 136 homeschooling parents in a southeastern state was recruited by targeted, nonprobability sampling through curriculum fairs, umbrella schools, Christian and eclectic homeschool groups, and national home education advocacy groups. To obtain the sample, surveys were sent to approximately 250 homeschool parents of elementary school-aged children, ages 5 to 13 years (54.4% response rate). To ensure that the sample was as representative of the population as possible, a small incentive was given to participating parents for use at a local bookstore (other work has indicated that such token payments are helpful in recruitment: e.g., Fletcher & Hunter, 2003).

Although there are no systematic data available on demographic characteristics of the homeschooling population, some (Ray, 2000; Rudner, 1999) have suggested that the homeschooling population is generally White and middle class. This sample generally fit this description: Of the 136 homeschool parents who responded to the questionnaire (96.4% of whom were mothers), only 5% were non-Caucasian. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents held a 4-year college degree (20% held a degree in education). Most of the fathers held jobs as professional executives (54%), and 56% of the fathers had a college degree. Family income averaged more than \$50,000, and 86% of the families included between one and three children.

Following examination of the homeschooling group, we compared the strength of role construction, efficacy, and perceptions of life context with similar reports from a sample of 358 previously reported public school parents' reports in these areas (Walker et al., 2005). The public school sample was fairly representative of the general school population: Of the 358 public school respondents (82.6% of whom were mothers), 42.3% were non-Caucasian. Thirty-three percent of the respondents held a 4-year college degree. Both mothers and fathers held a wide variety of jobs. Sixty-six percent had a yearly family income below \$50,000, and 89% of the families included between one and three children. Despite the differences in demographic variables between

the homeschool and public school parent groups, comparisons promised to be useful because both samples appeared reasonably representative of their respective populations.

Measures

Measures for the homeschooling group were adapted from current parent involvement literature (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Walker et al., 2005) or developed based on information derived from qualitative studies of homeschooling (e.g., Knowles, 1988; Van Galen, 1988). All measures were set to a 6-point Likert-type response scale. All underwent face and content validity evaluations by a panel of five persons who had expert knowledge of the constructs being evaluated. The experts were presented with the scales and a description of the constructs and asked to evaluate how well the scale assessing the constructs matched the construct definitions. Satisfactory face and content validity were attained for all scales.

In addition, to better understand how homeschool parents were thinking about the questions on the survey, a comments section was provided. Twenty-nine percent of the homeschool parents used the comments section, and we offer a sample of the comments as they illustrate patterns observed in the data. Measures for public school parents included the original versions of the scales as reported in Walker et al. (2005). A list of measures used with each group is included in Table 1.

Psychological Motivators of Involvement

Psychological motivators of involvement included three major constructs: two of which were adapted from the parental involvement literature (role construction, efficacy) and one that was developed based on the homeschooling literature (beliefs about the values and teaching approaches children should experience in their education).

Parental role construction for involvement. Because role construction is a fairly complex trait with multiple measurement approaches available, this study used two forms of scales to examine role construction. The first, a categorical approach to role construction, is based on a definition of parental role construction for involvement as parents' beliefs and behaviors about what one is supposed to do in relation to the child's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). In early work on this construct, Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997) identified three major categories of parental role construction: parent focused (beliefs and behaviors indicating that the parent

Table 1
List of Measures for Homeschool and Public School Parents

	Homeschool Parents	Public School Parents ^a
Psychological motivators		
Role construction: categorical, parent focused	✓	
Role construction: categorical, partnership focused	✓	
Role construction: role activity beliefs	✓	✓
Role construction: valence toward schools	✓	✓
Efficacy for helping the child succeed in school	✓	✓
Personal beliefs: values	✓	
Personal beliefs: ideology	✓	
Personal beliefs: pedagogy	✓	
Personal beliefs: special needs	✓	
Perceptions of life context		
Time and energy	✓	✓
Knowledge and skills	✓	✓

a. For more information about the measures used with these public school parents, please see Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005.

is primarily responsible for the child's educational outcomes), school focused (beliefs and behaviors indicating that the school is primarily responsible for the child's educational outcomes), and partnership focused (beliefs and behaviors indicating that the parent and school are jointly responsible for the child's educational success). Consistent with this approach, we adapted two scales developed and reported by Reed, Jones, Walker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2000) to assess parent-focused role construction (Reed et al.'s reported $\alpha = .63$) and partnership-focused role construction (Reed et al.'s $\alpha = .84$). The Parent-Focused Role Construction Scale (sample item: "It's my job to explain tough assignments to my child") achieved satisfactory reliability with the homeschooling sample ($\alpha = .76$); the Partnership-Focused Role Construction Scale, adapted to reflect a partnership with the homeschool community rather than with a public school (sample item: "I find it helpful to talk to other teachers or parents"), also achieved satisfactory reliability with the homeschool sample ($\alpha = .78$).

The second approach to measuring role construction, as described by Walker et al (2005), focused on parental role activity beliefs and parental valence toward schools. Role Activity Beliefs refers to how active a parent believes he or she should be in the child's education. Parental Valence toward Schools refers to how attracted a parent is to school given past experiences.

We adapted the 10-item Role Activity Beliefs Scale and used the 6-item Valence Toward School Scale as reported by Walker et al. (2005). Alpha reliabilities for the public school sample reported by Walker et al. were .84 and .94, respectively. Alpha reliabilities were also satisfactory for the home-schooling sample (Role Activity Beliefs: alpha = .87, sample item: "I believe it is my responsibility to help my child with schoolwork"; Valence toward Schools = .93, sample item: "I disliked . . . liked my school.")

Self-Efficacy for Helping the Child Succeed in School

Parents' self-efficacy has been defined as parent beliefs about personal ability to help children succeed in school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parents with a strong sense of self-efficacy generally set higher goals and invest more work in realizing these goals than do parents with a low sense of self-efficacy for helping their children succeed (Bandura, 1977; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (1992) measure of parent efficacy for helping children succeed in school was used to assess this construct. Drawn from the literature on personal efficacy and teacher self-efficacy (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1983; Bandura, 1977, 1984, 1986; Dembo & Gibson, 1985), the scale included 12 items and achieved an alpha reliability of .81 with their sample of public school parents. Alpha reliabilities with a shortened 7-item scale for the public school sample reported by Walker et al. were .78. Alpha reliability for this scale with the homeschool sample (.78) was satisfactory as well (sample item: "I know how to help my child do well in school.")

Personal Beliefs Related to the Decision to Homeschool

Developed for this study, this scale assessed four different belief systems identified in the homeschooling literature that might motivate a parent to homeschool. These belief systems focused on parents' perceptions of public schools' ability to teach children content and use teaching methods consistent with the parent's beliefs about good education for their children. The beliefs systems assessed included parents' value beliefs, ideological beliefs, pedagogical beliefs, and beliefs about the child's special needs.

The Value Beliefs Scale contained four items that reflected religious and moral reasons a parent might decide to homeschool and asked the parent to evaluate how well public schools can provide adequately for the child's education in these domains (sample item: "I believe that public schools do a good job of teaching character development.") The importance of such beliefs for many homeschooling parents is supported by Cai, Reeve, and

Robinson (2002), who claimed that 75% of homeschool educators are conservative Christians who stress Biblical values and doctrine for their children and tend to believe that public schools are not able to teach the values they want their children to learn. Alpha reliability for this scale with the homeschooling parents was .88.

The Ideological Beliefs Scale contained four items and assessed parents' beliefs that specific ideas compatible with their own thinking should be taught to their children (sample item: "I believe that public schools have an appropriate curriculum.") Van Galen (1988) suggested that the curriculum of most public and formal schooling legitimates limited facets of knowledge (e.g., traditional teachings that may exclude information pertaining to race, religion, ethnic minorities, or women), and these limitations may motivate parents to homeschool; furthermore, parents may believe that public schools teach inappropriate content (e.g., sex education). Alpha reliability for this scale with the homeschool group was satisfactory (.76).

A 3-item scale was used to assess parents' pedagogical beliefs, or their ideas about appropriate teaching practices. For example, homeschool parents may criticize school labeling of children and related tracking practices, believing that such practices can relegate children in lower groups to an inferior education and a limited future (Van Galen, 1988). Homeschooling parents may also believe that public or other schools teach ineptly (e.g., by focusing on methods that reinforce extrinsic motivation for learning; Knowles et al., 1994). The scale (sample item: "I believe that public schools use teaching practices I agree with") achieved satisfactory reliability (.71).

A final major reason for many parents' decision to homeschool resides in their beliefs about their children's unique academic, behavioral, emotional, or physical needs. Bielick et al. (2002), for example, suggested that parental perceptions that public schools do not meet these needs account for 40% of the reasons parents decide to homeschool. Van Galen (1988) observed that parents might see their children having trouble in public schools and believe that they have exhausted the school's resources for solving the problems. Beliefs regarding child's special needs were assessed using a four-item scale (e.g., "I believe that public schools know how to deal with my child's individual needs"); the scale achieved an alpha reliability of .92.

Because the four scales were developed for this study, factor analyses were conducted on the full measure. The full scale loaded on three factors instead of the original four, suggesting that pedagogical beliefs and beliefs about the child's special needs are closely related. Although this strong correlation might have implications for future studies, the goal in this study

was to develop a reliable measure to assess parents' perceptions of public or other schools' ability to meet their beliefs about important issues in their children's schooling. Because the literature suggests that pedagogical and special needs concerns represent two distinct beliefs systems (e.g., Collom's [2005] analyses distinguished pedagogical and achievement items), they were treated as separate scales in the analyses reported here.

Parental Perceptions of Life Context Variables

We suggest that a parent's decision to homeschool is motivated not only by the parent's psychological beliefs but also by the parent's perception of contextual variables that influence the feasibility of homeschooling. In particular, these include parental perceptions of personal time and energy, as well as knowledge and skills pertinent to helping children learn. Life context variables were evaluated by survey questions regarding the amount of time, energy, knowledge, and skills parents believe they have available for homeschooling. The measures were derived from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (1995, 1997), as reported by Walker et al. (2005).

Perceptions of time and energy for involvement. Assessment of parents' perceptions of the time and energy available for the child's education was grounded in the reality that homeschooling parents generally must teach the child, supervise the child's schoolwork, evaluate the work, and plan for the equivalent of extracurricular activities for the child (McGraw, Bergen, & Schumm, 1993). Often, homeschooling parents also believe that they should communicate with other homeschool parents about the child's learning to fully provide for the child's academic and social education. These tasks require that homeschooling parents be able to devote a significant portion of each day to planning, teaching, and supervising the child's education.

The Time and Energy Scale reported by Walker et al. (2005) was grounded in six common behaviors identified in the parental involvement literature (communicating with the teacher, communicating with the child about the school day, helping the child with homework, supervising the child's homework, helping out at the school, and attending special events at the school). They reported an alpha reliability of .84 for the scale with the public school sample used for comparative purposes in this study. We adapted the scale as follows for the homeschooling sample: communicating with other homeschool parents or teachers, communicating with the child about the school day, helping the child with schoolwork, supervising the child's schoolwork, and planning extra school activities. Satisfactory alpha reliability was attained with this sample (.84).

Perceptions of knowledge and skills for involvement. To homeschool, parents must have the skills necessary for teaching the child, as well as knowledge of relevant content, methods, and enrichment events. Parents must know how to contact homeschool support groups or umbrella schools if problems arise. With few outside resources to aid in assessing the parent's ability to homeschool (Marlow, 1994), parents must assess their own knowledge and skills as adequate to the task of teaching their child.

To assess parents' beliefs about their skills and knowledge for involvement in their children's education, we adapted the scale reported by Walker et al. (2005). Three items in the scale focused on parents' perception of their knowledge of events (e.g., knowing about special events, knowing the best ways to contact the teacher), and three were related to parents' perceptions of personal knowledge or skills for varied teaching tasks (e.g., skills to help at school, knowing how to communicate effectively with the child). Walker et al. reported an alpha reliability of .83 for the scale with the sample of public school students' parents. We adapted the scale for use with the homeschooling sample: Three items were modified to assess parents' knowledge about outside resources (e.g., knowing about homeschool support groups, knowing about field trip opportunities), and three were modified to focus on parents' knowledge or skills for schooling (e.g., skills needed for homeschooling, skills for communicating effectively with the child). Satisfactory alpha reliability was attained with this sample (.79).

Results

As shown in Table 2, homeschool parents recorded relatively high means as well as a negative skew on psychological motivators and life context variables, and low means as well as a positive skew on personal beliefs related to homeschooling. Because skew was high, further analyses were done to assure that assumptions of normality were not violated; all assumptions held. The pattern of findings for construct means suggested that this group of homeschooling parents indeed recorded strong standing on variables theoretically linked to the decision to homeschool. Particularly notable were the group's tendency to endorse strong role activity beliefs ($M = 5.57/6.00$, $SD = .41$), strong parent-focused role construction ($M = 5.61/6.00$, $SD = .44$), strong sense of efficacy for helping the child learn ($M = 5.35/6.00$, $SD = .51$), as well as strong perceptions of time and energy ($M = 5.32/6.00$, $SD = .54$) and skills and knowledge ($M = 5.32/6.00$, $SD = .50$). These results suggest that the homeschool parents as a group believes that they should be highly

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for All Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Psychological motivators											
1. Role construction: categorical, parent focused	—										
2. Role construction: categorical, partnership focused	0.33***	—									
3. Role construction: role activity beliefs	0.73***	0.56***	—								
4. Role construction: valence toward schools	0.06	-0.06	0.06	—							
5. Efficacy for helping the child succeed in school	0.37***	-0.01	0.29***	0.24**	—						
Psychological motivators:											
Personal beliefs											
6. Personal beliefs: values	-0.14	-0.22**	-0.10	0.20*	-0.15	—					
7. Personal beliefs: ideology	-0.03	-0.20*	-0.10	0.28***	-0.26**	0.53***					
8. Personal beliefs: pedagogy	-0.08	-0.20*	-0.15*	0.25**	-0.17	0.47***	0.60***				
9. Personal Beliefs: special needs	-0.13	-0.18*	-0.12	0.33***	-0.15	0.51***	0.51***	0.77***	—		
Perceptions of life context											
10. Time and energy	0.54***	0.30***	0.52***	0.19*	0.50***	-0.13	-0.23**	-0.23**	-0.21*	—	
11. Knowledge and skills	0.40***	0.11	0.41***	0.26**	0.67***	-0.03	-0.18*	-0.11	-0.17	0.61***	—
<i>M</i>	5.61	5.00	5.57	4.24	5.35	1.97	2.85	2.33	2.00	5.31	5.32
<i>SD</i>	0.44	0.80	0.41	1.15	0.51	0.85	1.00	0.82	0.88	0.54	0.50
Possible range	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6
Actual range	2 to 6	2 to 6	2 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6	1 to 6
Skewness	-1.32	-0.99	-0.99	-0.41	-0.97	0.99	0.47	0.71	1.01	-0.66	-0.60
Kurtosis	2.60	1.47	1.17	-0.59	1.45	1.73	0.10	0.90	1.32	1.33	0.45

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

active in their child's education, are able to be effective in teaching their child, and have the contextual supports necessary for teaching their children.

Consistent with our expectations, these homeschool parents recorded somewhat stronger parent-focused role beliefs ($M = 5.61/6.00$) than partnership-focused role beliefs ($M = 5.00/6.00$). These homeschool parents tended to view their own school experiences positively, but there was also notable variability in the group (valence: $M = 4.24/6.00$, $SD = 1.15$). Homeschool parents also reported some current negative views of public schools' abilities to educate their children well. In particular, they recorded relatively strong disagreement with public schools' performance in the area of value beliefs ($M = 1.97/6.00$, $SD = .85$; e.g., schools' ability to teach character development), special needs beliefs ($M = 2.00/6.00$, $SD = .88$; e.g., schools' abilities to meet individual children's learning needs), and pedagogical beliefs ($M = 2.33/6.00$, $SD = .82$; e.g., schools' use of sound teaching practices). They also disagreed, but less strongly, with public schools' ideology ($M = 2.85/6.00$, $SD = 1.00$; e.g., schools follow an appropriate curriculum). The latter finding may suggest that public school curricula matters somewhat less to these homeschooling parents than do the schools' teaching practices and ability to meet individual children's needs.

What Differences in Motivation and Life Context Are Found Within the Homeschool Group?

To answer this question, we separated the homeschooling group by the categorical form of role construction parents endorsed most strongly. Because homeschooling parents decide to assume full responsibility for their children's education (and most do so with little explicit support from the local neighborhood community or school system: Holt, 1983; Knowles, 1989), we expected that the majority of the homeschooling parents would record a strong parent-focused role construction. However, because umbrella schools and varied support networks are also sometimes available to homeschooling parents, we expected that some homeschooling parents would endorse a partnership-focused role construction most strongly. We also expected that the two groups might reflect differences in other study variables as well, particularly efficacy for helping the child learn, knowledge and skills for teaching the child, and selected personal beliefs related to homeschooling.

As predicted, more homeschool parents ($n = 93$, 68.4%) endorsed a parent-focused role construction than endorsed a partnership-focused role construction ($n = 16$, 11.8%) when endorsement was defined as scoring higher on one role construction scale than the other. Although the parent-focused role

construction group was larger than the partnership-focused group, comparisons between the two groups were useful because these sample sizes were consistent with our expectations. (Approximately 20% of the parents endorsed both types of role construction fairly strongly; in general, these parents showed beliefs and behaviors consistent with parents who endorsed a parent-focused role construction.)

As predicted, parent-focused role construction was positively related to parents' reports of time and energy ($r = .54$), knowledge and skills ($r = .40$), and efficacy ($r = .37$, see Table 2). These findings suggest that parents who hold a parent-focused role believe they are able to homeschool and believe they have the personal resources necessary for effective homeschooling. Also consistent with our predictions, homeschool parents who strongly endorsed a partnership-focused role orientation manifested a different pattern: They recorded a positive correlation with perceptions of time and energy for homeschooling ($r = .30$) but no significant links with efficacy or perceptions of knowledge and skills for homeschooling. This suggests that partnership-focused parents may believe they need to seek help from others as they enact their beliefs about homeschooling.

Independent-samples t tests between the two role construction groups supported the correlational analyses (Table 3). The two groups differed significantly in efficacy for helping the child learn ($t = 3.12, p = .00$), perceptions of knowledge and skills for involvement ($t = 2.43, p = .02$), and perceptions of time and energy for involvement ($t = 2.34, p = .02$). Parent-focused respondents recorded higher scores than partnership-focused parents, resulting in medium-large to large effect sizes for all three variables ($d = .85, .63$, and $.53$, respectively).

Overall, parents with a parent-focused role construction held stronger perceptions of their knowledge and skills, time and energy, and efficacy than did their partnership-focused counterparts. This theme was reflected in parent comments. Those who strongly endorsed parent-focused role construction offered observations about their personal responsibilities in their child's education and their ability to help their children; for example, "Can I help them do their schoolwork and stay out of trouble and work hard? Absolutely." Other parent-focused respondents acknowledged the importance of their contextual resources: "I consider it a privilege to be able to stay home and homeschool my children. I know a lot of folks who cannot afford to have one parent not working to bring in income to pay the bills." Partnership-focused parents, on the other hand, often commented that there were sometimes difficulties in homeschooling and that varied partnerships helped them succeed; for example, "I love homeschooling. Yes there are

Table 3
Independent-Sample *t* Tests and Effect Sizes Between Homeschool Groups

Construct	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Direction of Effect	Difference	<i>t</i> Test	Significance (Two-Tailed)	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Efficacy for helping the child learn								
Parent focused	93	5.41	0.45	1.00	0.38	3.12	.002	.8452
Partnership focused	16	5.04	0.45	1.00	0.38	3.12	.002	.8452
Perceptions of time and energy for involvement								
Parent focused	93	5.35	0.54	1.00	0.33	2.34	.021	.6331
Partnership focused	16	5.01	0.46	1.00	0.33	2.34	.021	.6331
Perceptions of knowledge and skills for involvement								
Parent focused	93	5.35	0.49	1.00	0.33	1.97	.051	.5334
Partnership focused	16	5.10	0.36	1.00	0.33	2.43 ^a	.022 ^a	.5334
Personal beliefs: values								
Parent focused	92	2.04	0.91	1.00	0.13	0.54	.593	.1454
Partnership focused	16	1.91	0.72	1.00	0.13	0.54	.593	.1454
Personal beliefs: ideological								
Parent focused	93	2.96	1.03	1.00	0.48	1.80	.074	.4876
Partnership focused	16	2.48	0.75	1.00	0.48	1.80	.074	.4876
Personal beliefs: pedagogical								
Parent focused	93	2.38	0.85	1.00	0.17	0.77	.445	.2074
Partnership focused	16	2.20	0.71	1.00	0.17	0.77	.445	.2074
Personal beliefs: special needs								
Parent focused	93	2.05	0.92	1.00	0.20	0.86	.391	.2332
Partnership focused	16	1.84	0.58	1.00	0.20	0.86	.391	.2332

a. Use unequal variance *t* test because of a significant Levene's test: $F = 3.992, p = .048$.

challenges but that is part of living We have a strict umbrella group, but I like it because it helps keep me accountable.”

We also examined links between parents’ role construction orientation and personal beliefs implicated in homeschooling (Table 2). We expected that parents endorsing a parent-focused role construction would be more likely than partnership-focused parents to believe that public schools do not do a good job of responding to parents’ pedagogical and special needs beliefs. We also expected that parents endorsing a partnership-focused role construction would suggest that schools do not accommodate families’ ideological and value beliefs very well. Surprisingly, we found that parent-focused role construction was not highly correlated with any of the four personal beliefs scales. This suggested that parent-focused homeschooling parents do not draw primarily on their experiences with public schools when making their decisions to homeschool: They may disagree with (some) public school practices, but this disagreement does not appear to be the primary reason they decide to homeschool. Also to our surprise, partnership-focused role construction was significantly correlated with all personal beliefs scales, suggesting that partnership-focused homeschool parents may be motivated to homeschool in part because they believe that the public school system has not met their beliefs and values related to their children’s education. An independent-samples *t* test (Table 3) suggested that although the two groups recorded differences in the four types of personal beliefs (i.e., the parent-focused group generally evidenced more positive evaluation of public school practices), the effect did not reach significance (small to medium effects, ranging from .15 to .49). Power analyses, however, suggested that these differences would likely reach significance with a larger sample size for the two groups.

These results, although unanticipated, are sensible: Homeschool parents appear to decide to homeschool not so much because they believe that public schools cannot educate their children but because they believe that they are personally responsible for their child’s education and they are capable of educating their children well in ways consistent with their priorities. As one parent-focused homeschool parent explained, “People who do not homeschool tend to assume it is done in reaction against institutional schooling . . . (but) to me, homeschooling was a positive choice rather than a reaction against the school system.” In contrast, partnership-focused homeschool parents seemed more likely to homeschool as a reaction to perceived difficulties in creating a viable partnership with the public school system. One parent, for example, noted, “When we began home-schooling, we lived within a public school that was extremely poor We could not afford private schools, (and) someone suggested homeschooling. We researched it and

opted to try it." For this particular parent, as with many partnership-focused parents, the decision to homeschool seemed to be a reaction to perceived inability to partner effectively with other school options.

*How Does the Homeschooling Group
Compare to a Group of Public School Parents?*

To gain a sense of the homeschooling group's standing on the constructs assessed relative to parents whose children attend public schools, we compared the homeschool group to a group of 358 public school parents reported by Walker et al. (2005) on two psychological motivators of involvement (role construction, assessed as role activity beliefs and valence toward school, and efficacy), and perceptions of life context (time and energy, skills and knowledge for involvement).

Independent-samples *t* tests and effect sizes (see Table 4) revealed significant differences between the homeschool and public school parent groups on all variables. Findings supported the expectation that homeschooling parents' standing would be stronger than public school parents' in role activity beliefs, efficacy, perceptions of time and energy for involvement, and perceptions of skills and knowledge for involvement; also consistent with expectations was the finding that homeschool parents recorded weaker valence toward schools than public school parents did. Comparisons also suggested that homeschool parents recorded large positive effects in role activity beliefs ($d = 1.23$), efficacy for helping the child learn ($d = .81$), perceptions of time and energy for involvement ($d = 1.21$), and perceptions of knowledge and skills for involvement ($d = .92$). Public school parents recorded a medium-large effect size in valence toward public schools when compared to homeschool parents ($d = .67$). These large effect sizes support our belief that homeschool parents hold strong parental involvement beliefs even when compared to a sample of active public school parents.

Multiple hierarchical regression analyses to examine how well the constructs predicted membership in the homeschool or public school group indicated that parents' perceptions of efficacy for helping the child learn, perceptions of time and energy for involvement, role activity beliefs, and role valence toward schools accounted for a significant portion of the variance in whether a parent chose homeschool or public school (adjusted $R^2 = .40$, $F = 80.762$, $p < .000$). (Perceptions of knowledge and skills were excluded due to a nonsignificant *t* test; the nonsignificant relationship may have been due to its high correlation with efficacy, $r = .67$. It should also be noted that parents' personal beliefs, which could not be compared across the

Table 4
Independent-Sample *t* Tests and Effect Sizes Between Homeschool and Public School Groups

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Direction of effect	Difference	<i>t</i> test	Significance (Two-Tailed)	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Role construction: Role activity beliefs							
Homeschool	5.57	0.41	1.00	0.73	12.21	.000	1.2297
Public school	4.84	0.65	1.00	0.73	12.21	.000	1.2297
Role construction: Valence							
Homeschool	4.24	1.15	-1.00	-0.67	-6.63	.000	0.6676
Public school	4.91	0.94	-1.00	-0.67	-6.63	.000	0.6676
Efficacy for helping the child learn							
Homeschool	5.35	0.51	1.00	0.66	8.09	.000	0.8144
Public school	4.69	0.51	1.00	0.66	8.09	.000	0.8144
Perceptions of time and energy for involvement							
Homeschool	5.31	0.54	1.00	0.96	12.03	.000	1.2122
Public school	4.35	0.87	1.00	0.96	12.03	.000	1.2122
Perceptions of knowledge and skills for involvement							
Homeschool	5.32	0.50	1.00	0.67	9.14	.000	0.9206
Public school	4.65	0.80	1.00	0.67	9.14	.000	0.9206

two groups, might also have contributed to the variance observed. Similarly, differences in family status variables between the two groups may also have contributed to the observed variance.)

Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that parents decide to homeschool for reasons similar to those motivating many public school parents' involvement in their children's education: Specifically, these homeschool parents believe they should play an active role in their children's education, believe they have the ability to help their child succeed in school learning, and perceive that contextual factors in their lives make involvement or homeschooling possible.

Thus, constructs that have been useful in explaining parental involvement in the public school system appear to be also useful in understanding parents' choices of other forms of education for their children. Results also demonstrated that parental involvement constructs could be used to predict homeschool rather than public school participation. This suggests that parental involvement constructs, traditionally used to predict public school involvement, may be conceptualized as constructs useful in predicting parental involvement in many different educational settings.

The study broadens understanding of parental involvement in children's education, as it highlights a population that is clearly involved in children's education but in a very nonstandard way. The findings also provide a base of useful descriptive information on homeschoolers that should enable more detailed understanding of parents whose involvement beliefs lead them to homeschool.

Although previous research on homeschooling has contributed much to our limited understanding of parents' decisions to homeschool, this study demonstrates that the personal beliefs variables previously emphasized in the homeschooling literature should not continue to be studied in isolation. Specifically, these results suggest that, depending on involvement beliefs, personal values do contribute to some parents' decision to homeschool. However, knowledge of parents' involvement beliefs is key to understanding the impact that the personal value beliefs have on the decision to homeschool. For example, parents with a partnership-focused role appeared to be motivated to homeschool also by their value beliefs regarding moral and religious issues, appropriate curricular content for their child, appropriate teaching practices for their child, and beliefs about public school abilities to deal with their child's individual needs. Although these value beliefs

appeared to be important to all the homeschool parents, they did not appear to contribute substantially to many parents' decision to homeschool. Parents who held a strong parent-focused role appeared to be motivated to homeschool more by their strong beliefs about their parental role, their efficacy for helping their child learn, and their beliefs about the personal resources available to help them educate their children.

Although this study offers conceptual and methodological strengths, it was also constrained by some limitations. Because there was no sampling framework on the homeschooling population, it is not possible to know if participating parents were representative of all parents who homeschool. This makes it difficult to determine if the results are generalizable to homeschool parents as a whole. For example, it seems likely that parents who homeschool in more nontraditional forms (e.g., in a religious community setting) may be motivated to homeschool for reasons different than those observed in the parents who participated in this study. Another limitation emerges from a monomethod bias, as all data were collected through survey measures. This limitation may pose some challenge to construct validity, because the range of constructs measured and participants' responses were limited by the survey design. Finally, this study used only self-report data, which may have created some favorable self-report bias.

Further research should address these limitations. For example, it would be useful to design a sampling framework of homeschool parents in a state where parents are required to report to the state if they decide to homeschool. This would increase the generalizability of findings for the homeschooling population. To reduce monomethod and self-report biases, future studies should complement survey measures with other methods, including structured interviews with parents. The use of interviews would help provide a richer and deeper understanding of the constructs involved and would allow further insight into how parents think about these constructs in making their decisions about homeschooling. It was interesting to note that many homeschool parents who completed these surveys elected to explain their reasons for homeschooling in the optional comments section of the survey; their comments suggested that they were interested in ensuring that their views were clearly conveyed and accurately understood. Fuller and more systematic approaches to obtaining access to these parents' thinking would allow better explanations of parent and family motivations for homeschooling.

In addition, links between the parental involvement literature and the homeschool literature should be further explored. Studies with homeschool parents may help us better understand all parents' thinking about involvement in their children's education. For example, a study examining public

school parents' personal beliefs as assessed in this study might offer important information about the role of such beliefs in many parent's thinking about the best school settings for their children and their own reasons for involvement. Further studies systematically examining parent-child interactions in both homeschool and public school families would also offer useful information to the field. These observations would likely provide a richer understanding of parent-child interactions and sources of parental influence on student learning outcomes across varied school settings. Such a study might also include examination of homeschool and public school parents' teaching styles, as well as children's perceptions of parents' involvement, to give the research community a richer understanding of parental roles in children's learning processes and outcomes.

Homeschooling has been and continues to be a controversial issue in the United States. Many educators and policy makers (e.g., the National Education Association, the National Parent Teacher Association, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals) have expressed concerns about and opposition to the practice of homeschooling for several reasons, despite its legal status. Although the percentage of citizens in the United States who believe that homeschooling is a viable choice for educating children has increased during the past two decades (e.g., rising from 16% in 1985 to 41% in 2001; Rose & Gallup, 2001), very little systematic information is available on why families choose to homeschool, how homeschooling influences children's learning, or how the practice of homeschooling influences communities as a whole. The results of this study offer new information about why some parents choose to homeschool; in doing so, they may provide a basis for continuing inquiry into family motivations for public, independent, and home-school approaches to educating children in the United States.

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