

Homeschooling, social isolation, and life trajectories:

A mixed method analysis

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Background

- A longstanding critique of homeschooling is that it isolates children from mainstream society, depriving them of vital social skills & experience ... and making them ill-equipped to navigate society
- It is unclear to what extent this critique of homeschooling is warranted
- Research on educational attainment (Wilkins et al., 2015), civic engagement (Casagrande et al., 2019), exposure to cultural resources (Hamlin, 2019), and social adjustment (Medlin, 2013) reports mostly positive outcomes for homeschoolers
- However, this existing scholarship has largely been generated from self-reports from homeschooling parents or children being homeschooled (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020).

Theory & Literature

- One important source on social and life outcomes may be adults who were homeschooled, but few empirical studies have elicited information from adults
- Furthermore, studies treat the practice as static. Yet, the argument that homeschoolers are socially isolated and ill-equipped to navigate society may apply differently based on years homeschooled
- If homeschooling is socially isolating, it may have more harmful social and life consequences for adults who were homeschooled for longer periods of time

Study Purpose & Research Questions

Phase 1. **31 adults** who were homeschooled as children were interviewed to understand how they perceive the influence of homeschooling on their social and life trajectories.

Research question 1. *How do adults who were homeschooled perceive the influence homeschooling on their social and life trajectories?*

Phase 2. Survey data on **140 adults** who were homeschooled as children were analyzed to address the following question:

Research question 2. *Are later-life outcomes (i.e. higher education, income, marital status, subjective wellbeing) for adults who were homeschooled associated with the length of time homeschooled?*

Findings from Interviews

- Only ***three of 31*** adults described homeschooling experiences that could be characterized as a state of social isolation
- Most felt that homeschooling had given them social experiences that were suited to their individual social needs, and that homeschooling had not hindered their ability to navigate society effectively
- Interviewees described both ***conventional*** (e.g. sports, church groups, community-based activities & clubs) and ***unconventional*** (e.g. apprenticing, long-term traveling, professional training in athletics, & homeschool coops) opportunities for socialization, social experience, and connections

Findings from Interviews

- The importance of the homeschooling parent in being intentional about facilitating social experiences was a frequent theme.
- And, parents reportedly played a role in recognizing that a child's social interests would be served more effectively in a brick-and-mortar school. An indifferent approach to socialization seemed to be considerably harmful.
- Decisions to stop homeschooling were also largely driven by children themselves. Interviewees cited individual social interests & personalities as considerable influences
- Feelings of missing out on mainstream school-led social activities (e.g. football games, prom) led to exit in some cases

Characteristics of parents and children...

I think it is very personality dependent... Homeschooling is maybe not the best thing for everyone. But just because you're homeschooled doesn't mean you are going to be a weirdo and just because you have been to public school does not mean you are going to be a perfectly socialized, well-functioning human being either. It definitely depends on the person and the environment that they are homeschooled in. -

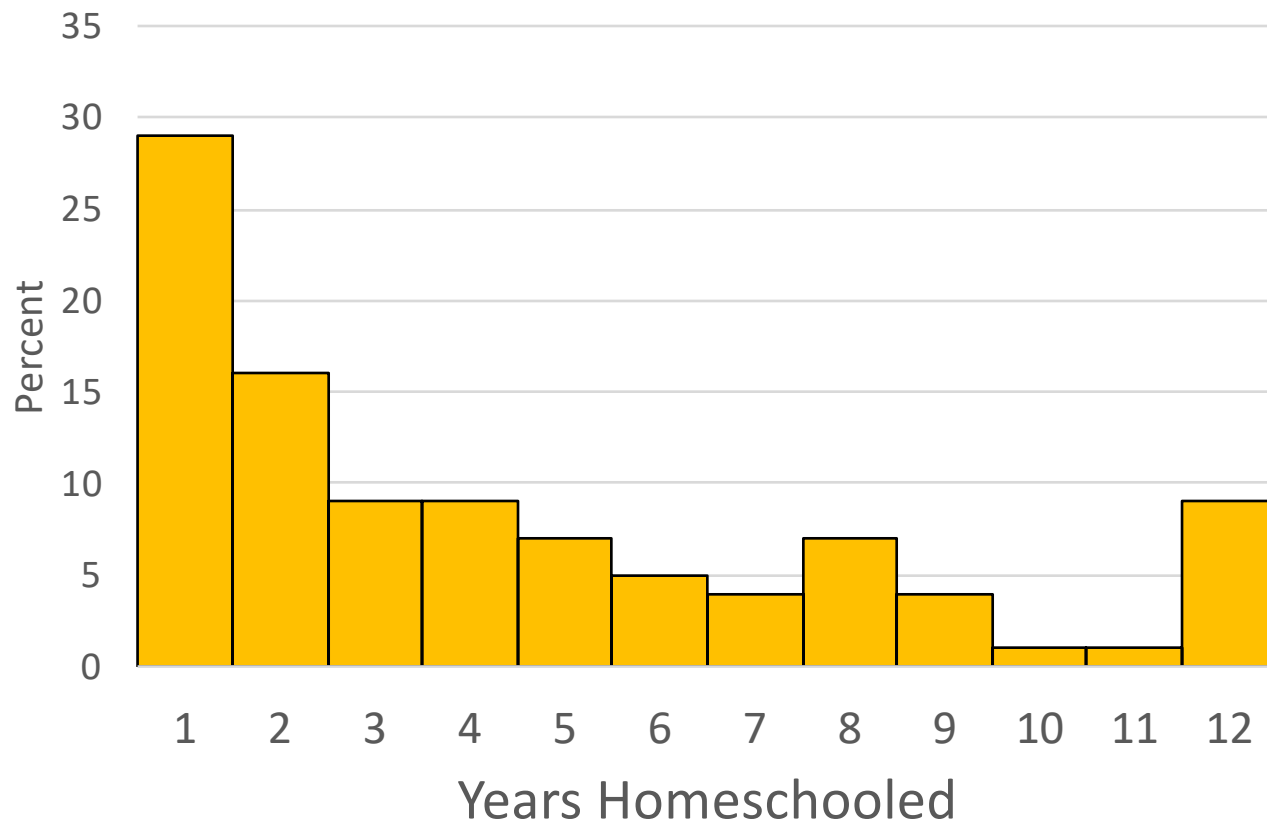
Homeschooled grades 1-7

Findings from Interviews

- K-12 homeschoolers reported initial culture shock when entering university/workplaces, noting that they had to learn mainstream social norms and overcome social gaps
- However, after a short adjustment period, they reported doing well socially with some attributing their thriving to having been homeschooled
- In adulthood, interviewees were generally well connected in later life and active in mainstream institutions

Survey Results

(from Understanding America Survey)



- 45% of adults who were homeschooled ($n = 140$) did so for 1-2 years while
- Only 11% did so for 10-12 years.
- **Note.** Number of years homeschooled ($n = 140$)

Survey Results

Homeschool trajectories and life outcomes (25-65 year olds)

	Household Income Above \$50,000	Attended College	Divorced / Separated	Subjective Well-Being	Positive Affect	Negative Affect
Substantial Homeschooling	1.22 (0.59)	0.90 (0.47)	0.88 (0.57)	0.261 (0.421)	-0.233 (0.492)	-0.780 (0.512)
Long-term Homeschooling	1.22 (1.04)	1.26 (1.09)	1.00 (1.22)	0.611 (0.667)	0.400 (0.778)	-0.136 (0.809)
White	1.89 (1.06)	2.72* (1.46)	0.61 (0.41)	-0.278 (0.468)	-0.810 (0.554)	0.508 (0.576)
Age	0.99 (0.02)	0.96 (0.02)	1.06** (0.03)	-0.0211 (0.0162)	-0.00391 (0.0189)	-0.00528 (0.0197)
Male	2.02 (0.96)	0.94 (0.49)	0.50 (0.35)	-0.452 (0.411)	0.270 (0.480)	-0.539 (0.500)
Ever attended private school	2.39* (1.15)	5.93*** (3.67)	0.48 (0.35)	0.586 (0.454)	0.537 (0.530)	-0.311 (0.551)
Constant	0.20 (0.22)	2.58 (2.61)	0.04** (0.05)	7.527*** (0.728)	7.235*** (0.871)	3.889*** (0.906)
Observations	95	95	95	92	91	91

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Note. In Model 1-3, logistic regressions are performed. Odds ratios and standard errors presented in Models 1-3. In Models 4-6, OLS regression is performed. The sample is slightly smaller for subjective wellbeing, negative affect, and positive affect because of missing data for these three variables.

Discussion

- Evidence from this study and others suggest that homeschoolers may not be a socially isolated group
- Instead, homeschoolers in these samples seem to have peer networks and social connections that arise in conventional and unconventional social settings and they report being well-connected later in life
- It is important to note that although this study contributes to the literature, it has methodological limitations (e.g. small sample, self-reports)

Thank you

Interview sample...

- Approximately 68% of participants reported attending private or public schools during their K-12 education.
- With the exception of one participant, all grew up in conventional two-parent households.
- Participants reported 15 forms of Christianity that were practiced in their childhood homes; only one participant was raised in a home that did not follow a religious tradition.
- On average, participants came from families that had four children. In 90% of these households, the mother was the primary homeschool teacher or played a significant role in delivering instruction.

Interview sample

- Three participants were taught by parents with a high school level education while the other participants were taught by parents who had some college experience, undergraduate, and graduate degrees.
- Participants were located across the United States with two currently residing overseas.
- Participants in the sample are relatively well educated. Sixty-four percent have an undergraduate degree or higher and 16% are current undergraduate students. Nearly 20% have some college but did not complete their degrees. Approximately half of the sample is married and only one participant is divorced.

On social acculturation...

Up until that point, I had very little exposure to profanity and foul language, and that was quite a shock. It's kind of going from a very sheltered upbringing into a very rough part of the workforce in general, but a lot of profanity, a lot of smoking. That was very different. It took it took a little while to find my feet for sure.

-Homeschooled K-12

When I tell people I'm homeschooled, they almost kind of gasp, "like really, you?" And I'm like, ... I understand that your perception is that I'm part of an Amish community or that I'm part of a religious community or a group of people who live in a rural area. And I don't know how to tell them, no, I just did school from home.

-Homeschooled Grades 1-8

Summary statistics for dependent variables

	M	SD
Subjective Well Being	6.81	1.87
Positive Affect	6.67	2.15
Negative Affect	3.48	2.26
Household Income (\$50>)	0.36	0.44
Attended Higher Education	0.61	0.49
Divorced/Separated	0.11	0.31

Characteristics of adults who were homeschooled from interviews ($n = 31$)

ID	Grades Homeschooled	Race	Childhood family structure	Siblings	Gender	Age
1	Gr. 1-8	White/Hispanic	Two-parent	2	Female	30-35
2	Gr. 4-7	White	Two-parent	2	Female	30-35
3	K-5	White	Two-parent	4	Female	36-40
4	K-12	White	Two-parent	6	Female	25-29
5	K-10	White	Two-parent	6	Male	25-29
6	Gr. 2-6; 8	White	Two-parent	2	Female	25-29
7	Gr. 2-12	White	Two-parent	2	Male	25-29
8	K-12	White/Asian	Two-parent	2	Female	25-29
9	Gr. 1-7	White	Two-parent	2	Male	18-24
10	K-12	White	Two-parent	6	Male	18-24
11	K-12	White	Two-parent	10	Male	18-24
12	K-12	White	Two-parent	3	Female	25-29
13	K-8	White/Asian	Two-parent	0	Male	25-29
14	K-12	White	Two-parent	4	Female	25-29
15	K-8	White	Two-parent	3	Female	25-29
16	K-9	White	Two-parent	1	Male	18-24
17	K-12	White	Two-parent	5	Female	36-40
18	Gr. 1-3; 5-10	White	Two-parent	6	Non-binary	25-29
19	Gr. 3-4; 7-12	White/Hispanic	Two-parent	2	Male	25-29
20	K-12	White	Two-parent	3	Female	25-29
21	Gr. 4-8	Asian	Two-parent	1	Female	30-35
22	K-12	White / Native	Two-parent	2	Female	18-24
23	K-9	White / Native	Two-parent	2	Female	18-24
24	K-12	White	Two-parent	5	Female	18-24
25	K-3; 5-8	White / Native	Two-parent	2	Female	18-24
26	Gr. 11-12	White / Native	Two grandparents	4	Male	41-50
27	Gr. 6-8; 11-12	White	Two-parent	2	Male	36-40
28	K-6; 9-12	Asian	Two-parent	3	Male	25-29
29	K-12	White	Two-parent	1	Female	25-29
30	Gr. 9-12	Asian	Two-parent	1	Female	30-35
31	Gr. 5-12	White / Native	Two-parent	0	Male	25-29