

# **“You Can’t Rely on Somebody Else to Teach Them Something They Don’t Believe”: Impressions of Legitimation Crisis and Socialization Control in the Narratives of Christian Homeschooling Fathers**

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## **Abstract**

Homeschooling is a permanently established segment of the American education landscape encompassing nearly 2 million children. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 21 Christian homeschooling fathers in the upper Midwest, this study examines fathers' perceptions of their place in the homeschooling movement and their rationalizations for homeschooling. The study's findings suggest that homeschooling fathers have a keen sense of their duty of nurturing the home as a “protective cocoon” where concerted *moral* cultivation can take place. This forms the basis of a system of “total

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socialization” aimed at negating the influence of competing socialization agents. But underlying perceptions of the home as a protective cocoon is a legitimization crisis stemming from a loss of faith in American public education and its capacity to act as an agent of moral socialization for today’s youth.

**Keywords**

homeschooling, moral socialization, fatherhood, legitimization crises

**Personal Reflexive Statement**

*The principal investigator in this study is a homeschooling father who carries insider or emic status in this subculture. As new arrivals to Minnesota in 2001, my partner and I were surprised to learn that Minnesota ranked among the worst states in the nation for the achievement gap between black and white students in mathematics and reading (see Venneman et al. 2009). Our decision to homeschool turned largely on this social problem. As a homeschooling father, I play an active role in pedagogical matters, from direct instruction to offering advice on curriculum material. However, my foremost role is to provide emotional support and encouragement to my partner because of how taxing homeschooling is on the primary teacher (see Lois 2006, 2010). I began this study out of pure sociological curiosity to discover what other fathers were doing in their homeschooling households. As a group, there is little substantive research on fathers in this subculture; so the study’s focus fills a gap in sociological literature on this unique part of the American educational landscape.*

**Introduction**

Homeschooling is a permanently established segment of an increasingly diverse educational landscape in the United States, one of a wide range of choices that include public and private schools, charter schools, religiously based private education, and online or cyber charter schools (Cambre 2009; Huerta, Gonzalez, and d’Entremont 2006). In 2007, there was an estimated 1.5 million homeschooled students in the United States, an increase of more than 400,000 students since 2003, making it one of the fastest growing sectors of education (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2009). According to the Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics in 2006, the principal rationale and motivation for homeschooling are (1) concern about the environment of public schools and (2) the opportunity to offer religious and moral instruction to children, reported by 31.2 percent and 29.8 percent of surveyed respondents, respectively (Princiotta and Bielick 2006:13). Other studies have reached similar conclusions on the importance of religious values as the foremost motivation for the majority of homeschooling families, with Mayberry (1989) finding that 65 percent of respondents had this as their chief motivation (see also Collom 2005; Cooper and

Sureau 2007; Kunzman 2009; Stevens 2001). Homeschooling is an increasingly popular and growing educational option for many families harboring disaffection with public schools (Apple 2000; Gaither 2009). Yet, there remains a dearth of sociological studies on the father's role within the homeschooling household. Many studies on homeschooling focus on the children in this setting, especially their academics, aptitude, and outcomes (Ray 1998, 2000; Rothermel 2004). Fewer studies have focused on mothers in their role as pedagogues (Lois 2006, 2010, 2012; McDowell 2000a, 2000b). However, there is almost a complete absence of sociological and educational research on the father's role in the homeschooling family. His voice adds to sociological knowledge on the community's motives for homeschooling and its aspirations for its youngest members. The father's narrative sheds light on his contribution to the homeschool as a family enterprise and his role in ensuring its promulgation within the household and wider society. With a lacuna in the research as its starting point, this article examines the father's rationalization for homeschooling and his standpoints on the socialization objectives of this emergent educational subculture.

## Literature Review

### *Homeschooling's Challenge and Its Detractors*

The right of American parents to homeschool their children was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in its 1972 *Yoder* ruling, and since that time, steady increases in the number of homeschooling families, beginning with conservative Christians and secular "unschoolers," have been the norm (Blockuis 2010; Gaither 2008; Kunzman 2009; Stevens 2001). Yet, many progressive scholars have vehemently refuted the right of parents to homeschool their children as an eminent danger to the common good and democracy by diminishing the public school's role as the principal socializing agent of children in society (Blockuis 2010; see also Howell 2005). Lubienski, focusing on the notion of the common good and echoing Horace Mann's view of the public school as the great social equalizer, writes that homeschooling is anathema to the public interest because it deprives schools of social capital, reasoning that "because homeschool families tend to be articulate, active, and interested in their children's education, students in public schools could benefit from educational experiences that include the participation of such influences" (Lubienski 2000:208). Hill (2000) writes that homeschooling harms public schools by reducing enrollment and thus limiting school districts' share of state appropriations for education, a point driven home by estimates from the Heritage Foundation which finds that homeschoolers "save taxpayers at least \$4.4 billion and \$9.9 billion in instructional costs annually" (Lipps and Feinberg 2008).

Following progressive criticisms on homeschooling, Reich (2002) argues that the increasing popularity of homeschooling and parents' desires to "customize" their children's education represent a serious threat to democracy. Arguing forcefully against homeschooling as a civic peril, Reich writes:

Because homeschooled students receive highly customized educations, designed usually to accord with the preferences of parents, they are least likely in principle to be exposed to materials, ideas, and people that have not been chosen in advance; they are least likely to share common education experiences with other children; and they are most likely to have a narrow horizon of experiences, which can curtail their freedom. Although highly customized education for students may produce satisfied parents as consumers, and even offer excellent academic training to the student, it is a loss from a civic perspective. (Reich 2002:59)

Thusly framed, the idea that homeschooling threatens the public good by diminishing democratic citizenship seems to be enshrined as a “taken-for-granted” (Schutz 1962) worldview of many progressive theorists on public education, albeit without much empirical evidence. Homeschooling, as a well-established political movement, represents a profound challenge to public education. And Gaither (2009:332), who sees homeschooling as a social movement, frames it as “a deliberate act of political protest against, and alternative to, formal educational instructions.” This educational alternative that emerged in the 1970s is today a leading force in politics as represented by the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA; Cooper and Sureau 2007; Gaither 2009).

Progressive theoretical criticisms on the dangers of the homeschooling movement notwithstanding, empirical evidences for the high academic achievement, and educational outcome of homeschool children are unassailable (Collom 2005; Ray 2000). Comparing a sample of homeschooled children to their public school peers on the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools battery, Rothermel (2004) found that the former outperformed the latter; however, what was extraordinary was the finding that homeschoolers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds outperformed their middle-class peers in public schools. Ray’s (1998) research found that homeschooled children ranked in the 87th percentile of all test takers on reading comprehension and in the 80th percentile for language. A follow-up study by Rudner (1999) also found similar results for reading, 85th percentile, and for mathematics, 79th percentile.

### *On Socialization and Moral Education*

Socialization, broadly defined, is an educative process whereby individuals come to learn the norms, mores, and customs of a particular society so they can acquiesce to the culture’s expectations and fulfill their roles in the social order (see Vigilant and Williamson 2006). Socialization occurs at all levels of society and through varied institutions or agents. The key agents of socialization include family, schools, religious institutions, the media, peer groups, and the field of competitive sports, historically an important arena for socialization of boys into masculinity (Messner 1990). The family, however, is the preeminent socialization agent because it transmits norms that shape preferences, outline worldviews, and socialize children into their

class location, gender and personality, and race and ethnic identity. And the family is also the initial field for the moral socialization of children (Kohlberg 1969). Moreover, the home is where parents prepare children for their expected roles as adults through the inculcation of norms that support the importance of education and the acquisition of culturally approved skills that bolster academic excellence and ensure the social reproduction of class privilege, what Pierre Bourdieu (1986) calls “cultural capital” and Annette Lareau (2003) defines as “concerted cultivation.”

The central role of the family in the moral socialization of children notwithstanding, sociology has a long history of studying the contribution of schools in transmitting the norms and morality of society. Emile Durkheim saw the moral socialization of children as the most important work of public schools, a task that may have been too overwhelming for the modern industrial family (Durkheim 1973). Durkheim believed that the public school was the single most important arena for the socialization of children, for the transmission of collectively held values that bind and unite people, and for building a sense of collective solidarity, or sameness, around key morality concepts. Durkheim (1972:204-5) said:

Society can survive only if there exist among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the mind of the child, from beginning, the essential similarities that social life demands . . . Each society, considered at a given stage of development, has a system of education which exercises an influence upon individuals which is usually irresistible. It is idle to think we can rear our children as we wish. There are customs to which we are bound to conform.

Emile Durkheim recognized the eminent function of the public school in transmitting cultural values and collective moral sentiments that define a nation and a people, and these collectively held moralities were the “social glue” that gave people a sense of unity and shared identity. Education—and its *public* variety specifically—was the basis of homogeneity in a modern world marked by complex division of labor and pronounced human diversity. Having a shared morality that was propagated by teachers, whom Durkheim saw foremost as moral educators (Durkheim 1972:218), was the key ingredient for social solidarity.

The public school, in Durkheim’s view, was “an organized moral environment” (Durkheim 1972:208) that transmitted the values of adult society to children. Accordingly, in a humanistic and a scientifically oriented society, education’s “morality” tend to deemphasize the role of religious sentiments and worldviews, and Durkheim (1972:217) concedes as much when he concludes that “The secularization of education has been in progress for centuries.” Coincidentally, it is exactly the secularization process in education that the modern homeschooling movement is standing against—a struggle that is grounded in a clash of worldviews, whose rhetoric opposes the very institution that is supposed to unite society: the public school. To be sure, Durkheim recognized the possibility of paradigmatic conflicts between the secular values

propagated by a moral education based on science and humanism, and the values of Christianity, that posits a worldview often in opposition to scientific empiricism. The central value of a Christian-centered moral education is “conversion,” as Durkheim eloquently describes:

According to Christian belief, to shape a man is not to embellish his mind with certain specific habits, but to create in him a general attitude of the mind and the will which makes him see reality in general in a definite perspective ... Christianity consists essentially in a certain attitude of the soul, in a certain *habitus* of our moral being. To foster this attitude in the child is thus the essential goal of education. (1972:206-207)

And this is Christian homeschooling’s *raison d’être*: the moral education in, and conversion of children toward, a worldview that accords to a Christ-centered morality (see Kunzman 2009; Stevens 2001). It is en route to this end that the homeschool can be viewed as a sheltered milieu, where the sway of other socialization agents, namely peer groups and the school, can be more closely regulated—or expelled—by alert parents whose aim is fashioning a “definite perspective” in the minds of children.

## Data and Method

To understand the father’s rationalization for homeschooling and his views on its socialization objectives, this article uses data from structured, in-depth interviews with 21 Euro-American men from the upper-Midwestern states of North Dakota and Minnesota. The interviews were conducted between spring 2009 and summer 2010 and were between 1 and 2 hours in length on average. There was an intentional relaxed quality to the interviews since the research subjects were aware of the principal investigator’s identity as a homeschooler. Because of the lead researcher’s emic or insider status, the fathers in this study spoke freely about their views on, and challenges with, homeschooling, and this was an outgrowth of the rapport, trust, and openness they felt with the interviewer.

A third of the 21 participants in this study came through a letter that was sent to the members of a Christian homeschooling organization that serves as a resource and support group for homeschooling families. The principal researcher was granted permission to send a letter to each of the over 130 families that are members of this organization. The other subjects were recruited by the personal request of the principal researcher at gatherings for this organization or by the chain referrals of members who circulated the recruitment letter to other homeschooling friends. The fathers in this study were all Euro-American and Christian, and were between 29 and 56 years of age. Fifteen of the men were employed in professional occupations such as information technology, registered nurse, university professor/researcher, architect, college dean, and city planner to name a few. Six respondents worked in

blue-collar jobs such as welding, assembly-line production, and building maintenance.

Using grounded theory's "constant comparison method" with the extant interview data, the principal researcher established that the point of saturation had been reached after the 21st interview and that no novel information or theoretically substantive codes were being generated with the study's questionnaire instrument (see Charmaz 2006). The interview covered questions on three broad themes: (1) father's motivation and justification for homeschooling; (2) homeschooling practices, including curriculum material and pedagogical approaches; and (3) questions on the father's role and contribution to the enterprise. The interview instrument ended with a question that allowed each father to freely discuss any theme or issue that he felt was important to homeschooling that was not covered in the hour-long interview. (See Appendix for a copy of the interview instrument.)

The study's epistemological approach is constructivist, and the methodology is grounded theory. Constructivism attempts to discover how social actors construct and interpret their lived experiences with an intentional focus on their perceptions of reality (see Charmaz 2000; Guba and Lincoln 2004). The 21 interviews were transcribed verbatim, and this yielded over 300 pages of interview data for analysis. The analysis of data employed grounded theory's tactic of focused coding which involves "using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz 2006:57). These "earlier codes" were initially generated by the principal researcher's analysis of the data and not by a priori deduction, and then used by each researcher to code his or her individual copy of the data.

This study involved insider/outsider team research (see Bartunek and Louis 1996) to address implicit and epistemic biases of the principal researcher who happens to be a homeschooler and an *insider* within this subculture; the coinvestigators are *outsiders*. The benefit of the insider/outsider team research is the unique perspectives that both partners bring to the table and the potential for interpretive conflict during the data analysis portion of the research. While both insider and outsider must work to address potential threats to the study's validity, the insider may have an additional vested interest in safeguarding the community from harmful caricature. And when insider/outsider team members disagree about the construal of data, the discourse that follows is an opportunity to strengthen the interpretive validity structure of the study (see Borland 2004; Johnson 1997). In this project, both insider and outsider researchers had individual copies of the transcribed data for independent coding, and when we compared to our individual codes and interpretation of critical sections, we were in agreement the vast majority of time. When interpretive differences transpired, we discussed the reasons for our dissenting analyses, and tried to arrive at a middle-range interpretation of the data. While we cannot guarantee a perspective that is "value free," we can assure the reader that the insider/outsider team method is one of the best tools for constraining personal and epistemic biases.

## Results: Total Socialization and the Father's "Protective Cocoon"

The homeschooling fathers in this study saw as one of their most solemn duties that of nurturing the home as a "protective cocoon"<sup>1</sup> where concerted moral cultivation can take place.<sup>2</sup> Lareau's (2003) concept, "concerted cultivation," applies to a type of middle- and upper-middle-class parenting style whereby parents stress the importance of academic achievement and point children toward activities that are specifically designed to produce admission to top colleges and universities. The process of concerted cultivation is calculated to produce high-performing students and academic success. Coincidentally, respondents in this study suggest a similar type of cultivation is taking place in the homeschool, but one where the endpoint is not necessarily academic success, but "conversion" in the Durkheimian sense.

There is a verse, Deuteronomy 6:7, that says that we should train our children all day without ceasing, and that it is our responsibility to train our children up. So we made a conscious decision not to give that responsibility to somebody else who we didn't know or trust, and that's what it comes down to. That's the primary foundational principle for homeschooling with a lot of add-ons: a quality education; being able to be with your children; and being able to keep them isolated until you feel that they are able to handle the world. There is a lot of icing on the cake, but that is the foundational principle. (Interview Subject # 16)

Concerted *moral* cultivation then, is a child-rearing and pedagogic approach that has as its preeminent end point the moral socialization of children into a Christian worldview. But unlike "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2003) for academic excellence, which is accomplished in conjunction to, and in cooperation with, public schools and teachers, "concerted *moral* cultivation" seeks to regulate the influence of other socializing agents while excluding altogether the role of public schools. Most frequently, the fathers in this study would mention an extant policy of controlling the influence of other potential socializing agents whom they saw as propagating a worldview that was anathema to Christian values. This is a "total socialization" arena whereby homeschooling fathers seek to vigilantly monitor all possible socialization agents, while closing off access to some entirely. The theme of maintaining control over competing socialization agencies was one that all the 21 homeschooling fathers in this study repeatedly mentioned in their narratives with varying degrees of intensity.

We wanted to control the influences that were put on our kids. And we, obviously being Christians, wanted our kids to follow the example to accept Christ, and we felt the best possible way to do that was to eliminate the outside influences that they would probably get in the public school system. We feel that whoever spends the most time with a child, they will probably gravitate toward that influence—and we wanted to control that. (Interview Subject # 5)



Several fathers also spoke of the time parents spend with children compared to the time children spend in the public school classroom as a point of worry. Concern about the length of time children spend in classrooms is an implicit acknowledgment of the paramount role that educational institutions play in the socialization of children. Homeschooling provides a protective cocoon because it supports protracted and intensive parental engagement that, in the worldview of many respondents, is the best arena for socialization into a Christ-centered morality.

### *A Protective Cocoon against the Influence of Peer Socialization*

For the fathers in this study, homeschooling's protective cocoon was a bulwark against what was articulated as the potentially corrosive influence of non-Christian, public school peers. Peer groups are a special primary socialization agent because their influence extends throughout the life course. Friends, coworkers, and fellow students are "generalized others" (Mead 1934) who stand as a metric for comparison. The influence of peer groups in the public school setting has received a considerable amount of attention in the scholarly literature, especially as it relates to the negative sway that peer groups have on academic performance (Fordham 1988; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; McBroom 1994; McWhorter 2001). In their research on adolescent socialization, Adler and Adler (1998) found that peer groups use in-group/out-group subjugation, through the mechanisms of bullying and harassment, to ensure conformity. Moreover, they report that the threat of expulsion from the group—coupled with the use of stigmatizing labels for norm violators—were the main apparatuses for compliance (Adler and Adler 1998).

Most frequently, the fathers in this study mentioned—with grave trepidation—the potentially dangerous influence of public school peers on a Christ-centered morality, and they saw the opportunity to limit or completely restrain peer influences as one of the most important benefits of homeschooling. Fathers commented on the potentially damaging link between unsupervised interactions, especially the hours spent on school buses traveling to and from school, and weakened morality. For example, one father said:

Your responsibility is to raise your kids up to be Christians, and you don't want to do that one day out of seven or one morning out of the whole week. It's got to be a life changing deal. And I don't think you can do that by sending your kids out to public school or by sending your kids out to private school. The influences that the kids have with one another are important; even though they may be Christians, they are still kids. Like I said, if you have a pack of dogs and you put them in a park, they'll be a pack of dogs in a park. Right? I know that kids are not animals, but that same thing happens. If we have a bunch of kids together who are unsupervised, or even supervised by people whose ethics you don't agree with, then that's not good. One of the questions I heard when I was debating whether to homeschool or not was, '*Would you put your kids on a yellow school bus and let them do whatever they wanted to do while they are going to public school?*' No. I never thought of it like that. [Laughter] (Interview Subject # 16)

Many fathers spoke of their own experiences with bullying and peer pressure as a troubling turning point in their lives, signaling that the dysfunctional experiences that some children have at home are often brought into the classroom in ways that are morally damaging to other students. The fear that their children might acquire “bad habits” from public school peers was pervasive in the narratives, and these discussions turned largely on the belief that things have gotten worse since their own time in the public school. Several fathers said that they simply did not want their children to have these morally harmful encounters. Two fathers said:

When you allow your children to be placed together with other people’s children, they, of course, learn things from each other, and that’s not a surprise. Unfortunately, they learn things you don’t want them to learn from each other rather than the things that you do want them to learn from each other. When someone asks me, *‘Well, why do you homeschool?’* usually the answer that I give first because it’s nice, simple, easy to digest and understand is that *‘I don’t want my children learning the bad habits of other people’s children.’* They will learn their own bad habits well enough on their own. (Interview Subject # 6)

The most beneficial aspect of homeschooling is that I know that the sole influence on my daughter is our home—and I’ve got control over that. There are environments that a lot of kids are in that parents don’t have control over, and they get into whatever, whenever. And I know that my daughter is being influenced by my wife, and I know that my wife is being influenced by God . . . But the rest of the other influences, we’ve intentionally blocked those off because society as a whole is not building characters for heaven . . . I don’t think there is any reason that we as parents should just let our children be friends with just anybody for the sake of having friends. We’ve got to choose who we’ll let have influence over our children. (Interview Subject # 17)

Fathers also mentioned the problem of peer influences on adopting materialistic practices that conflict with Christ-centered values. Many were concerned about the strong emphasis placed on wearing the right type of fashion and the latest styles in order to “fit in” with popular students who have power to impose potential stigmatizing and damaging labels on those who share nonmaterialistic values. Most frequently, homeschooling fathers, especially those who had many years of practice in the subculture, would comment that the single biggest benefit of controlling peer influences is the lack of rebellion and teenage angst so often associated with American adolescence, and popularized in literature, song, and film as a normal part of the coming of age narrative. One father said:

We’ve taken it for granted that rebellion is not a natural part of being a teenager. It’s not! It’s abnormal! And it’s due to the fact that at some point along the way, children become more influenced by teachers and their peers, than their parents. And it is very, very difficult to get it back after you lose it. That’s what homeschooling does: it creates an environment in which there is this bond between parent and child, where parents

impart their values, and children, hopefully, are protected and have teachable spirits, and where there is instruction and discipline occurring. (Interview Subject # 10)

Several fathers who had already homeschooled children to college mentioned that the closeness of their relationships with their children endured long after the influence of peers should naturally have overtaken their own influence, and this was due to a dedicated strategy of weakening the power of cohort socialization early on. Similarly, Merry and Howell (2009:363), in their study of “attentive parenting” and homeschooling, concluded that “home education not only promotes greater intimacy, but also provides insurance against the loss of intimacy that may occur under certain conditions when children attend school.” A total socialization strategy, which filters all of the known socialization agents, was common among all 21 homeschooling fathers in this study. Nurturing the home as a protective cocoon that kept out potentially damaging moral influences was one of the most important responsibilities that fathers delineated in their interview narratives, and one that yielded the benefit of a closer relationship between parents and children in some cases. Indeed, many of the fathers in this study implicitly framed total socialization as a necessary condition for successful moral cultivation into a Christian worldview.

### **Total Socialization as an Outgrowth of “Legitimation Crisis”**

The aforementioned discussion on total socialization as a mechanism to filter other potentially harmful socialization agents does not fully attend to the “why” question, namely “Why are public schools so mistrusted in their capacity to ‘properly’ socialize children by the fathers in this study?” Analysis of the data reveals that underlying the perception of the homeschooling household as a protective cocoon is a “legitimation crisis” marked by a loss of faith in the American public school’s capacity to act as an agent of moral socialization for children. Ironically, the historical vision of the public or “common school” included the idea that schools would be institutions for the moral socialization of American children. As Carper (2000:12) points out, “Common schools, they believed, would mold a moral, disciplined, and unified population prepared to participate in American political, economic, and social life.” The great hope for the public or common school was that it, rather than the family, would be the foremost moral socialization agent in an emerging industrial society. Whether or not the public school has failed in its historic mandate to act as an agent of moral socialization for children is debatable, but the question of how to teach morality to children is one of great educational and sociological interest (see Noddings 2010). Nevertheless, a pivotal theme in the narratives of the 21 homeschooling fathers in this study is the loss of trust in the capacity of the public school to fulfill not only its academic mandate as the great social equalizer but also its imperative to morally shape the minds of its pupils in a way that does not negate certain Christ-centered principles. The most eminent theme that comes out of the

narratives that explains the turn away from, and the complete mistrust of, the public school as a socializing institution is a widespread “legitimation crisis.”<sup>3</sup>

Habermas (1975), in his classic book *Legitimation Crisis*, describes a state of disruption whereby members of a particular society lose faith in their government’s ability to fulfill its key functions or to meet the most basic needs of the populace. Legitimation crises can affect the realms of politics, economics, and the socioculture system. In the chapter “Crisis Tendencies in Advanced Capitalism,” Habermas singles out education as one of the government’s administrative functions that has the potential to experience a crisis of confidence from the masses. He writes:

Whereas school administration formerly had to codify a canon that had taken shape in an unplanned, nature-like manner, present curriculum planning produces a universal pressure for legitimation in a sphere that was once distinguished precisely for its power of self-legitimation . . . The end effect is a consciousness of the contingency, not only of the *contents* of tradition, but also of the techniques of tradition, that is of socialization. Formal schooling is competing with family upbringing as early as the pre-school age. (Habermas 1975:71-72)

And one symptom of a crisis in the administrative realm of government is, according to Habermas, the increasing use of, and reliance on, alternative modes: “Efforts at participation and the plethora of alternative models—especially in cultural spheres such as school and university, press, church, theatre, publishing, etc.—are indicators of this danger, as is the increasing number of citizens’ initiatives” (Habermas 1975:72). While there is no question that the burgeoning ranks of homeschoolers is a response to the widely accepted view that American public schools are failing to deliver on their most basic expected function which is to provide a world-leading education to all of its students, there are other reasons for the legitimation crisis besides academic failure that were common in the narratives of the 21 fathers in this study. The main sources of legitimation crisis in the narratives of our homeschooling fathers are as follows:

- (a) A generalized belief that the American public school is actively propagating an atheist/anti-Christian worldview.
- (b) A generalized belief that the American public school is the main ideological battleground for “cultural politics” anathema to a Judeo-Christian morality.
- (c) A generalized belief that the American public school is not meeting the needs of children with special needs on both ends of the spectrum.
- (d) A generalized belief that the American public school has very poor disciplinary standards, and, as such, is a weak agent of moral socialization.
- (e) A generalized belief that American public education’s pedagogical tools are ineffective largely because schools are controlled by an indolent bureaucracy.

### *The Anti-God Basis of Legitimation Crisis*

The fathers in this study held the view that the public school was propagating a worldview that was not only anti-Christian and antireligion broadly speaking, but one that was entirely atheistic. Nowhere was this more evident than in fathers' discourses about the scientific perspective that completely negates the Genesis account as literary fiction. For these fathers, public education is not a scientifically neutral endeavor, but one with an ideologically driven agenda that ultimately leads to the erosion of religious faith. One father, who previously had his children in public schools, noted this frequently cited reason for homeschooling:

I know a couple in North Dakota who is homeschooling, and the wife told me that they have been homeschooling for several years, but now they are thinking about giving it up because it was too much work or whatever. And I basically told her that they started homeschooling for a reason because they were not happy with the way public schools were teaching their children. So I asked her, *'Do you really want to put your kids back in that environment?'* I said, *'You obviously do not have the same religious values as I do, but you obviously do have religious values of some kind. And you are able to teach your kids that when you have them at home, and the public school isn't doing that at all. It is teaching them evolution, that God doesn't exist, and teaching this, that, and the other thing that you don't believe in. Do you really want them doing that?'* And she thought about it for a couple of days and she got back to me and said, *'You are right, there is no way we can do that to our kids! **You cannot rely on somebody else to teach them something they don't believe.**'* (Interview Subject # 18)

Fathers pointed to the cultural shift in law that led to the removal of prayer in public schools as cause of the current "state of Godlessness" in American education, and often lamented that humanism had become the accepted ideology and worldview of public educators across the nation, noting that proclamations that the public school was propagating a value-neutral approach to morals and ethics were simply untrue. At best, respondents argued, schools could only claim that they were not in support of a Christian worldview.

The anti-god basis of legitimation crisis in the narratives of these 21 homeschooling fathers is an irreconcilable critique since the only remedy to their loss of faith is to reintroduce a form of religious practice in the public classroom that would radically change the constitutionally orthodox and nonreligious public school into an institution with a preference for Christianity. And since the public school cannot privilege any single religious faith without summarily excluding others, what is left, according to narratives of these homeschooling fathers, is an educational system where morality and moral education are largely absent from the classroom. The homeschool is an answer to the morality conundrum of the public classroom, because in this "protective cocoon" the teaching of scientific and classical subjects can be coupled with a moral education that is Christ centered.

### *Legitimation Crises in Education's Support of Cultural Politics*

The belief that schools were the epicenter for America's culture wars was a prevalent and frequently cited reason for the loss of faith in public education. Of pointed concern for many fathers were the controversies over how homosexuality is framed in course material, especially the use of books that support gay marriage and that challenge heterosexism:

When I was in public school, homosexuality was bad, and living together before you were married was bad, but that was back in the 1970s, and '77 was when I graduated. (Interview Subject # 16)

I had an opportunity to work for the district office in the public school, and I worked with a lady who had adopted a curriculum that pounded on the idea of tolerance: homosexual tolerance. *'Well you know what? I don't think God is tolerant to any of that. Black is black and white is white, and there's no gray in between it,'* and I said this to her. And she said, *'Well that's your view but I don't believe that.'* (Interview Subject # 15)

The perception of the imposition of cultural politics into curriculum material, issues such as feminism, sex education, abortion rights, and homosexuality, was an often cited trope for the public school's loss of legitimacy in the eyes of many fathers. One father noted that his decision to homeschool turned on an experience he had when his elementary-age son brought home a book about the different types of families that included a discussion of gay and lesbian unions. Almost every father in this study lamented the problems posed by an education that challenges many of the fundamental taken-for-granted ideas of a conservative Christian worldview: that abortions are wrong, that cohabitation is a sin, and that gay marriage is anathema to Biblically sanctioned heterosexual monogamy. Fathers in this study interpreted the public school's silence on, or implicit support for, cultural politics as a manifest challenge to their attempts at moral socialization using Bible-based beliefs. And like the first form of legitimation crisis, the public school's approach to cultural politics gives rise to an intractable position for these fathers since it would be an untenable option for schools to teach on these issues without offending various stakeholders. So once more, the homeschool becomes a shield against the encroachment of a secular-progressive worldview that fathers saw as pervasive in the public school.

### *Failure to Adequately Address the Concerns of Its Special Needs Students*

The third source of legitimation crises stems from a generalized belief that was common among the fathers in this study that public schools were not equipped to adequately address the concerns of special needs and advanced pupils and that homeschool was the ideal environment for these students.

My son probably would be labeled ADHD if he was in public school, and our concern was that it would probably want to make sure he was medicated. You know, getting kids on medication for long periods of time is not good for their bodies! You know, I come from a family of nine, and we had some rambunctious ones, but you still have to learn patience, and it's hard for kids to learn discipline if they're doped up. I mean, they learn some, and I understand that. But to really gain control of themselves, without having to rely on something else, to me is very important. (Interview Subject # 11)

I've come to the conclusion that the public school classroom setting is designed mostly by women for little girls. I mean it sounds very sexist but little girls do best in that environment. What we try to do at home for our boys is have shorter and challenging assignments. (Interview Subject # 9)

A few fathers of children who are hyperactive mentioned that homeschooling was the best alternative for them, insisting that public schools are too quick to medicate those who do not conform to a docile disposition. And evidence from the scholarly literature does support the generalized belief that some students with special needs, particularly those with a diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, perform significantly better academically in the homeschool environment than in the public school setting (see Duvall, Delquadri, and Ward 2004).

Other fathers with students who were academically advanced noted that one of the benefits of homeschooling was the opportunity it offers parents to teach to the needs and learning styles of each child and to go as fast and as far with each lesson as a child can accept. One father, whose child was several grade levels above his age in reading and mathematics, noted that his decision to homeschool partly turned on the boredom that his son suffered while in the public classroom due to being much more academically advanced than his peers. While this type of legitimization crises was frequent in the data of the 21 fathers, it is by no means unique to this population of conservative Christians. This generalized belief, that public schools are failing to meet the needs of outlier students on either end of the spectrum of academic outcomes, is a common theme in much of the popular criticism of the American public school (see Winstanley 2009).

### *Legitimation Crisis in Perceptions of Weak Disciplinary Regimes and Pervasive Delinquency in American Public Schools*

The homeschooling fathers in this study held views on the nature of school discipline that expressed a generalized belief that public schools were largely failures in their attempts to govern students and control troubling behaviors like bullying, and this was the fourth source of legitimization crisis. Respondents frequently invoked memories of their own experience with bullying and harassment in public school to frame their generalized belief about this crisis:

We were frustrated with the amount of time spent in class basically doing disciplinary stuff, on things that weren't really education-related. We went to the class and observed the class

a couple of times to get a sense of that, and that was our conclusion, that there was a lot of time spent on just inefficient non-productive education . . . (Interview Subject # 4)

My wife was sexually molested on a school bus. She was bullied and made fun of because of her weight. I was bullied and made fun of because of how small I was in elementary school. I encountered a lot of bullying, and being made fun of in school. I was sensitive to that, and I didn't want to have my son deal with that. (Interview Subject # 3)

Implicit in this crisis is the belief that the public school is inadequate to serve as an institution of moral socialization since adherence to basic discipline on the part of students is so negligent. Recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Education on the pervasiveness of bullying shows that as many as 9.2 percent of high school seniors have been the victim of a bullying threat or experienced a bullying-related injury in public school (Synder, Dillow, and Hoffman 2009). Several fathers made an implicit connection between the lack of moral education in public school curriculum and assumed misbehavior in the classroom, with a few fathers making a supposed connection between the removal of Christianity from the public classroom and delinquency.

### *An Indolent Bureaucracy*

The final source of legitimization crises stems from the union politics of the National Education Association (NEA) which has stood in direct opposition to homeschooling since the movement came to national prominence in the 1970s and wields tremendous influence over American public education. The NEA's official policy on homeschooling, Resolution B-82, calls for homeschooling pupils to be subject to a plethora of state requirements in testing and graduation standards, while noting that "home schooling programs based on parental choice cannot provide the student with a comprehensive education experience" (NEA 2012:38). But perhaps most onerous to many of the fathers in this cohort of homeschoolers is the widely known stance the NEA has taken in advocating that homeschooling parents be subject to applicable state teacher licensure laws—a position that has been vigorously opposed in courts across the nation by the HSLDA. One father said:

If you look at the last national conference of the NEA, they say right on their website that it is not possible for parents to homeschool their children unless they have a teaching license, and they want to make that the law. The people who support Obama give a lot of money to liberal politicians who in turn, if they could, would ratify that U.N. treaty on children's rights, which basically means that parents won't have any rights. Parental rights are not guaranteed in the U.S. constitution. They are just implied that they are part of your inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our founding fathers felt that this is so obvious that they didn't need to spell it out that it is the parents' right to raise their children and to educate them in the way they see fit. We only institutionalized education basically halfway through the last century. And most people basically think that the public school have always been there and we've always



have done it this way. But really, in the vast majority of our history, children were homeschooled, or parents would hire a teacher to teach in a one-room school house. (Interview Subject # 9)

... Not all teachers are bad, but they just have to follow the directions they are given. (Interview Subject # 15)

Homeschooling fathers spoke of public education as an indolent bureaucracy that was completely under the sway of powerful union forces that did not have the best interest of children at hand, and one that had a blatantly hostile agenda to destroy or significantly curtail parental rights to homeschool their children as they please. The power of this education bureaucracy was a major source of mistrust and loss of faith in the public school.

## Discussion

A distinct feature of the narratives of the 21 fathers in this study is a consistent framing of homeschooling's objective in terms of moral socialization. Sociological studies on homeschooling mothers, conversely, are less ideologically focused on their motives and justifications for homeschooling and more intently centered on matters of process and outcome. For instance, Lois (2006, 2010, 2012) and McDowell (2000a, 2000b), in their enquiries on homeschooling mothers, place emphasis on process-related issues such as role strain, emotion work, and pedagogical challenges that women face in their triangulated roles of mother, teacher, and wife. In this study, fathers conveyed more acute concern for the politics of homeschooling and less about the pragmatics of day-to-day instruction and the attendant relational dilemmas of teaching children. This difference is perhaps owed to a gendered division of labor in the homeschooling household with its traditional structure: women doing much of the teaching and household labor and men functioning as the sole or primary wage earner. Even so, fathers articulated cogent rationalizations for their (1) choice to homeschool, (2) views on the importance of effecting socialization control to filter other influencing agents, and (3) expressions of legitimation crises in statements on the efficacy of public schools.

The 21 homeschooling fathers in this study are a small, though ideologically representative, slice of the majority of American homeschooling households who are driven to home educate because of strong religious values and a Judeo-Christian worldview (see Stevens 2001). The narratives of the fathers in this study, especially desires to teach their children within the protective cocoons of the homeschool, are indicative, we believe, of a broader perceived moral crisis in American society today. The generalized belief, expressed in each of the 21 narratives, is that of widespread societal and educational failures to socialize children into the most basic ethical and moral standards that would constitute the basis of a shared "conscience collective" (Durkheim 1972). Far from the outright rejection of the historic functions of common education, the fathers in this study lament nostalgic for a public school that at one time may have functioned as the preeminent agent for the moral socialization of children. In

these narratives, there were references to the public school as a place where morality and ethically based discussions and values are not permitted, thus forming the basis of their conviction in the “anti-God bias” of American public education.

The natural reaction to the perceived crisis in the culture’s failure to properly socialize its young is attempts to build the home and homeschool as an arena for “total socialization”—a socializing institution that filters all of the other preeminent socializing agents in society, namely schools, peer groups, and media. Under this practice of total socialization, namely the concerted filtering of other socialization agents deemed anathema to apt morals, the homeschool takes on some of the features of an “austere institution” (Foucault 1975) that is designed for concerted moral cultivation into docility: disciplined bodies and moral minds. But it would be too easy to label total socialization as the natural outcome of a fundamentalist world-view because, after all, most religious conservatives are not homeschooling. Rather, we argue that total socialization is a symptom of—and a rational response to—a deeply held and pervasive generalized belief in the inability of the public school to meet its most basic function in society: to be an institution of successful and consistent socialization into knowledge acumen and collective moral sentiment.

The collapse of confidence in the American public school constitutes an eminent legitimization crisis that pervades the narratives of these homeschooling fathers. Understood within the context of legitimization crises, the narratives of the homeschooling fathers in this study, which singularly focus on the public school’s failure to meet its perceived historic mandate as the preeminent grounds for the moral socialization of the next generation, are not too far removed from other sources of crisis in public education. The conventional criticism levied against the common school is rooted in its inability to educate America’s children to the high academic standards of other postindustrial nations, and this forms the basis of a nationwide legitimization crisis that appears intractable (see Darling-Hammond 2010). But whether its source is morality based (failure of moral socialization) or is academically driven (inability to educate all children to an agreed upon national standard), the legitimization crisis produces the same outcome: a loss of confidence in—and gradual withdrawal of—collective support and moral sentiment from the institution of public education as a trusted arena for socialization. And the narratives of the 21 homeschooling fathers in this study signal a collective and pervasive loss of faith.

## Appendix

### *The Father in the Homeschooling Family: A Study in Sociology*

#### *Interview Instrument.*

##### Motivation

1. How many children do you have, and how long has your family been homeschooling?

2. What led you to choose homeschooling for your child/children? [**Possible Follow-up:** Whose initial idea was it to homeschool, and how long did you and your wife discuss this option before deciding to do it?]
3. What role, if any, did your religious beliefs play in your decision to homeschool?
4. What do you see as your primary role as a father in a homeschooling family?

#### Curriculum

5. Describe the typical homeschooling day. (How many hours does/do your child/children spend studying on a typical school day?)
6. How are decisions about your child's/children's curriculum handled? [**Possible Follow-up:** Who makes decisions about your child's/children's curriculum and why?]
7. Who does the majority of teaching in your household? [**Possible Follow-up (if it is the wife):** Do you participate in the teaching? If so, what subjects, and why?]
8. Do your child/children receive year-round instruction, or do they follow the public school schedule and get summer vacation?
9. Do your religious beliefs inform your curriculum and teaching practices? If so, how?
10. What is the difference (if any) between class time, playtime, and family time in your household? [In other words, is there a clear demarcation between school time and nonschool time in your homeschooling day?]
11. Tell me what your child/children is/are currently studying in their home-school curriculum. [**Possible Follow-up:** Tell me what your child/children will be studying in the next school year.]
12. Are there subjects that you feel you are not able to teach at this point? (**Possible Follow-up:** If yes, what are these subjects, and how do you plan to address this concern?)
13. Are there specific subjects you feel should *always* be taught by a parent, and if so, why?
14. What do you see as the *most beneficial* aspects of homeschooling?
15. Do you have any corresponding concerns about homeschooling?

#### Role Strain

16. Do you and your wife have careers outside of the home?
17. What are some of the main sources of stress or burnout for the homeschooling parent? [**Possible Follow-up:** How do you handle the strain or stress that can result from homeschooling?]
18. What do you see as the main stressors for homeschooling moms?
19. What are some things husbands in homeschooling families can do to support their homeschooling wives? Or, how do you support your homeschooling spouse?

20. What specific chores do you do around the house? What does your spouse do? Who, in your family, takes care of *most* the household tasks (i.e., laundry, dishes, etc . . . ), and why?
21. What advice would you offer to fathers who are considering homeschooling as an option?
22. Are there any questions or issues about fathers in homeschooling families that were not addressed that you would like to discuss?

### Demographic Queries

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Education Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Religious Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Notes

1. We borrow this metaphor from Giddens (1991). In *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Giddens employs this useful metaphor of the "protective cocoon" (p. 114) to illustrate the need to protect the individual's sense of ontological security from fateful events that have a disruptive affect on well-being.
2. See Apple (2000) for a criticism of the "personalizing or cocooning" nature of the homeschooling community.
3. Mayberry et al. (1995:100-102) also employ Habermas's (1987) notion of the "colonization of the life-world," or the state's escalating intrusion into the domestic sphere, to explain the emergence of the homeschooling movement in the 1970s.

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