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The Third Shift: The Gendered Labor of (Home)Schooling

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The Third Shift: The Gendered Labor of (Home)Schooling

by

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Professor Daniel Perlstein, Chair
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The Third Shift

Abstract

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The Gendered Labor of (Home)Schooling

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This dissertation is a study of the gendered educational labor of homeschool mothers. Though recent literature has painted homeschooling as an outlier in American education or as an extreme version of neoliberal privatization and opting out, scholars have not adequately taken into account either the long entanglement of the domestic home and public school spheres or the way that homeschooling mothers use the practice as a form of personalized agency.

Using a conceptual framework that insists on the centrality of carework and asserts mothers as experts, this work seeks to explore the dialectical tension of protection and punishment inherent in both the home and schooling. This inquiry begins with a historical theorization of homeschooling that starts in the era of the Cult of True Womanhood, a period in American history when civil and social society lauded the image of feminine domesticity and a separate spheres ideology just at the time when the Common School movement began to rely on a largely female teaching force. Exploring how both the modern school and the modern home were co-constructed as spaces of domestication and education by women's labor, this history ends with a theorization of the *third shift,* or educational labor as women's third job.

Using a phenomenological approach to interviewing homeschool mothers in California, I found that, though their homeschooling practice was rooted in their parenting, it is a distinct kind of educational labor separate from domestic labor or outside employment. As such, homeschooling mothers develop a highly-focused educational expertise (in the practice and their children) that frequently precludes them from doing other kinds of (paid) labor. This labor is often unseen and always unpaid, both by their families and the larger economic system. Homeschool mothers give their labor–often joyfully–for the practice, but recognize that they are made economically vulnerable by it, too. Using the framing of love, homeschooling mothers make claims to parental rights by declaring that the state

cannot possibly love their children the way they do, and further asserting that love is the essential characteristic for teaching. I find that for these mothers, homeschooling was a way to advocate for themselves, the individual and educational needs of their children, and in critique of a schooling system they found lacking. Homeschooling mothers, many of them former classroom teachers, construct critiques of the system of which they had been a part and tried to change from the inside. The classroom teachers-turned-homeschoolers I spoke with had two important realizations: 1) the teaching profession and being a parent are incompatible and, 2) I don't want my children in the system I've been teaching in. Rather than seeing these mothers as "outsiders," as the literature often posits them, my research theorizes them as insiders looking in from the outside.

The contemporary homeschooling movement has attracted adherents from both progressive communities and conservative Christian families. Yet in homeschooling they find some degree of common ground, meeting in the *Place Behind the Barn*, a place that is simultaneously doing and undoing the messy, political work of (re)claiming the domestic and forging a new community.

Recognizing the cataclysms of COVID-19 pandemic schooling, this work ends with and interrogation of the differences between homeschooling and pandemic schooling and finds that the pandemic has issued not a school problem and a labor problem, but a gendered school-labor cataclysm of *disaster patriarchy,* one which homeschooling research may thoughtfully illuminate.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The contemporary homeschooling movement seems, on first glance, contradictory to deeply-held American beliefs about the democratic value of public education and the need for governmental oversight of children's education. How can children learn, and become citizens, if not in schools? Such a framing would position homeschooling on the "outside" of the educational system, an outlier that bears little resemblance to the rest of American schooling. But such a narrative misses the dynamic ways that homeschooling is actually a natural, and integral, part of the American schooling tradition. Indeed, homeschooling is born out of one of the most essential tensions in American education, the relationship between the school and the home.

The complex–sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory–relationship of American schools and American homes has long perplexed and energized both parents and educators. By "home," I am referring here to the domestic sphere of housing and family (though not exclusively biological) and by "school" I am referring to the institutional setting of education; though, as I will argue throughout this dissertation, such a distinction is not necessarily as bright a line as those definitions would pretend.

At the level of school policy and systemic ideology, educators and reformers have often theorized that schools should look more like homes. Educational philosopher and reformer John Dewey sought to remodel schools in the image of the pioneer homestead (Dewey, 1899). And with regard to practice, there are any number of innovations that move the work of the school into the space of the home. Homework, for example, (introduced to American schools by universal public school champion Horace Mann, 1868) was originally unpopular and even banned (B. Gill & Schlossman, 1996), but became standard in the Cold War Era (B. P. Gill & Schlossman, 2003), extending the work of the school day into the home. The National Congress of Mothers, now called the PTA (Muncy, 2000; Schoff, 1916), is a particularly American notion of parental involvement in schooling. So, too, are expectations that parents will volunteer in their children's classrooms or help with school activities (Brent, 2000; Copeland, 2012), these tasks echoing the notion that elementary school teaching requires more mothering skills than professional expertise. The family home and formal school overlap and intermingle in a multitude of ways, seen and unseen.

American parents perform large amounts of educational labor; not just teaching but also helping with schoolwork and homework, volunteering in classrooms, serving with the PTA, and homeschooling. Though the language of "parental involvement" is coded as gender neutral, as the origins of the PTA and the overwhelming number of women among school volunteers makes clear (Fahey, 2008; Muller & Kerbow, 2018), when the literature on volunteerism and educational labor says "parents," it obfuscates the fact that these individuals are women and the work is being done not by all parents, but by mothers.

Noticing both the interconnected nature of homes and schools, and the prevalence of women's labor in education, this work questions how these dynamics play out in homeschooling and how the gendered work of homeschooling shapes its relationship to the rest of the American school system. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us, homeschooling (or, at least in the case of the pandemic, schooling at home) is a vital practice that should sit at the "center" of our understanding of the American educational system, not just because it is currently prevalent, but because it reveals dynamic truths about American schooling. Inquiries into homeschooling help us see the interconnected relationship between schooling and the family, as well as how the school-family relationship is embedded in larger institutions: the economy, law, and the American state.

In order to better understand the role of gendered educational labor in homeschooling, I conducted a qualitative study of homeschooling mothers in California, focusing on their work as educators. Specifically, I conducted interviews with 74 homeschooling parents, mostly mothers, in California, during the Spring and Summer of 2019. Through this inquiry, I explored how that work was shaped by gender and the way that work was manifest as advocacy, teaching, and political community.

Research Questions

The literatures on gender, the home and education are vast, and so beginning this research I was guided by several lines of inquiry, which would be distilled into my research questions:

1. What is the gender work of homeschooling?
2. Is homeschooling a form of choice? Of advocacy?
3. What is the political work of homeschooling?

As I followed these guiding questions, they built on each other, forming a kind of layered analytical frame. By this, I mean that I sought to think about how these issues of gendered work, choice/advocacy, and political work were interrelated, rather than separate issues. Homeschooling is defined here as being work primarily done by women, and so I saw the question of gendered labor as not just my first research question, but also my overarching lens through which my other questions were interpreted, and with which my research sought to contend. Seen in this way, my research questions came to form a set of parentheticals:

1. What is the gender work of homeschooling? How does gender shape homeschooling practice, experience, and identity?
2. Is (gendered) homeschooling a form of choice? Of advocacy? How might choice and advocacy in homeschooling rely on or be shaped by gendered labor?
3. What is the political work of (gendered) homeschooling? Is (gendered) homeschooling a form of choice that does political work? How is the political work of homeschooling a part of or distinct from the gendered advocacy labor of homeschooling?

Homeschooling is thus the defining practice of issue in this research, but women's educational labor is my primary focus in asking these particular research questions. I am guided in this research by the literatures on homeschooling, especially homeschooling history, (parents') motivations, and homeschooling as mothers' labor. This work was further framed by literature on women's labor from the fields of education; feminist theory and studies; and the history of women's work in both the domestic sphere and in schools. Finally, this research is guided by the research on school choice and advocacy, with a focus on the way that literature does (or does not) speak to issues of women's labor.

Homeschooling

In this work I define homeschooling as not just education in the home, but a combined process and identity wherein parents assume responsibility for their children's education. The Homeschool Legal Defense Association, the country's largest homeschool legal rights and lobbying organization, defines homeschooling as being defined by five features: (a) Education is parent-directed; (b) education is customized/customizable to meet child and family needs; (c) education can take place outside of classrooms and "book learning"; (c) education is primarily home-based; and (d) within state homeschooling laws, educational choices are up to the parent

(Definition adapted from the HSLDA, 2020, January 10). Georgina Aubin, homeschooler and educational researcher, defines homeschooling this way in her work,

> This study uses the word homeschool as a verb, being the act of engaging in home education. It is often used in the present participle form: homeschooling, as a verb or an adjective. Regarding parents, it refers to the act of managing their children's home education. Regarding students, it refers to the act of completing their schooling tasks away from a full-time institutional school. A student can also be 'homeschooled', thus receiving the action of homeschooling (Aubin, 2018).

Homeschooling, as used throughout this work, is thus an action and practice as well as an identity; one is a homeschooler who homeschools.

It should be noted that homeschooling, being a practice defined by customizability and individuation, contains important variations of practice, practitioners, ideology, and geography. There are few statements to be made that are universally true about all homeschoolers or all homeschooling practice. One key distinction is among the styles or pedagogical/curricular approaches to homeschooling, which are often defined by their degree of subject rigidity and the amount of freedom children are given to direct their own schooling. The strictest subject-bound style is typically cited as Classical Homeschooling, an approach that, popular with many Christian families, focuses on "in-depth teaching of logic and critical thinking skills, and continued reference to classical languages such as Latin and Greek" in addition to the "memorization and recitation of facts and figures" (Suarez & Suarez, 2006, pp. 3-4). Often juxtaposed with Classical Homeschooling is Unschooling, or, as Karl Wheatly, a university content and curriculum specialist and unschooler, defines it "I use… the terms 'unschoolers' and 'unschooling' to refer those families who primarily or entirely let children learn about whatever they are interested in, and use little or no formal adult-chosen curricula" (Wheatley, 2009, p. 2). Gray and Riley write that "unschoolers learn primarily through everyday life experiences– experiences that they choose and that therefore automatically match their abilities, interests, and learning styles" (Gray & Riley, 2013, p. 2). While not strictly opposite, Classical Homeschooling and Unschooling are often informally discussed as such by practitioners. In addition to these two forms, however, there are several other popular homeschooling types: Charlotte Mason (Levison & O'Brien, 2000), unit studies (Ray, 2000), experiential learning (Chapman, McPhee, & Proudman, 1992; Kraft, 1990), cooperatives (Hirsh, 2019; Muldowney, 2011), and online or remote classes (Roblyer, 2008).[1]

This chapter introduces relevant political frameworks and situates homeschooling within the broader research and feminist theory of women's gendered labor. Second, I introduce additional context on the homeschooling community, beginning a conversation that will run throughout this work: who homeschools and why? Third, I describe the motivation for this study, which is born out of a focus on carework and re-introduce my research questions. In several short sections I explicate each of these questions and relevant discussion surrounding them. Fourth and finally, I provide an outline of the dissertation chapters to follow.

Bringing Motherhood into Educational Research

In much of educational policy research, gendered work is a mere after-thought and the work of mothers rarely if ever explicitly mentioned. Why study mothers and domestic labor in the context of education? It would be glorious to believe that this answer didn't need explaining. Why not mothers? Of course mothers. Of course the unpaid labor that women do to keep systems

[1] Several of these homeschooling styles are defined in greater length in the glossary.

functioning. It is impossible to fully understand how schools and families function without invoking women's work and interrogating how mothers do unseen (educational) labor. And yet this is a conversation and a topic of study that are often overlooked in educational scholarship.

Regarding questions of women's labor, feminist scholarship has been instrumental in bringing issues of domestic, child, and family work to the fore, raising questions of care and unpaid labor and advocating for gender equity. Regarding the question of care and carework, this is a large category of labor that includes mothering, yes, but also other types of labor. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2010) details care work in this way,

> Caring can be defined most simply as the relationships and activities involved in maintaining people on a daily basis and intergenerationally. Caring labor involves three types of intertwined activities. First, there is direct caring for the person, which includes physical care (e.g., feeding, bathing grooming), emotional care (e.g., listening, talking, offering reassurance), and services to help people meet their physical and emotional needs (e.g., shopping for food, driving to appointments, going on outings. The second type of caring labor is that of maintaining the immediate physical surroundings/milieu in which people live (e.g., changing bed linen, washing clothing, and vacuuming floors). The third is the work of fostering people's relationships and social connection, a form of caring labor that has been referred to as "kin work" or as "community mothering." An apt metaphor for this type of care labor is "weaving and reweaving the social fabric." All three types of caring labor are included to varying degrees in the job definitions of such occupations as nurses' aides, home care aides, and housekeepers or nannies. Each of these positions involves varying mixtures of the three elements of care and, when done well, the entails considerable (if unrecognized) physical, social, and emotional skills (Glenn, 2010, p. 5)

Carework can be paid or unpaid, and can occur both in and out of the home (England, 2005). Importantly, carework is (at least in the contemporary United States) largely low-status, care is passed onto or forced upon low status individuals, primarily women and members of race/class subordinate groups.

Feminist scholarship has also been critical to understanding how, as Ann Orloff writes, "the character of different welfare states' policies both shapes and is shaped by the content of women's (and men's) practical and strategic gender interests" (Orloff, 1996, p. 70). In particular, this scholarship has illuminated how welfare produces "gendered citizenship" (men make claims on the state as independent workers while women do so as dependent mothers or members of families), producing a "two-tier" or "two-track" system in which insurance programs protecting work serve men and means-tested poverty-reduction programs support women and children (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Nelson, 1990). And just as research finds that the social welfare state performs economic and racial regulatory functions, so too does feminist scholarship find that these policies enact gender-based means of control, via the feminization of poverty (Bianchi, 1999; McLanahan & Kelly, 2006; Pearce, 1978), social reproduction of gender hierarchies (Orloff, 1996; Orloff & Palier, 2009), and the translation from a private to a public patriarchy (C. Brown, 1981; Haney, 2004).

Feminist scholarship has reproachfully noted that most policy efforts to give women equality have simply aimed to make them more equal in the marketplace, or are predicated on the artificial distinction between the domestic and economic spheres (Olsen, 1983), theorizing that only decommodification, or protection "irrespective of gender, from total dependence on the labor market for survival…from forced participation, irrespective of age, health conditions,

family status, [and] availability of suitable employment" (Orloff, 1996, p. 72) will actually produce equity. In short, until women are compensated for their unpaid labor, they will never actually be equal.

To contextualize the political import of women's work, feminist scholars like Silvia Federici have been arguing for decades that domestic labor is the unpaid, unseen, unappreciated, unvalued engine that powers capitalism (Federici, 2004). Further, in 1975 her work "Wages against Housework" she makes the case that "not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character" such that domestic labor is seen as hardly labor at all, but as an act of love (Federici, 1975, pp. 76-77). Domestic labor is transformed from work (which could be compensated, organized on, and seen as part of the social contract) to identity (what makes a "good woman") and just like that, women's work is expected, erased, invisible. In the almost 50 years since Federici wrote "Wages Against Housework," there are certainly some shifts in the shape and value of housework, but her central premise remains disturbingly relevant.

Who Homeschools and Why?

The history of the homeschool movement provides some grounding into who homeschools and why. Histories of homeschooling often trace the inherent tension–and interplay–between American nation-building and skepticism about the state. Like many histories of homeschooling, (See also: Carper & Hunt, 2007; Guterson, 1993; Stevens, Lampmt, & Wuthnow, 2003), researcher and conservative homeschooling advocate Milton Gatither's account begins in the American colonial period and picks up in earnest with an analysis of the contemporary movement that began in the 1960s and 1970s (Gaither, 2008). These histories recount how back-to-the-land, collectivist movements, as part of their larger skepticism of governmental intervention and oversight, moved to educate children outside of institutional settings (i.e., formal schools; but also questioning norms of education like testing, grading, and age-segregated classes). According to historians of homeschooling (Gaither, 2009; Lines, 2000). Homeschooling flowed naturally from a broader ethos of divestment from institutions–physical, structural, and ideological.

Most histories then follow with a narrative of how, upon gaining newfound traction, homeschooling spread from the left to the right, making its way across the aisle of the Culture Wars to gain popularity with conservative families. Like progressive families, Evangelicals were concerned with creeping Institutionalism and state control over children. As Heather lines writes, "The contemporary homeschooling movement began as a liberal, not a conservative, alternative to the public school… then, in the 1980s as the school culture drifted to the left, conservative and religious families were surprised to find themselves in a countercultural position" (Lines, 2000, pp. 75-76). Homeschooling thus attracts adherents from across the political spectrum who are wary of institutionalism, governmental control and oversight, or who simply feel that childhood has become too regulated. For many in the homeschooling community, the promise of greater autonomy is central to its appeal.

Literature on parental motivation finds that personal sentiments about schooling and parenting vie with compelling narratives about the intellectual and social benefits of homeschooling. Parents want to spare their children from their own unhappy educational experiences (J. G. Knowles, 1991) while simultaneously providing them with a kind or quality of education that cannot be found in institutional schooling. In large-scale surveys of

homeschooling parents, researchers have identified common factors that both draw parents away from public schools and towards homeschooling. While coded differently by individual researchers, certain concerns appear consistently: educational quality, concerns about public school social influences and peer groups, concerns about public educational quality, and the desire to include religious teachings (Collom, 2005). Research consistently finds that these factors are both highly personal and intermingled (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Hanna, 2012), with parents' own goals (ex. the desire for a close family bond) existing in tandem with goals for the child's education. Research also finds that motivation can stem from an innate desire to homeschool, as researcher Jennifer Lois terms "first choice" homeschoolers (Lois, 2012), or in reaction to a number of different school, social, parental, or familial concerns, what Lois calls "second" or "third" choice homeschoolers and others call "reactive homeschooling practice" (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021).

There is a rich literature written by homeschoolers themselves that speaks to their motivations for homeschooling, though even in these texts their thoughts about the "why" of homeschooling are jumbled together. One such example comes from Laura Brodie, who describes her "uncommon year" with her fifth grade daughter as "Julia's homeschooling sabbatical, because, as an English professor, I understand the need for intellectual rejuvenation" (Brodie, 2010, p. 2) and recounts that "when friends and family asked, 'why are you homeschooling?' my answers varied according to my mood" (p. 3). These reasons she lists as all the motivations one might expect: burnout, trying something new, getting an intellectual boost before middle school, critique of the school system on fundamentals like math and reading, but admits that "all of these answers, however, were incomplete" (p. 3) and goes on to spend a chapter of her narrative recounting the absolute terror she felt the day her daughter disappeared for an hour. Julia is found safely in the back of her mother's closet, avoiding homework, but the mingled fear for her daughter's physical and intellectual safety propels Brodie's narrative, and her homeschooling journey, forward. Brodie's rationale for homeschooling is, ultimately, an inexorable mixture of need to stem the "misery quotient" building around Julia's homework, Brodie's and her husband's "dreary experiences" with schooling, and her own desires to enjoy her time with Julia and protect her from drudgery.

Indeed, in most accounts of homeschoolers' motivations and experience, there is no one clear rationale, with the personal, political, and intellectual all maintaining salience. What seems relevant and pervasive, however, is that as the individual assuming the educator role, parents' own thoughts and feelings about education, along with their personal goals, exist co-mingled with intellectual, pedagogical, or curricular goals. Homeschool parents have to choose to assume the role of educator, just as much as they have to decide that homeschooling is the best educational format for their child(ren).

Nationally, best estimates are that prior to COVID, somewhere between 3-5% of children in the United States were homeschooled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; Ray, 2021).[2] Because of the variability of homeschooling laws, the imprecision of counting criteria

[2]These numbers are difficult to pin down, in part because in some states, like California, children who are homeschooled must be enrolled in either a public charter school or private school. In California, enrolling in a charter school provides access to every-semester funding. Alternatively, parents can file a Private School Affidavit (PSA), essentially becoming their own private school (California Department of Education, n/d). I attempted to get a number of homeschooling families via a request for information from the California Department of Education (CDE). In 2019 they sent me the most recent statistics (2018-19) for private schools (3111 registered private schools), which obviously includes many homeschool families. Sorting for the number of fulltime teachers (1 or 2) and the total enrollment (perhaps 1-10 as a starting place) should theoretically reveal many homeschools registered

(e.g., should a child who homeschools through a charter program be counted as a homeschooler or a charter student?), and other lapses in statistics, such numbers are almost impossible to come by reliably. The same is equally true for the national racial demographic breakdown of homeschoolers. What statistics are available about the race of homeschoolers are also quite outdated. The Institute of Education Sciences - National Center for Education Statistics' (IES-NCES) last report on homeschooling children is from 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The pro-homeschooling organization Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE) reports numbers from 2016 (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, n/d). Regarding the national racial makeup of homeschooling families, these two sources differ. It is impossible to say whether that difference is due to the 4-year gap in data collection. However, given homeschooling's reputation as a largely white practice, it would be in the best interests of a pro-homeschooling organization to paint the homeschooling community as racially-diverse as possible. As I will discuss in *Chapter 4: Research Design & Data,* my interview population was also largely white. Below, I display the racial demographics of homeschoolers as reported by the IES-NCES (2013), CRHE (2016) as compared to 2020 national demographics of children's race from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2021).

Table 1
Race/Ethnicity of Homeschooled Students (comparing reported 2013 and 2016 demographics)

	White	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic**	**Other, non-Hispanic**
IES-NCES (2013)	68%	8%	15%	4%	5%
CRHE (2016)	59%	8%	26%	7%	Not Reported

Table 2
Race/Ethnicity of All US Schoolchildren

	White, Non-Hispanic	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic**	**Other, non-Hispanic**
Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2020)	50%	14%	26%	5%	5%

Thus the image of image of homeschooling as an entirely white phenomenon is outdated, at best; yet homeschooling is (even by the possibly more politically efficacious estimate provided by the CRHE) still predominantly made up of white families. As I report in my high-level data findings,

as homeschools. Within this narrowed list, however, are still many schools with names like "Heritage Christian–San Clemente" (total enrollment 6, fulltime teachers 1). Without a school-by-school confirmation of the list, it would be impossible to know which of these were "schools" and which homeschools. Even with such confirmation, this list would still miss the many California families who homeschool via the charter option. In short, no one (not even the CDE) knows how many homeschool families are in the state.

(*Chapter 4: Research Design & Data,* see Table 4) my research participants were 79% white. While some research has found no racial bias in homeschooling (Kraychir, 2003; Ray, 1997), such authors tend to be from pro-homeschooling organizations and research institutions. Independent research (Levy, 2009) has found a positive correlation between racism and the "geotemporal diffusion of homeschooling legislation." Of course, this is not necessarily distinct from other kinds of school choice, which is also linked, both historically (Margonis & Parker, 1995) and contemporarily (Henig, 1996; Holme, 2002) to parents' desires to shield white children from school segregation efforts.

Economically, (again, before COVID) 21% of homeschoolers were classified as poor ("living in households with incomes below the poverty threshold, which is a dollar amount determined by the federal government to meet the household's needs, given its size and composition") and 79% as non-poor (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).[3] This is similar to the national average; the National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 2010, 21% and in 2018, 18% of all children under 18 lived in families experiencing poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Similarly, Brian Ray's 2010 study for the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) found that, for families surveyed, the median income was $75k-$79,999, while at the time the median nationwide income was $74,049, (Ray, 2010).

However, if we break down the numbers a little further, into not just poor and not-poor, but by degrees of non-poverty, an interesting finding emerges. The National Center for Education Statistics stopped reporting this breakdown of numbers after 2003, so it is impossible to know if they hold true 14 years later, but in that year they found that homeschooled students were as likely as other students to be poor and more likely to be "near poor" (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, n/d)–between the poverty rate and 200% of the poverty rate. This higher rate of middle class status or near-poverty for homeschool students (as compared, for example, to private school students) may be due in large part to homeschooling families sacrificing mothers' second incomes for the practice, as most homeschooling mothers do not work outside of the home for wage labor. It is also true, especially in the greater San Francisco Bay Area where I conducted the majority of my interviews, that income levels play a role. Because of the high cost of living in the area, homeschooling families had to have one (usually male) parent whose salary was enough to live on, two very flexible jobs, or figure out how to make life work on much less income. Issues of work and wages are explored in more detail in *Chapter 2: Work, "Homeschool is Parenting on Steroids."* Class differences and nuances clearly matter in home schooling, but the notion that home schooling is simply a manifestation of privilege is not supported.

Of course, there is more to socio-economic (SES) and class status than a family's income in any given year. I could not find other data on measures of poverty (or, alternatively, class status) for homeschooling families such as housing (insecurity); absence or presence of healthcare; or use of WIC or other food subsidies. In my research, however, while six of the mothers I spoke to reported that homeschooling had imposed hardships on their family and been a significant economic struggle,[4] the other sixty-eight did not mention economic factors when asked to discuss what was difficult about homeschooling. If, instead of income, we use educational attainment as a proxy for SES[5], we might get a better sense of the class backgrounds

[3] We will leave, for a moment, the insufficiency of most means-tested poverty calculators.
[4] In two cases because the mother was homeschooling while a single parent, in another 1 case each because the father and primary breadwinner had either lost his job or gone back to school.
[5] As the NES and other educational bodies often do when making educational recommendations.

of homeschooling families. This measure might also better capture what kinds of work and income homeschooling mothers would be able to engage in, were they employed outside of the home, thus circumventing the problem of only measuring net income. Research shows that homeschool parents had a higher level of formal educational attainment than the national population. Ray's 2010 NHERI study found that

> Homeschool parents have more formal education than parents in the general population; 66.3% of the fathers and 62.5% of the mothers had a college degree (i.e., bachelor's degree) or a higher educational attainment. In 2007, 29.5% of all adult males nationwide ages 25 and over had finished college and 28.0% of females had done so (Ray, 2010, p. 43)

These data indicate that homeschooling families, while maybe cash poor, possess other social types of social and cultural capital. These findings were replicated by my research, which found that the homeschooling parents were not just highly educated, but often formally trained in education (as explored in *Chapter 3: Teaching, "I've Always Been a Teacher."*)

Need for this Research

This work brings together these two strands of inquiry: gendered labor and homeschooling mothers' own motivations–personal and political–for homeschooling. Determining how larger societal pressures, histories, and motivations have shaped and constrained the choice to homeschool is one the major goals of this dissertation. At the same time, I wondered how parents navigated these pressures. While homeschooling families enjoy, appreciate, even cherish the practice itself, is it best understood as an answer to a riddle, or the question itself? By that, I mean that while families will tell you they "homeschool for homeschool's sake," is homeschooling an end in its own right, or a solution to and partial reconciliation of the problems and insufficiencies of schooling, work, family, or community? Having been moved to step outside them and forge something new, homeschooling families have astute observations about and vital critiques of the failings of these systems.

I was also motivated in this work out of a desire to take seriously and bring to light the unseen work of care. The goal of "saying the quiet part out loud" is, for me, a personal as well as intellectual and political project. That which we don't name, identify, and study we, often, cannot quantify and do not value. I recognize that personal narratives of carework are, exactly that–personal–but in their intimate details there is galvanizing resonance to be found.

The conundrum that a woman's most productive career and child-bearing and -rearing years overlap to an almost perfect degree and the question of whether and when to have children is one that began to animate my personal conversations right around the time I entered graduate school in my late 20s. These discussions range from the macro (climate change is real, should we even bring children into this messed-up world?) to the local (the Bay Area is so expensive!) to the personal (to IVF or not to IVF?). As the culture of motherhood, feminism, and queerness has shifted, some friends are thrilled to be free from the pressure and assumptions that they'll reproduce. Others are scared of spending their most fertile years in graduate school or climbing the corporate ladder. One friend texted me to say that her new job in Big Tech came with an egg-freezing package. The women I know text each other late at night to talk quietly, secretly, about fertility issues; miscarriages; wanting one more; shame about not wanting any; the love they have for their children that also tips into exasperation, resentment, and occasional loathing; joking-not-joking about buying land and forming a collective in the woods to share the burdens of mothering; how much they love their husbands and partners but how infuriating they can be,

too; divorces; abuse; coming-to-terms with sexuality and bodily trauma. Some this is venting, surely, women creating safe places amongst themselves, but these conversations also reveal that for however "far" we have come, the identity of "woman" is still an incredibly fraught one and remains inseparable from issues of "motherhood."[6]

These conversations, and my own experience in my early 30s as a caregiver to a parent dying of cancer, fundamentally refocused my attention on issues of mothering, care-giving, and domestic labor. I'm not a parent, but deep inside the world of hospice I became intimately familiar with domestic labor in a way that living alone, with roommates, or a partner hadn't shown me. For a surreal year I spent days and even weeks at my parents' house in Marin, grateful for the flexibility that being a student afforded me, but also recognizing the strange irony that being a childless student actually allowed me to take on caregiving duties. My strong community and middle class whiteness worked together to protect my choice to essentially take several years "off" to be with my family; thankfully, I was met with immense emotional and financial support. And while I wouldn't trade those days with my mother for anything, that doesn't erase the tradeoffs of care. I started to piece together a personal schema for how carework and domestic labor exist in a nexus of compulsion and devotion that can't be reduced to simple yes/no answers. As I re-engaged with my dissertation after a period of grieving, it became clear to me that the questions I wanted to know about and that my friends were texting back and forth, were not about single acts of reproduction but identities of care. On whose behalf would we labor to care and how? To what extent would we subvert our own wants, needs, goals, and desires? What labor would we assume? What labor would be expected of us? These questions brought me back to the hidden work of mothers and education, and places like homeschooling where we could make that unseen effort visible.

Research Question One: What is the Gender Work of Homeschooling?

Educational research often says that education is a "pink" field, or is deemed "women's work." In homeschooling, this observation is translated to the level of the family, and this work considers how educational labor fits into the other, and other types, of labor performed by women. Taken in two parts, that requires that I interrogate both gender and labor, in the context of (homeschool) education.

As discussed in more detail in *Chapter 3, The History of Home/Schooling,* there is a strong research tradition into the history of homeschooling. These pieces are written by practitioners who seek to recount their personal histories of the practice (Seelhoff, 2000a, 2000b, 2001), pro-homeschooling historians interested in situating homeschooling amidst the larger American educational tradition (notably Gaither, 2008; Gaither, 2009); and historians of American education (Lines, 2000), progressive movements, religious descent and education, and other themes found within homeschooling (see, for example Carper & Hunt, 2007). There is, as well, an ample literature that addresses the efficacy of the practice (Lubienski, Puckett, & Brewer, 2013) and legal standing (Klicka, 1998; Raley, 2017). There is also work that explicitly deals with the motivations of homeschool parents (see above, in the section "who homeschools

[6] I recognize that my cohort of largely college-educated women with different kinds of racial and economic privilege is not representative of the whole of women's experiences and I'm certainly not trying to paint it as such. Instead, I'm suggesting that by moving back and forth between the particular and the shared, there are insights to be gained about the whole. Considering what concerns galvanize one group of women and how they are or or not like another, how the systems in which we operate do or do not allow for certain kinds of privilege, agency, and opportunity are illuminating.

and why") as well as many texts that break down different identity groups' and their involvement in the practice, such as Christian evangelicals (Jeynes, 2012) or Black families in a particular geographical area (see, e.g., Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013).

There are also some excellent pieces on homeschooling mothers and labor. As Mitchell Stevens, Lampmt, and Wuthnow find in their 2003 book on homeschooling, *Kingdom of Children,* the practice and growing homeschooling community is fueled by both individual women's work and networks of of parents involved in support and advocacy efforts (Stevens et al., 2003). They further find that homeschooling gives women a more meaningful role in the home, rather than being "just housewives," and conceive of homeschooling as a powerful way for women to honor increasing demands for self-actualization and self-fulfillment, for both themselves and their children: "At the same time that women *as women* have learned to be more defensive about their own needs, then, they also have faced increasing demands *as mothers* to honor their children's individual needs" (Stevens et al., 2003, p. 189). Michael Apple explicitly calls attention to homeschooling as gendered labor (Apple, 2013), examining the ways that conservative Evangelical women take up homeschooling as part of a long history of carework within traditional religiously-structured patriarchy. Within these communities, and homeschooling, writes Apple, women and women's work takes on important material and symbolic meaning, as women are "simultaneously able to claim subaltern status based on the history of dominant gender regimes and having dominant status given their positioning in relationship to other oppressed groups" (p. 22).

Jennifer Lois's "Home is Where the School is," (2012), a longitudinal study of homeschooling mothers that looks at the emotional labor of mothering and homeschooling, builds on earlier research about caretaking and the interactions between mothering and personal identity. Lois's work, which was influential in the development of my research questions and study methodology, is especially thoughtful about the kind and quality of homeschooling labor. In her book she details carefully how all-consuming homeschooling is for mothers, in measures of time, emotionality, and intellectual labor. What work like Steven's, Apple's, and Lois's begins, and work from homeschooling practitioners (Brodie, 2010; Finch, 2012) extends is a clear understanding that homeschooling is a) work and, b) work done largely by women. What remained, then, were questions about the nature of homeschooling as gendered *educational* work.

As a graduate student of education who embraced feminist and other critical theory in my work and feminist pedagogy in my classrooms, I was highly attentive in my coursework and prior research to questions of gender. I looked for the way that gender figured into conversations of educational theory, policy, and practice, I looked for the way that educational scholars studied and wrote about gender. I wanted to know whether the "parents" cited in the literature were women[7] or if, for example, gender was structuring differences in education for teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Often, I found that sex was mentioned as a demographic characteristic, but not as a theoretical lens to explain the ways and mechanisms by which gender mattered. Educational research that explicitly studied schooling from a feminist or maternal lens was even more rare. Where it exists, it is often regarding the study of education for girls and women (see, e.g., Sykes, 1998), the explicit teaching of feminist theory or pedagogy (Jones, 1997), or regarding how to expand women's access and equity within a particular male-dominated field like medicine (Sharma, 2019) or STEM (Barton, 1997; Beddoes & Borrego, 2011). Educational research (and educational practice more broadly) has been rightly called out

[7] Mothers, grandmothers, or femme/nonbinary/genderqueer parents.

for its racism (e.g., López, 2001; Scheurich, 2002). In response, the field as a whole has become more attentive to issues of race, racism, and race difference. In a similar way, educational researchers should become more thoughtful about and more frequently add to systemic analyses issues of gender (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). Gender and topics of feminist concern are critically understudied in educational research and, especially considering the preponderance of women involved in education, a gross oversight.

An inquiry into homeschooling demands that I ask questions about the negotiations, opportunity costs, critiques, and benefits of navigating educational systems while also being highly attentive to issues of gender and women's work. How, in occupying this position within the schooling system (i.e., homeschooling), are homeschool mothers able to achieve some measure of freedom or control by expending labor; vast amounts of labor that in most cases represented an opportunity cost of other types of work?

Research Question Two: Is Homeschooling a Form of Choice? Of Advocacy?

In the past decade, school choice has emerged as one of the most pressing issues of educational policy, practice, and research. So much so, in fact, that school choice occasionally became the dominant lens through which research tried to understand all manner of schooling issues, including homeschooling. When I first encountered homeschooling, for example, it was as an extreme manifestation of privatization and choice (see, e.g., Cervone, 2017; Heuer & Donovan, 2017) but those within educational research and policy were dismissive about the validity of both the practice and its ability to speak to the institutional schooling system. Homeschooling was framed as a choice, but in "choosing away" from institutional schooling, homeschoolers were seen as engaged in an extreme form of "exit" (Hirschman, 1970) that was both a manifestation of neoliberal attacks on public schooling (Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Thiem, 2007) and a challenge to core democratic values (Ross, 2009). Homeschooling was thus framed as both in opposition to the tradition of American public schooling and, inasmuch as it could be framed as school choice, an exploitation of the current educational policy environment. Yet did these framings hold with the lived reality, individual and communal, of homeschooling?

Even as literature has long recognized the straw-man quality of the "rational man" in school choice models, much of the literature that aims to examine the mechanics of choosing still simply details aggregate attendance patterns or schooling outcomes, using these as a proxy for "preferences" or the "effects of choice" (see, as examples Bettinger, 2005; Elacqua, 2012; Elmore, 1991; Kisida & Wolf, 2010; Lauen, 2009). Some analyses of choice systems account for location and geography (André-Bechely, 2005); residential patterns (Holme, 2002); class (Bosetti, 2004); race (Henig, 1996); and school quality (Buckley & Schneider, 2003; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Yet missing from many of these analyses are the human logics of the systems that undergird notions of choice and the relationships this sets up between families and schools.

Further, the school choice literature is often inattentive to the individual, gendered work of parents in re school choice and how those dynamics shape school choice processes. Notable exceptions are work like that of Courtney Bell (2009) on choice-sets and Camille Wilson (published under the name Wilson Cooper, 2007) on choice as motherwork, both of which draw attention to the hidden work of mothers inherent in choosing, or not choosing, school options. Work by Bell and Wilson prompt questions about how features of systems, dynamics of power, and people's lived experiences actually constrain and determine schooling outcomes. How is "choice" additive to, in tension with, or in tandem with other elements of parenting? Of parents' other political, personal, and ideological identities and work?

In the context of the school choice literature, "advocacy" is usually defined as political support or lobbying for a particular school choice form, parents or groups organizing to extend or continue school choice practices (see Scott, 2009). In this respect, when the term "advocacy" is used in the school choice literature, it typically refers to advocacy for more school choice (e.g., Lubienski, Weitzel, & Lubienski, 2009). Although some homeschoolers advocate politically for the practice, homeschooling is missing the kinds of advocacy organizations and groups seen elsewhere in the school choice landscape.

For the purposes of this inquiry, instead of evaluating any one school choice system or policy, I sought to investigate the ways that people navigated and negotiated constrained options and closed systems. How do people wind their way through complicated systems and how, in turn, does that process shape their lives? Schooling decisions aren't made in vacuums, but in the midst of messy personal, parental, and familial dynamics. If homeschooling is a form of choice, is it different than choosing other forms of schooling? Is advocacy best conceived of in the context of homeschooling the way the school choice literature would posit–as demanding support for more homeschooling–or are homeschoolers working to champion something else, with homeschooling as the means to that end? I also wondered if homeschooling would be a place to see gendered educational labor and political advocacy made manifest, and how that labor and advocacy would be understood by homeschoolers themselves.

Research Question 3. What is the Political Work of Homeschooling?

I also came to this topic to investigate vital questions about the interactions between parents and the state. Here was a clear example of tension between the familial parent (parent's rights) and the state-as-parent (*parens patria*), an obvious place to see a collision of claims about the best ways to educate children (Blokhuis, 2010). Legal scholars like Elizabeth Bartholet make the claim that homeschooling is an inherent violation of children's rights to education, arguing that parents do not have the right to shield children "from exposure to views that might enable autonomous choice about their future lives" and citing issues of abuse, neglect, and social/racial isolation (Bartholet, 2020). Conversely, proponents of homeschooling appeal to a long history of parents rights in re the ability to make educational decisions on behalf of minor children (See, e.g., Wisconsin v. Yoder 1971) and point to the schools' financial, rather than intellectual or sentimental, interest in maintaining student attendance (Klicka, 1998). Homeschooling advocates have also pointed out that, while sensational cases of abuse sometimes occur in families that are to some extent engaged in "homeschooling" and make for compelling narrative (see, e.g., Westover, 2018) these cases are rare and not limited to homeschooling; children under the watchful gaze of institutions (both schools and foster homes) are also neglected and abused (Kelly, 2019). How do competing claims to educational rights between the state and families, both of whom make claims to parental rights, play out for homeschool families? How do homeschooling parents assert their parental rights to educate at home?

In homeschooling, as historians have noted, there is also a quintessentially "strange bedfellows" coming together of left and right, as the practice attracts adherents from both liberal progressive spheres and conservative religious communities. What is it about homeschooling that brings together such politically disparate groups? And are they, truly, together in homeschooling or are various groups engaged in the same practice but in radically different ways? In an American political landscape deeply divided and highly stratified by hot-button issues, homeschooling offers a unique opportunity to see how some families are drawn together in their

shared identity. What is it about homeschooling that unites them, and what does this shared affinity reveal about the current American political landscape?

Dissertation Outline

In *Chapter 2, Conceptual Framework* I introduce my conceptual framework, which first insists on the centrality of carework. Using feminist novelist Ursula K. Le Guin's notion of "the carrier bag," (Le Guin, 1989) my framework asserts the vitality of the domestic, despite–and because of–its mundanity. Building also on the theory of MotherScholarship (Lapayese, 2012b) my framework situates homeschool mothers as experts in their practices and experiences of homeschooling. As articulated by feminist theory, women's experiences with domesticity and schooling are shaped by dialectical forces, out of which seeming "contradictions" are held in productive, and reproductive, tension. Salient among these tensions, for the purpose of educational labor, is the dialectic between protection and punishment, the Foucauldian dilemma (Foucault, 1977) between education as liberation and regulation.

Chapter 3: The History of Home/Schooling sets up the historical frame through which I conducted my empirical research. In this chapter, I explore the longstanding relationship of the home to school, consider the ongoing practical and symbolic connections between these two spheres, and discuss how homeschooling is poised at the nexus of this meeting. This history traces the origins of homeschooling to the era of the Cult of True Womanhood, a period in American history when civil and social society lauded the image of feminine domesticity and a separate spheres ideology. This was, seemingly ironically, the same era in which the Common School movement began to rely on a largely female teaching force, both for their cheap labor but also for their perceived excellence in domestication and mothering. Exploring how both the modern school and the modern home were co-constructed as spaces of domestication, education, and women's labor, this chapter begins to understand how homeschooling is a uniquely–and intrinsically–American concept. This chapter ends with a short history of (the phases of) the feminist movement as seen through the lenses of women's work, education, and domesticity. This history asks whether we have arrived at a new phase of feminism and theorizes women's educational labor as the *third shift.*

In *Chapter 4: Research Design & Data,* provide a description of the sample and interview protocol as well as an overview of my phenomenological approach, including sampling and data analysis.

In *Chapter 5: Work, "Homeschool is Parenting on Steroids,"* I begin addressing the first of my three research questions, asking, "what is the gendered work of homeschooling?" In this chapter I report the first of my findings from my interviews with homeschool mothers. As the mothers I interview made clear, homeschooling practice, while rooted in parenting, is a distinct kind of educational labor separate from domestic labor or outside employment. As such, homeschooling mothers develop a highly-focused educational expertise (in the practice and their children) that frequently precludes them from doing other kinds of (paid) labor. This labor is often unseen and always unpaid, both by their families and the larger economic system. Homeschool mothers give their labor–often joyfully–for the practice, but recognize that they are made economically vulnerable by it, too.

In *Chapter 6: Advocacy and Agency, "I'm the Mom I'm Going to Work It Out,"* I turn to the second of my search questions, asking, "is homeschooling a form of choice? Of advocacy?" In this chapter, I think of advocacy as an extension of the core gendered work of homeschooling and question how homeschooling is both a form and a target of advocacy. Using the framing of

love, the homeschooling mothers I interviewed make claims to parental rights by declaring that the state cannot possibly love their children the way they do, and further asserting that love is the essential characteristic for teaching. While the homeschooling mothers in my study do find salience with the frames of advocacy and agency, as I explore in this chapter I find that they use homeschooling as an advocacy tool, rather than as an advocacy target. Echoing Stevens, Lampmt, and Wuthnow, I find that for these mothers, homeschooling was a way to advocate for themselves, the individual and educational needs of their children, and in critique of a schooling system they found lacking.

In *Chapter 7: Teaching, "I've Always Been a Teacher,"* I continue addressing the research questions and themes of the two prior chapters, seeing teaching as an extension of both gendered labor and as a kind of advocacy. I explore how homeschooling mothers, many of them former classroom teachers, construct critiques of the system of which they had been a part and tried to change from the inside. The classroom teachers-turned-homeschoolers I spoke with had two important realizations: 1) the teaching profession and being a parent are incompatible and, 2) I don't want my children in the system I've been teaching in. Rather than seeing these mothers as "outsiders," as the literature often posits them, my research theorizes them as insiders looking in from the outside.

In *Chapter 8, The Place Behind the Barn*, I take up the third of my research questions, asking "what is the political work of homeschooling?" In the tradition of second wave feminism, this chapter asserts that the "personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970) to consider how homeschooling engages in revised notions of public and private space, providing the homeschooling mothers I spoke with both an identity and a shared community. This community, which I call The Place Behind the Barn, engages with the interconnected, unclear, and imprecise issues of school and home that have run throughout this work. This chapter explores how homeschooling, via The Place Behind the Barn, is simultaneously doing and undoing the messy, political work of (re)claiming the domestic and forging a new community.

In *Chapter 9, Conclusion*, I bring these findings together, considering what homeschooling mothers' experiences of homeschooling reveal about both the practice and the broader American educational system.

In *Chapter 10, Epilogue, COVID-19 and Pandemic Schooling*, I reflect on the findings of this research in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter highlights and interrogates the differences between homeschooling and pandemic-schooling and find that the pandemic has issued not a school problem and a labor problem, but a gendered school-labor cataclysm of *disaster patriarchy,* one which homeschooling research may thoughtfully illuminate.

In addition, the dissertation includes the following supplemental material: *Glossary of Terms,* highlighting common homeschooling terms and terms defined throughout the work. *References. Appendix 1:* Call for Participants. *Appendix 2:* Semi-Structured Interview Protocol. *Appendix 3:* Researcher Subjectivity & Experience.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

In this conceptual framework, I first begin by reiterating the centrality of carework and women's labor. Using feminist novelist Ursula K. Le Guin's notion of "the carrier bag," (Le Guin, 1989) my framework asserts the vitality of the domestic, despite–and indeed because of–its mundanity. Second, building on the theory of MotherScholarship (Lapayese, 2012b), my conceptual framework situates homeschool mothers as experts in their practices and experiences of homeschooling. Third, as articulated by feminist theory, women's experiences with domesticity and schooling are shaped by dialectical forces, out of which seeming "contradictions" are held in productive tension. Salient among these tensions, for the purpose of educational labor[8] is the dialectic between protection and punishment, the Foucauldian dilemma (Foucault, 1977) between education as liberation and regulation. Finally, I use an intersectional lens to both conceptualize and analyze mothers' homeschooling experiences, using this theoretical approach to help me understand how homeschooling sits at the intersection of vital elements–liberation and regulation, home and school, work and family–of the American educational experience.

In summary, this framework asserts the relationship between four key analytical and theoretical concepts that frame the whole of the project. These ideas run throughout the dissertation and offer landmarks to the way I approached homeschooling and collected, analyzed, and considered my findings. These concepts also serve to contextualize homeschooling in broader conversations and fields of inquiry.

When I began this work in 2018 I found that homeschooling was framed, if at all, as an extreme manifestation of neoliberal privatization or as something that didn't have much bearing on the public school system because it represented families "opting out." Theoretically, I had been approaching this work with a kind of defiance, a bold argument for why I thought homeschooling should make its way into every consideration of educational systems and policy. I never dreamed that the system itself would soon be engaged in homeschooling (or what I term *pandemic-schooling*) or that homeschooling would have its 15 minutes of fame. Now in 2021, amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic, the effort to center a conversation about homeschooling seems almost self-explanatory. Yet in the conversations about pandemic-schooling, the practice is taken up as a temporary measure or a stop-gap effort in the face of public health cataclysm. What these conversations still miss, and I believe this work illuminates, is the meaning that homeschooling has had, and will continue to have before, during, and after COVID.

The Carrier Bag

As a first theoretical approach, I knew that I wanted to tell a feminist story that centered women's work and narratives. Feminist scholars have long argued that traditional histories of labor and education miss much about the personal, everyday, and collective lives of women (Helmbold & Schofield, 1989; Kessler-Harris, 2003; Martin & Goodman, 2003). I would argue that it is in part because practices like homeschooling are dominated by women/femmes that they are devalued and overlooked.

As an important political, theoretical, and linguistic note I begin by saying that definitions of womanhood and femininity which have relied on notions of biological essentialism are no longer appropriate. Building on the work of feminist scholarship (Butler, 1999) and

[8] The range of educational work that parents perform, from helping with homework to serving on the PTA to homeschooling.

changes in popular usage and understanding, my work recognizes that gender, rather than being binary (male/female) is a spectrum, as well as a personal and social construction that is both a representation of the self and, as Judith Lorber argues a manifestation of power hierarchies (Lorber, 2008). Therefore, while much of my research is focused on mothers, women, and maternality, I recognize that these concepts are broad and imprecise categories. The subjects of my study primarily identified as women and mothers[9], but it is important to note that, while my work looks at the intersections of women's work and maternality, not all women give birth, nor is maternalism synonymous with women's work. Further, there are men and genderqueer people who bear children. When I use the term "women" throughout this work, I am referring to people who present as femme[10] or identify as women, speaking specifically about their gender identity but recognizing that this is an imprecise and limited designation.

Long a reader of science-fiction, particularly narratives written by women, I kept coming back to Ursula K. Le Guin and her anarcho-feminist "Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction." Le Guin's Carrier Bag centers not just women's work, but specifically the domestic and the continual, communal work of gathering food. She writes,

> It is hard to tell a really gripping tale of how I wrested a wild-oat seed from its husk, and then another, and then another, and then…[but]we've heard it, we've heard all about all the sticks and spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard thing, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is the new story. That is new. And yet old. Before–once you think about it, surely long before–the weapon, a late, luxurious, superfluous tool; long before the useful knife and ax; right along with the indispensable whacker, grinder, and digger–for what's the use of digging up a lot of potatoes if you have nothing to lug the ones you can't eat home in–with or before the tool that forces energy outward, we made the tool that brings energy home. (Le Guin, 1989, pp. 165, 167)

Le Guin acknowledges that this story can seem boring, even trivial, but that at its core is an essential labor of humanity–providing sustenance. Siobhan Leddy writes about Le Guin's theory, contextualizing it for a more contemporary struggle, saying that "while, in reality, most meaningful social change is the result of collective action, we aren't very good at recounting such a diffusely distributed account. The meetings, the fundraising, the careful and drawn-out negotiations–they're so boring! Who wants to watch a movie about a four-hour meeting between community stakeholders?" (Leddy, August 28, 2019, online/n.p.). But the four-hour meeting may be exactly where the real work gets done.

Le Guin's call to find meaning in the mundane, constituting a kind of antithesis to much of educational policy studies, has resonated in such fields as anthropology and social history, and suggests a dignity and importance to the activities and sensemaking of homeschool women. Using the framing of the carrier bag and its insistence on carework and nurturance I was able to

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[9] For a longer examination of the (loaded) connotations and implications of the word "woman," see Amanda Montell's book *Wordslut,* "Chapter 2: Wait … What Does The Word 'Woman' Mean Anyway?: Plus Other Questions Of Sex, Gender, and the Language Behind Them" (Montell, 2019, p. Ch.2). Writes Montell, "frustrating as it may be, there is ultimately not one simple definition of the word gender or man or woman. Some use gender to refer to a set of culturally learned behaviors, or a social status imposed upon them as a result of their sex. Others use it to mean an inherent sense of identity linked to their instinct or brain. Some use it to mean both" (Montell, p. 97)

[10] Originating in queer parlance, "femme" was a term used in opposition to "butch" to refer to women who presented as stereotypically feminine or girly (Blair & Hoskin, 2015). As adopted into wider usage however, femme is used as an additive descriptor to refer to people who embrace femininity, regardless of their gender; men, women, and non-binary people can all present as femme.

foreground questions of domesticity, care, and mothers' labor. Leddy's reframing of the carrier bag also made me wonder if homeschooling fit with notions of American exceptionalism and individualism, as I'd seen it framed, or with the understanding of the "four-hour meeting" where things get done, i.e., in a communal, collectivist frame. I wondered how I should tell a story of homeschooling, and whether it, despite also foregrounding the domestic, would also be one that centered narratives of nurturance.

Echoing Le Guin that the Carrier Bag is useful in that it is more concerned with those who have been socially perceived as women and their activities than men and theirs, it is women's stories that I and this dissertation aim to explore, in all of their domestic activity. Some feminist scholars have powerfully challenged Le Guin's narrative that domestic history is placid or peaceful or boring (Chadwick, 2018). There is inherent violence in childbirth, injury, sickness, and old age, all of which are central occupations of the domestic sphere and women's work. Further, there is violence and cruelty in women's labor, both in and out of the domestic sphere. Women participate in capitalism, conquest, slavery, settlement, and war, often in the name of the domestic or in their roles as caregivers, as mothers (e.g., Boyd, 2009; Jacobs, 2009; Jones-Rogers, 2019). In concert with these and other authors, I therefore argue that pretending a Carrier Bag story, i.e., a domestic history, will free us from a violent narrative is both disingenuous and inaccurate. Instead, I focus on how women are, as Michael Apple says, "simultaneously able to claim subaltern status based on the history of dominant gender regimes and having dominant status given their positioning in relationship to other oppressed groups" (p. 22). In this conceptual framework, I see that it is the bringing together of these elements–nurturance and violence–that is both so valuable and so necessary.

As I began this process of "bringing together," I tried to make sense of the dialectical forces that shape homeschoolers' lives and the *pushing-pulling* that homeschooling mothers are animated by, the forces that draw them towards the practice while also pushing them away from others. One example of a pushing-pulling might be the push away from a traditional public school due to quality right at the same moment a mother was feeling pulled towards homeschooling due to an interest in, say, an unstructured learning style like unschooling. In an interview a mother might tell you about one of these rationale first, but in reality they act in concert. I thought about the pushing-pulling that structures domestic work, carework, education, and mothering.

As feminist theory, and increasingly society[11], has begun to move beyond a static notion of the gender binary, there is growing recognition that the lived experience of gender isn't simple, either, but messy, evolving, and sometimes contradictory. The "messiness" that I refer to here, again, is part of the interconnected, unclear, and dialectical forces that feminist theory acknowledges are at the heart of women's experiences. Gender is "messy" because the experience of living in a patriarchy is full of confusing, conflicting, and unresolvable tensions. As women have (re)claimed their sexuality, for example, they must negotiate between subjectivity and being the object of male attention (Tolman, 2009). Or, as one songwriter

[11] Certainly for younger generations. Pew reports that "Ideas about gender identity are rapidly changing in the U.S., and Gen Z is at the front end of those changes. Gen Zers are much more likely than those in older generations to say they personally know someone who prefers to go by gender-neutral pronouns, with 35% saying so… Gen Z is by far the most likely to say that when a form or online profile asks about a person's gender it should include options other than "man" and "woman." Members of Gen Z are also similar to Millennials in their views on society's acceptance of those who do not identify as a man or a woman. Roughly half of Gen Zers (50%) and Millennials (47%) think that society is not accepting enough of these individuals" (Parker & Igielnik, 2020, May 14).

recently put it, "it's hard to be objectified just the right amount/and sometimes still have sex with dudes when they deserve to be called out" (Lark, 2021). A feminist commitment to acknowledging the messiness does not preclude examining the role of race and class hierarchies, or of neoliberalism in homeschooling, but invites us not to reduce homeschooling to such hierarchies.

Early work in the fields of feminist history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, promoted the then-radical idea that capturing women's lived experiences was a necessary part of scholarship. Making these claims opened up new studies and avenues of knowledge, but it also ushered in new ways of knowing. Feminist epistemology is, as Joyce McCarl Nielson writes, a paradigm shift that "focus[es] on the distinctive experience of women–that is, seeing women rather than just men in center stage, as both subject matter and creators of knowledge" (Nielsen, 1990, pp. 19-20). Centering women's lived expertise as home educators is the first necessary piece of my research, but it is not the end of my analysis.

Simply capturing events or practices like homeschooling from the perspective of women isn't a complete picture if we don't also account for and take seriously the pushing-pulling of the domestic sphere; parenting and reproduction; or work under capitalism. It is therefore necessary that I, as Nielson suggest, to move beyond a mere paradigm process–women known things–to a "feminist standpoint and dialectical process": a feminist view of the world and understanding of how gendered oppositional forces shape events. Or, a feminist theoretical understanding of how the dialectical structures and shapes events and, I would extend, people's lives. Nielson writes about the importance of considering the

> dialectical tension that characterizes most women's experience and feminist research. As developed by Westkott, dialectical refers to discontinuities, oppositions, contradictions, tensions, and dilemmas that form part of women's concrete experience in patriarchal worlds–dilemmas that are realized only with a feminist consciousness (Nielsen, 1990, p. 25).

It is therefore not enough to just interrogate practices like homeschooling that take place in traditionally feminized spaces like the home, we must further understand how that gendered work takes up goals with elements held in dialectical tension. Specifically, to what extent can homeschooling be both radically feminist and reproduce traditional gender roles? What does it mean to engage in work that is both essential and unseen, unpaid? In my research, I examine whether and how one group of homeschoolers perceive these potential contradictions. Of particular interest to me is gaining an understanding of whether these seeming "contradictions" will in fact reveal important truths about the systems and spaces–home, family, community, work–in which these women's educational labor occurs.

MotherScholarship

In order to build this critical feminist standpoint and dialectical process, my conceptual framework builds on the theoretical framework of MotherScholarship, a critical theory that posits the value of maternal knowledge and ways of knowing. This, in opposition to what Jane Duran calls academia's "masculinist, androcentric[12] tradition that yields a hypernormative,

[12] The claim that the Academy is built on a foundation of androcentric epistemology is a central claim of MotherScholarship (See Lapayese, 2012a, specifically Chapter 2, "Androcentrism in Schools."). Simply, androcentrism is the centering of masculinity. Within the academy, Elizabeth Anderson writes that "androcentrism occurs when theories take males, men's lives, or 'masculinity' to set the norm for humans or animals generally, with female differences either ignored or represented as deviant; when phenomena are viewed from the perspective of

idealized, and stylistically aggressive mode of thought" (Duran, 1991, p. 8) valuing the *appearance* of objectivity, rationality, and knowledge traditionally produced by men while simultaneously devaluing both women's contributions to the traditional objectivist cannon and the additional personal, biographical, and cultural knowledge with which women try to enrich academia. As Lapayese (2012) writes, "the mother-scholar standpoint challenges the notion that maternal identity is a devalued form of knowledge, believing that it should be elevated to the same space occupied by science and rationality" (Lapayese, 2012a, p. xii).

This goal of challenging androcentric epistemology has largely taken place in the context of the academy by focusing on the intersectional experiences of mothering faculty members. Thus far, MotherScholarship has insisted that scholars can also be mothers.[13] These insights are crucial but neglect the vital corollary—mothers can also be scholars. In summary, I seek to explore the extent to which the participants in my study view their educational expertise as augmented or even spring from their identity as mothers, or whether they experience these two identities–mother and educator–as independent or even at odds with each other.

The expertise claimed by the homeschool mothers in this study forms the foundation of the claims they make for parental rights and agentic control over the educational decision-making, content, and delivery of their children's education. These themes are explored in *Chapter 5: Work, "Homeschool is Parenting on Steroids,"* and my research explores how mothers' assertions of maternal love and their dedication to carework is framed by them as essential to the project of education.

Protection/Punishment

One of the dialectics highly salient to both schooling and domestic life is the relationship between protection and punishment, or the Foucauldian interconnection between discipline and punishment (Foucault, 1977). In other words, both homes and schools are always both protective and punishing, never just one or the other, and these two forces work in dialectical tension. The home can be both a refuge of safety and succor on the one hand and, at the very same time, a space of responsibility and regulation on the other, to say nothing of outright violence. Similarly, schools can be places of both protection and punishment. This conceptual faming seeks to understand how this tension between protection and punishment, always present in both schools and homes, structures their character and the activities like homeschooling that take place within them.

Dialectical Tension

Anecdotally, I recognize that both protection and care are present in the daily practice of education: "I'm giving you detention for your own good." There is excellent scholarship on the reform school (Colvin, 1997; Keeley, 2004), school discipline (Arum, 2003; Raby, 2012; Skiba & Peterson, 2000), corporal punishment (Heekes, Kruger, Lester, & Ward, 2020; Middleton,

men's lives, without regard to how women see them differently; and when male activities or predicaments are represented as the primary causes or sites of important changes, without regard to the roles of females in initiated or facilitating changes or the ways the situation of females has been crucial to determining structural constraints and potentials for change" (E. Anderson, 1995, pp. 57-58).

[13] Early data about the impacts of pandemic-schooling on female academics is worrisome, from the stalling of tenure clocks (Minello, April 17, 2020) to the immediate decrease in publications submitted (Kitchener, April 24, 2020). These effects are vital to the political mission of MotherScholarship, but focusing only on outcomes for the academy is both too narrow and a missed opportunity to expand the radical premise of this critical theory.

2008), and other school practices that are intended to protect and ameliorate, even while they punish and inflict violence. Even in the language of some of these educational forms–the correctional facility or reformatory school–can we see the protection/punishment dialectic at work. Writes James Keeley on this history of juvenile correctional education,

> correctional education was used as one of the reasons to justify workhouses, houses of refuge, reformatories, and industrial schools. In these settings, education was purported to be for the benefit of the incarcerates, but in reality it became an integral cog in the maintenance of institutions and cultural domination by the established society (p. 278).

While the correctional institution is an older method of schooling, and discipline, the core of these ideas as existing in tension persists. Pedro Noguera (2003) writes that it is marginalized children who most need help who are most frequently targeted for discipline. He writes,

> Too often, schools react to the behavior of such children while failing to respond to their unmet needs or the factors responsible for their problematic behavior. In so doing, they contribute to the marginalization of such students, often pushing them out of school altogether, while ignoring the issues that actually cause the problematic behavior. Schools also punish the neediest children be- cause in many schools there is a fixation with behavior management and social control that out- weighs and overrides all other priorities and goals (p. 342)

In this way, the protection/punishment works not just on individual children but on the systemic level, with school officials favoring the protection of some (order) at the expense of punishment of a few.

The dialectic between protection and punishment is therefore not a metaphor, nor is it merely co-incidental to the domestic or the school, but is intrinsic to the home and school as products of their co-construction as educational spaces. In this research, I understand that punishment and protection come together as, alternately, rationale for and means of action. Just as a teenaged girl is "dress coded" and sent out of class because her bra strap is showing, missing educational time to protect her virtue and that of the boys around her, so too is a child denied privileges like screen time or dessert for hitting their sibling. A bra strap has nothing to do with calculus, just as dessert has nothing to do with sibling camaraderie. Yet because both schools and homes are places are both spaces in which "being punished for protection" is part of the educational model, these ideas exist in dialectical tension.

Protection

As protective sites, and in keeping with Glenn's (2010) definition of carework, schools are engaged in all three types of care she cites: caring for the person, physical care, and fostering people's relationships and social connections. At the most instrumental level, schools are intended to protect the Republic via the creation of a well-prepared citizenry and to protect individual opportunity by imparting knowledge and building skills. There is, further, a rights-based argument to be made for protection in schooling, which begins with legal cases protecting the very right to an education, regarding student race (e.g., "Brown v. Board of Education," 1954), gender (e.g., Title IX, "Education Amendments Act of 1972," 2018), home language (e.g., "Lau v. Nichols," 1974), disability status (e.g., "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)," 1990; and "Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)," 2004), and equality of funding (e.g., "Serrano v. Priest," 1971).

One important perspective on the feminization of teaching and the persistent view of education as women's work, can be found in the work of theorists who have elaborated a feminist ethic of

care and the possibility of resistance against structures of power (Fisher & Tronto, 1990; Gilligan, 2013). Gilligan elaborates a feminist ethic of care, which she defines as

> resistance to the injustices inherent in patriarchy (the association of care and caring with women rather than with humans, the feminization of care work, the rendering of care as subsidiary to justice—a matter of special obligations or interpersonal relationships). A feminist ethic of care guides the historic struggle to free democracy from patriarchy; it is the ethic of a democratic society, it transcends the gender binaries and hierarchies that structure patriarchal institutions and cultures. An ethics of care is key to human survival and also to the realization of a global society (Gilligan, 2011).

When schools are acting in their most protective, caring, and liberatory capacity, Gilligan would argue, they care not just for the individual, but also for the collective. This theory of care also frames schools, and by extension the carework that occurs within them, as part of the intellectual project of education. Because care is necessarily for relationships, connection, growth, and understanding, learning cannot happen without care.

Nel Noddings argues that care is a moral orientation, not merely a characteristic of schooling. Arguing that carework, which she defines both as schools investing in the "moral and social growth of their citizens" and practicing "a form of what may be called *relational ethics.* A relational ethic remains tightly tied to the experience because its deliberations focus on the human beings involved in the situation under consideration and their relations to each other" (Noddings, 1988, pp. 220, 218) is fundamental to the practice of teaching, she suggests ways that the institutional structure of schools– which, as bureaucratic systems are organized against individualized care– could be reformed to be more caring (Noddings, 1995). Noddings finds that schools have become too preoccupied with the "teaching of basic skills" and that these have become a stand-in for the provision and teaching of care. Noddings argues that schools should not just model care in their teaching, pedagogy, and curriculum, but should also teach care, for reasons of academic literacy, connection to the standard subjects, connection of students and subjects to great existential questions, and because caring connects people person-to-person (Noddings, 1995, p. 676).

Noddings' research reminds us that caring is not a new development in American education, but the contemporary iteration of fundamental tenets. Her work considers the long history of moral education in American schooling, a tradition that "a relational ethic, an ethic of caring" updates, secularizes, and refocuses on holistic models of teaching and assessment (Noddings, 1988, p. 218). Noddings' work is emblematic of the aspect of schooling that casts "education" as the processes of caring for, nourishing, and edifying students. This ethos of caring is often feminized, linked to the maternal instinct to nurture (Noddings, 2001), the history of female teachers (both romanticized and real, e.g., Rousmaniere, 1994; Yezierska, 1923), and the (broader implications of the) feminization of education and teaching (Boyle, 2004).

Protection and care become especially salient when we consider that schools are a unique care environment in that they act *in loco parentis* when entrusted with the physical, intellectual, moral, and emotional safety of children. And while this custody may be shared with parents, it is significantly ongoing and long-standing. This familial relationship further frames the rationale for and orientation towards a care-based notion of schooling.

Similarly, the popular model of the family home is built on notions of care work and definitions of love, companionship, and protection. To this, we add the idea that homes are nurturing educative spaces where children learn both soft skills and hard facts. The home is an important site for language acquisition and early literacy, and research finds that exposure to

written texts leads to vocabulary and listening comprehension skills necessary for ongoing reading growth, while parental involvement teaches children about the early reading and writing linked to early literacy (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). The home is a place of both physical nutrition, but also where children learn about and become embedded in the policy, environmental, individual, and behavioral variables of nutrition environments (Glanz, Sallis, Saelens, & Frank, 2005). And in both religious and secular families, children learn about ethics and morality from parents and communities (Nucci & Turiel, 1993; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2007).

Caring for children and maintaining the home, is, overall, more often seen as women's work. As I explore in *Chapter 3: The History of Home/Schooling,* the separate spheres ideology of the mid-19th Century idealized feminine domesticity and relied on the cultural proposition that women were naturally better at childcare and housework (Rotman, 2006; Welter, 1966). During the second wave feminist movement, sociologists Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung documented the "second shift" wherein women in heterosexual couples with young children where both parents were working did up to a month more of 24-hour days a year of housework, parenting, and management of domestic life (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). In 1993, researchers Demo and Acock found that in families studied with children under the age of 18, across all family types (first marriages, remarriages, single-parent headed by a divorced mother, and single-parent headed by a never-married mother), regardless of women's employment, women performed "two to three times more housework than their husbands or cohabitating partners" (Demo & Acock, 1993). Contemporary research shows that even though male partners have increased the amount of time spent on domestic labor (Bureau of labor Statistics, 2021), women still do about twice as much as men and that the burden of childcare on women becomes both heavier and more unequal in families with young children (Pepin, Sayer, & Casper, 2018; Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2015).

Feminist theorists of care seek to both affirm the value of women's role in models of care and understand the "feminine voice" as, contrary to prior psychological research, highly morally developed, "defining the self and proclaiming its worth on the basis of the ability to care for and protect others" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 496) while at the same time insisting that we develop agender models of care (Noddings, 2001) and move towards a society that values care work (Fraser, 1994).

Punishment

In tension with protection is the work of punishment, the function to discipline, correct, and control. In this guise, schools mandate obedience or mete out penalties, and sort students into "winning" and "losing" tracks for their future lives–(non-)scholars, citizens, workers, and consumers (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Eckert, 1989; A. G. Powell, 1985). Violence in schooling is both literal and psychic, intellectual, and ideological. Scholars have considered how schools act as sites of racialized oppression and suffering (Dumas, 2014); gendered violence (Ferguson, 2001; Wun, 2016a, 2016b); the beginning of the "school-to-prison pipeline,"(Edelman, 2007; Noguera, 2003); domination (Fanon, 1965); and act as sites of status quo reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973; P. E. Willis, 1977).While corporeal punishment is increasingly less frequent, this is the function of schooling that leads scholars of the practice to find that "disciplinary practices used in American classrooms indicate that episodes of teacher violence have been a consistent and conspicuous part of American schooling since the very beginning," (F. J. Ryan, 1994, p. 71) a practice the Supreme Court has ruled does not constitute cruel or unusual

punishment ("Ingraham vs. Wright," 1977). In addition to direct methods of punishment like paddling, John Devine argues that contemporary schooling has undergone a "process by which violence becomes normalized in everyday school life…[via] an accompanying ethos of fear… wherever…a techo-security apparatus is relined on as the primary mechanism for achieving schoolwide discipline (Devine, 1996, p. 1). Even when outright violence is missing–as in the case of restorative justice, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), or other evidence-based discipline and intervention practices–the logics of punishment are still at play. As Rekia Jibrin writes about the implementation of restorative justice (RJ) in the Oakland city schools,

> RJ attempted to lower suspensions and holistically create alternative cultures to school punishment. When harm occurred in schools, RJ focused on repairing harms. Instead of punishing wrongdoing, RJ encouraged accountability and community building (Sumner, Silverman, and Frampton 2010). But even with RJ's caring rhetoric and practice, OUSD's hand in teacher turn over, police misconduct, an over-reliance on school security officers, and absent academic resources could not be overlooked. Poor, racialized students had little to learn with regardless of who their teachers were or if they had teachers at all (Jibrin, 2017, p. 551).

In the practice of RJ, explicit goals of protects co-existed with logics of punishment. This occurred both because of the reality of Oakland's schools (for example, the underfunding and lack of teaching staff Jibrin mentions) but also because, even when articulated as protection, RJ is still fundamentally used as a tactic of discipline. In this way, protection and care always exist simultaneously with punishment and punitiveness. In the absence of overt violence, schools use ridicule, rules, and ultimately suspension or expulsion "to produce the school as a particular kind of space, often one defined by hierarchical and ordered relations" (Raby, 2012, p. 4). This is the purpose of schooling that identifies "education" as the processes of regulating and disciplining students.[14]

Black intersectional feminist Joy James, theorizing the same ethos of carework in schooling that Gilligan considers, sees that the imposition of violence and the exploitation function of schooling actually perverts caring to punishment. She speaks of "Captive Maternals… either biological females or those feminized into caretaking and consumption," i.e., teachers and others whose labor has been pressed into the service of care, and the way their care labor is absorbed by the state in service of its own stabilization, productivity, and reproduction. She writes that Black bodies are the fuel on which the the American Empire feeds, via war, prisons, and labor, and "Black Captive Maternals remain disproportionately disciplined, denigrated, and consumed for the greater democracy" (James, 2016, p. 256). In her book *Bitter Milk* Madeline Grumet makes a similar argument, finding that women who teach become complicit in the project of delivering up children to the patriarchal state via schools. Grumet's theory is that female teachers are taught to subvert their instincts to care and maternality and thus leave care(work) in the family home. Both James and Grumet therefore see the school as an institution that works to pervert and subvert or appropriate the work of feminized care.

There are also elements of violence and discipline that run throughout the domestic home space. As I discussed with reference to Le Guin and her Carrier Bag, the domestic sphere

[14] Though Rebecca Raby finds that there are "several ways to conceptualize discipline: 1) as mastering a discipline; 2) as providing order needed for learning; 3) as an independent good; and 4) as cultivated self-discipline" (Raby, 2012, p. 76) and, with regard to the issue at hand, not all of these models would constitute punishment.

contains within it inherently violent elements. As Federici identifies, the domestic space is inherently violent in a different sense, as it functions as a system of regulation that shapes women's identities and robs them of their labor, agency, and political citizenship. In a Foucauldian sense of discipline and punishment, this violence continues to structure women's lives–from within and without–long after the overt threat has passed (Foucault, 1977). In this understanding of the domestic, one of its main purposes is to regulate and discipline women, bending their behavior and labor to both capitalism and the patriarchy.

The domestic sphere and home should also be seen as rational for and means by which violence and discipline have been enacted in their own right, as part of the American settler colonial project. Stephanie Jones-Rogers, author of *They Were Her Property*, debunks the myth that white southern women were somehow removed from or outside the institution of chattel slavery, writing that, instead, "Slave-owning women not only witnessed the most brutal features of slavery, they took part in them, they profited from them, and they defended them" (Jones-Rogers, 2019, p. ix). Jones-Roberts writes about how slavery was, for a certain class of white southern woman, a mainstay of her domestic portfolio and integral to all of the activities that defined her womanhood: marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, food growth and preparation, dressmaking, and housework. Margaret Jacobs writes that white women, in their roles as wives and mothers, used domesticity as their entrée into public policy. In *White Mother to a Dark Race* Jacobs writes, "They justified their increased public role, often condemned as outside their proper sphere, by identifying their activism with motherhood, women's traditional domain. Through this emerging maternalist politics, they offered to mother other seemingly disadvantaged women and advocated policies designed to strengthen mothering" (Jacobs, 2009, p. 87). Through Jacob's work we can see that maternalism was weaponized, regulating while claiming to care. Themes of settler colonialism will be explored in greater detail in *Chapter 3: The History of Home/Schooling.*

Chapter 3: The History of Home/Schooling

Whereas many policy debates today represent homeschooling as the antithesis of public schooling, historians have demonstrated that schooling and home have evolved together symbiotically, just as notions of womanhood and public have evolved together. Rather than binary, the home and school are intertwined, because women's domestic and educational lives are intertwined. Moreover, this relationship has been a messy one as women have navigated home, school, and the relationship between them in multiple ways. The history thus invites us to ask, not, why did some women betray (one version of the) public? But, how did they imagine and navigate public/home life in ways that were always constrained yet always imaginative? These negotiations, and the practices like homeschooling that grew out of them, have been innovative and creative, even as they have been belittled.

This history, and the revised story it offers about the intertwined domestic home and the public school, served as my intellectual framing as I began work on the empirical research presented later in this dissertation. As I began to think about "what is homeschooling?" and what was compelling about it, I began to ask how homeschooling was puzzling and banal, unusual and familiar. The answers I came to are presented, in part, in this chapter and also served to structure my phenomenological research. Through this history I came to see homeschooling as not just a practice, but a manifestation of long-simmering, unresolved issues of work, family, schooling, and home.

This chapter offers a discussion about schooling and the intersection between public and private spheres and how that meeting is moderated by women's work. I investigate how homeschooling sits in this convergence of public and private, and offers us an intimate look at how both the home and the school have been co-constructed by women, via discipline, as educational spaces. The chapter takes up a conceptual history the Cult of True Womanhood, using this examination as an entrée into understanding the coming together of home and school that make homeschooling possible.

In section one, I delve into the relationship of the domestic to schooling. Neither I nor the home schooling moms I Interviewed invented the complexities of domesticity and femininity, nor their relationship to the state and public life. This chapter ties these themes together: the complicated relationship between public and private; how mothers have long constructed identities that both conform to and resist ideologies of True Womanhood and its relationship to domesticity; and what this has to say about homeschooling, gender, and schooling writ large.

In the next section I discuss women's labor through the frame of feminized domesticity and how education became a central component of this ideology. I discuss how the aspirational 'Cult of True Womanhood'–which emerged just as the common school movement was gaining prominence in the United States–actually reveals powerful truths about the interconnectedness between the home and the school. I then explore how "discipline" is subsumed into "domestication" and develop a discussion of how this model of discipline and domestication cut across the school and home. Through this, I argue that a central component of domesticity was treating women as educative experts based on their adherence to the traits of True Womanhood.

In the third and final section of this chapter I provide a narrative history of the feminist movement through the lenses of domesticity, education, and women's work. This history questions whether we might be in, or on the edge of a fourth wave of feminism, and draws particular attention to the question of women's gendered labor, theorizing that educational labor is the unidentified *third shift.*

Domestication

Any good history should begin, of course, in the beginning. With that goal in mind, most historical accounts of homeschooling begin, logically, with some early account of education that takes place in the home, to make the claim that Americans have always practiced some form of homeschooling.

There are multiple histories of homeschooling, but *Homeschool: An American history*, by researcher and conservative homeschooling advocate Milton Gaither is indicative of this conceit. Gaither begins his history in the American colonial period, pointing out that early settler colonial families placed a high regard on literacy (Gaither, 2008). The central and oft-repeated thesis of this text is that home education is an integral and time-honored American tradition, wherein homeschooling and out-of-home schooling were undertaken with the same educatory and nation-building[15] aims.

Histories of homeschooling often then trace the inherent tension–and interplay–between American nation-building and skepticism about the state. Like many histories of homeschooling, (See also: Carper & Hunt, 2007; Guterson, 1993; Stevens et al., 2003), Gatither's account picks up in earnest with an analysis of the contemporary movement that began in the 1960s and 1970s. These histories recount how back-to-the-land, collectivist movements, as part of their larger skepticism of government intervention and oversight, moved to educate children outside of institutional settings (i.e., formal schools; but also questioning norms of education like testing, grading, and age-segregated classes). According to historians of homeschooling (Gaither, 2009; Lines, 2000) Homeschooling flowed naturally from a broader ethos of divestment from institutions–physical, structural, and ideological.

Most histories then follow with a narrative of how, upon gaining newfound traction, homeschooling spread from the left to the right, making its way across the aisle of the Culture Wars to gain popularity with conservative families. Like progressive families, Evangelicals were concerned with creeping Institutionalism and state control over children. As Heather lines writes, "The contemporary homeschooling movement began as a liberal, not a conservative, alternative to the public school… then, in the 1980s as the school culture drifted to the left, conservative and religious families were surprised to find themselves in a countercultural position" (Lines, 2000, pp. 75-76). Of course, such histories elide over the other counter-cultural, anti-statist schooling movements of the same eras, namely the free schools (Graubard, 2018), freedom schools (Perlstein, 1990), and other educational experiments (Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

These histories of homeschooling provide ample coverage of the particular features and characteristics of these different eras of homeschooling. However, these histories of the practice fail to detail the symbolic and cultural work of homeschooling. Further, I contend that by beginning with the contemporary homeschooling movement, these works have already missed the elusive "beginning," the moment when homeschooling was created. By that, I mean not the moment when some children were educated in the home, as in Gaither's chapter on Colonial America, but the moment when our understanding of "homeschooling" was created. The colonial-era Americans Gaither and others profile would not have identified themselves as homeschoolers, and not just because the term had not yet been coined, but because they didn't ascribe to the identity of "homeschooler" or take on the political ideology that brings together the

[15] For example, of the revolutionary era, Gaither writes "home tutoring, private academies, common schools supported by local taxes… all of these venues taught basically the same thing because all had the same goal of forging a common American identity from the disparate groups that made up the population" (Gaither, 2008, p. 26).

disparate individuals I describe in the introduction to this chapter.[16] Homeschooling is much more than just educating at home. Obviously the location is central to homeschooling, and the practice is additionally characterized by five features: (a) Education is parent-directed; (b) education is customized/customizable to meet child and family needs; (c) education can take place outside of classrooms and "book learning"; (c) education is primarily home-based; and (d) within state homeschooling laws, educational choices are up to the parent (Definition adapted from the HSLDA, 2020, January 10). That said, this definition (and histories of homeschooling) miss critical real and symbolic features of the practice. In this section, I detail how domestication and–as an embedded phenomenon–discipline, structures both the practice and its practitioners.

The Interconnection of Home and School

In order to find the true beginning point of homeschooling, we need to look to trace the history back–through various conceptions of what both "home" and "school" have been–to the era in which they became inexorably intertwined. It is only when we do that can begin to see the ways in which the home as educative space and the school as domestic space have long overlapped–a conflation which has allowed for the very concept of homeschooling to be possible.[17] I further contend that the crucial and often unexamined feature of the overlap between these two spheres–home and school–is women's labor. In part, as theorists of teaching like Madeline Grumet write, it is because

> Only men, according to Hegel and Marx, can attain second nature, the rational culture of the upstanding citizen. That consciousness is achieved through labor, and neither theorist…is willing to recognize the work that women contribute to child rearing is real, honest-to-goodness, social, material labor (Grumet, 1988, p. 62)

More than this crucial oversight, though, Grumet's work on motherhood and teaching critically explicates how theorizations of both work and these institutions miss the material, symbolic, and systemic ways women's labor within them operate.

We should therefore trace the origins of that overlap, specifically as it relates to women's labor and the labor of mothers, to the era of the 1820s-1860s, the period of time Barbara Welter called the "Cult of True Womanhood" (Welter, 1966), and has been called by other scholars the "Cult of Domesticity" (Kaplan, 1998; M. P. Ryan, 1982).[18] This was precisely at the moment that the Common School movement was expanding, when schools and homes were jointly constructed as sites of productivity, economy, and learning. Both the Cult of True Womanhood and the Common Schools were engaged in education, but also in national projects of domestication, discipline, and empire (Kathryn Kish Sklar, 2019) via the logics of domination and settler colonialism. Simultaneously, the aesthetics of the domestic were used by women to further American imperialism, creating yet another elision between the public and private work of protection/punishment (Wexler, 2000).

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[16] Important, reciprocally, is the long-held American ideal of parental involvement in schooling, as evidenced by parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and homework; here we see another vital pre-history of the interaction between the home and schooling.

[17] This conflation over time has opened up what political scientists call the "Overton Window," or the shifts in policy that follow political change that follow social change (Lehman, 2010).

[18] As scholars who followed Welter note, and as I examine later in this chapter, there was always a crucial disjunction between the stated ideology and actual practice of Separate Spheres or the Cult of True Womanhood. As such, the rhetoric of these Cults cuts two ways, both disciplining and legitimizing women's entry into the public sphere. At the same time, as scholars we must recognize that they are something of straw women, more useful as theoretical and aspirational constructions than as lived experiences.

Thus examining the Cults of True Womanhood and Domesticity allow us to see how women's work–in the home and in schools–both bound together these two spaces and created a kind of shared space between them, wherein practices like homeschooling, which simultaneously challenge and reify norms and institutions, can thrive.

Separate Spheres?

The term(s) "Cult of True Womanhood" (or "Cult of Domesticity") were coined by Barbara Welter in 1966 and taken up by those interested in studying America's antebellum era. The Cult of True Womanhood asserts that a woman's place is properly the domestic sphere and specifically sets up the framing that women are sovereigns or rulers of this realm. Men, of course, in opposition or contrast, are rulers of the public sphere. According to the logic of this formulation, women are inherently more capable and naturally more inclined to the skills and tasks of home-making and domesticity. These include food preparation; shopping; decorating and furnishing; clothing and laundry; hygiene; cleanliness and cleaning; child-rearing; and domestic budgeting and buying. The "domestic" sphere was also elevated to the realm of ethics, morality and religion: women were posited as naturally more religious, moral, ethic, and pure of heart, which made them "better suited" to handling the spiritual matters of the home. Extended further, women were seen as preternaturally disposed to be nurturers, caregivers, parents, nurses, etc. This "nature" had a twofold implication: 1) Women were naturally more pious, reverent, and God fearing; 2) They were, in many ways, too fragile, too pure for the messy public roles that men (their husbands, fathers, or sons) often played in the nasty worlds of the economy, politics, and business. Praised openly by moral and civic pundits of the era, the Cult of True Womanhood was a power-sharing agreement between the genders. Women were to share power with their husbands (or fathers, if they had the audacity to be unmarried) but were to take full ownership of everything in their own domestic realm.

The historiography on the Cult of True Womanhood notices both that is complicated by the frontier homestead–women's labor was necessary for production–and that the frontier provided opportunities for, as Elizabeth Jameson writes, "a female culture which revolved around the female life cycle and around women's work" (Jameson, 2012, p. 148). Women in the west and on homesteads experiences cultures characterized by "sharing and respect for women expressed among homesteading families in [for example] northern Colorado" (K. Harris, 1984, p. 210).

This idealized way of organizing the world, was posited as the proper, natural balance and it was understood as giving women a very special and very honored place, within their households, marriages, and the sociocultural life of the United States.[19]

Women were seen as being perfectly represented in the public sphere by this arrangement while men, of course, were seen as being perfectly represented in the domestic sphere by the work that their wives did there. At the time, for example, due in part to the laws that enshrined coverture[20], anti-suffragists argued that women didn't need to vote, because husbands would voice an opinion on behalf of their wives. When it came to things like health, hygiene, food, and

[19] It should be noted that the Cult of True Womanhood flourished throughout Western societies, but was especially held up as the ideal in British colonies and the United States.

[20] The legal doctrine "which held that a wife had no legal standing because her being was completely incorporated into that of her husband. The doctrine was imported from England into Colonial America" (Zaher, 2002, p. 459). Zaher writes that coverture "has not yet disappeared from the law" which was the case upon her writing in 2002; some deem this no longer the case after the 2015 Obergefell vs. Hodges (same-sex marriage) decision, while other legal scholars find elements of coverture still extant in the law and legal doctrine (see e.g.,Tait, 2015).

proper household budgeting, it was assumed that men's interests, the maintenance of his household, and his desire for strong, well-bred, and healthy children and would all be seen to by his capable domestic counterpart: his wife. The Cult of True Womanhood gave wealthy white women a special status, elevating and fixing her in her a precise role and physical space. This hierarchical order was extended and expanded to account for Biblical patriarchy: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body" (Ephesians, 5:23, KJV).

Focused squarely on the home, these terms would seem at first glance to have little to do with formal schooling. However, it is in this idealized conception of gender roles and family that we begin to see the entanglement between the home and school through the concept of domestication. Whether or not this idealized private or domestic sphere ever truly existed has been a matter of some debate amongst feminist theorists and historians. Later historians and poststructuralist theorists point to the absolutist framing of this concept and the way that it elides complicated issues of gender and power, even for the white women at its core, to say nothing of Black and other minoritized women, women working outside the home, immigrant women, and others.

Later gender theory particularly began to question whether the "separate spheres" were ever truly separate and, if not, for whom this fiction was being reinforced. Writing in in 1990, Myra Marx Ferree details the ways that postmodern gender theory

> …move[s] theorizing about families away from the emphasis on dichotomies such as public or private, love or money, traditional or modern, and toward recognition of the diverse and contested nature of gender conventions both today and in the past. Rather than positing two opposite, comprehensive, consistent, and exclusive "sex roles," the new feminist theory identifies a variety of actively gendered roles that link families with other social institutions, offer rewards and costs to both women and men, and are both controversial and internally contradictory (Ferree, 1990, p. 866)

This reframing of "separate spheres" is integral to the project at hand, as it helps to draw attention to the ways in which the public and private spheres, here recognized as the family home and the public school, became and have remained deeply enmeshed. Further anthropological research has reified this theoretical reframing (Rotman, 2006). Recognizing, as both the theory and historical record bear out, that the "private" (home) and the "public" (school) are closely linked by personages, work, goals, and structures, allows us to better understand how gendered power moves between and through the school and home.

Conceptually usefully but practically fictive, drawing a bright line between home and school is inauthentic to both the lived reality and ideological understanding of these institutions. Shared goals and, in particular, a focus on the work of domestication, links these two seemingly separate spheres. Domestication is an expansive concept that contains within it a host of dualities and serves to illuminate crucial tensions at the center of American educational and family life. The joint work of domestication has shaped both American "school" and "home;" but without their intertwined and mirrored configuration, the US notion of homeschooling would be impossible. These peculiarities reveal the gendered work of parental actors, both individual and institutional, and the claims they make for control over children.

At the same time, whether or not the sharp absolutism of separate spheres ever existed in practice, its ideals and central tenets permeated American popular discourse, social behaviors, cultural expectations, and closely-held ideals. As many (Breslow Rubin, 1976; Goldin, 1990; Matthaei, 1982) have noted, adherence to the ideals of the Cult of Domesticity was actually

stronger amongst the white working class than amongst the upper classes, despite the fact that white women of this station had to work outside the home and its espoused values were out of reach. Ongoing research has found poor and working-class whites continue to hold many of these values (more strongly than other segments of the population; see: M. Lamont, 2000)[21].

Those that study the imposition of "respectability" and "uplift" politics on non-white but specifically Black women (from both within and without the Black establishment) similarly note the politics of appeasement of a striving-but-never reaching for a white woman's middle class ideal (Higginbotham, 1994; White, 2010). This imposition resurrects the familiar protection/punishment tension, with Black women both sought protection from racist male violence and were punished for failing to achieve white middle class ideals. It is thus useful to recognize "Cult of True Womanhood" as an aspirational norm, rather than as a practical manifestation of gender and race relations. Even if we concede that separate spheres were never actually separate, examining how domestic spaces were conceived of and how women were ideally positioned relative to those spaces is enormously important and serves to illuminate ongoing realities of gender relations.

Separate Spheres and Settler Colonial Logics

The American Cult of True Womanhood emerged via the imported European racial and gender logics, hierarchies, and structures of settler colonialism (Glenn, 2015). Scholars of the Cult of True Womanhood place its height from 1820-1860 (Welter, 1966), a period in history which also contains the true arrival of industrialization, the beginnings of the Common School movement, and the full feminization of the teaching profession. One of the crucial paradoxes, then, is how this ideology of the home flourished at exactly the same moment that the country was being pushed into cities, mechanization, and standardization, while (unmarried) women were being moved into work as teachers. Of course, this is perhaps not a paradox at all, if we consider the Cult of True Womanhood both aspirational and an attempt at recapitulation.

Though while certainly not exclusive to the United States (in particular, Victorian-Era England was highly enamored of the concept of True Womanhood), in the American context, the ideology took shape as the country was grappling with foundational questions of slavery, citizenship, immigration, (Irons, 2010), the achievement of Manifest Destiny, and the ongoing "Indian Problem" (Adams, 1995; B. Rouleau, 2020). Thus in the American context, as Amy Kaplan argues, the ideology of separate spheres was used as the counter-balancing force to a nation rapidly expanding through violent conquest and territorial acquisition; domesticity was both the answer to and corollary of settler colonialism (Kaplan, 1998). She writes, "If, on the one hand, domesticity draws strict boundaries between the home and the world of men, on the other, it becomes the engine of national expansion, the site from which the nation reaches beyond itself through the emanation of women's moral influence" (p. 586). The ideology and practice of

[21] While recent research (McDermott, Knowles, & Richeson, 2019) on the Trump era clarifies fine-grained distinctions amongst different groups of the white working class not previously illuminated by earlier findings ike Lamont's 2000 ethnography, they still find high adherence to traditional "respectability" norms amongst what authors Knowles, McDermott, and Richeson call "working class patriots," (E. Knowles, McDermott, & Richeson, 2021, forthcoming). In addition, they "embrace American identity more than class identity, emphasize the values of responsibility and hard work, derogate the poor as lazy and undeserving, express admiration for the rich, and report feeling respected because of the work they do. In turn, Patriot identity was associated with strongly negative views of immigrants and racial minorities and positive attitudes toward Donald Trump" (E. Knowles et al., 2021, forthcoming, p. 2).

separate spheres became the answer to the transition from a slave-owning to post-emancipation society; Indian education; the annexation of Texas; and other acts of American expansion and Imperialism.

White women of means were eager to embrace the Cult of True Womanhood in large part because it gave them a rarified position relative to poorer white women and women of all other races, (but especially Black women). While rich white women claimed an exalted position by "staying home," this was only possible through (and in direct contrast to) the system's degradation of domestic labor by enslaved, freed, or poor Black labor (Haley, 2016). The identity of "woman" was thus tightly constrained by settler colonial logics of race, class, citizenship, and power; limited to a very few; and moderated by proximity to whiteness and wealth. The "true" woman of the Cult of True Womanhood was one who upheld the system's virtues of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity within hierarchies of heteropatriarchy and whiteness.

Perhaps ironically, the white upper and upper-middle class women who most closely upheld this ideal were actually able, (via their identity as "true" women and mothers, and their demonstrated proficiencies at domestication) to pass into the public realm in this guise. Beginning in this era we therefore see women making claims to political participation, social welfare projects, and education based on their roles as wives, mothers, and capable agents of the domestic sphere (Ginzberg, 1992). This weaponization of "good mothering" became a powerful tool, especially in the argument for Indian child removal (Jacobs, 2009) and censure of the poor, new immigrants, and (post the Civil War) emancipated Blacks (Piven & Cloward, 1971; Wacquant, 2009). Under the guises of morality, benevolence, and good mothering, the Cults were instrumental in both solidifying and upholding settler colonial systems for a new era.

Cult of Domesticity & Teaching

So far, I have been focusing on only one of the central terms of the separate spheres literature, the "Cult of True Womanhood" to examine who was allowed to lay claim to the identity of womanhood and what roles and duties that identity ideally prescribed. Welter and others use the terms "Cult of Domesticity" and "Cult of True Womanhood," if not interchangeably, as embedded terms. In separate sphere literature, the "true" woman was one who upheld the ideologies and logics of the Cult of Domesticity. As historians have repeatedly shown, the home was constructed with the paid economy and the inequalities of the one shaped the inequalities of the other. Thus as critical race scholars and gender theorists would remind us, "womanhood" within the Cults was (re)constructed using the hierarchical tools of other systems and therefore an identity not open to all. Idealized or "true" womanhood therefore served a gatekeeping function, the barrier to entry into the space of domesticity. It is necessary, then, to turn our attention to the other term within this literature, the "Cult of Domesticity" to consider the symbolic and practical ways an idealized form of the domestic has shaped our discourse and beliefs in historically and contemporarily relevant ways.

The Cult of Domesticity held special appeal in the United States, as Americans have from the first been engaged in projects of domestication, in all its many forms and definitions. As a settler colonial nation, the United States has taken up the task of domestication–of people, land, animals, and material property–as its most foundational and causal mission. The term *domesticate* or *domestication* is surprisingly elastic, offering a long list of variations and interpretations. At the heart of each is the idea of the wild versus the refined, the struggle to achieve discipline over chaos. It might thus seem that domesticate and discipline are interchangeable synonyms, but this comparison would excise the descriptive preciseness of each.

Domestication can be used in the context of:

1. Homely arts (practical skills, thrift, economy, etc.)
2. Morality (saving or distinguishing the soul of the Godly from those of the unredeemed or Savage)
3. Culture (refinement, manners, breeding, finishing, etc.)
4. Subjugation (e.g., of people, animals, nature)
5. State (a "domestic" nation" in opposition to a "foreign" country or Other)

Domestication, from the Latin *domesticus* or "belonging to the house," in each of these cases signals the work of a superordinate Ruler laying claim to a subordinate Subject (person, physical state, or state of being), and bringing it under the control or "into the house" of the Ruling agent. Each of these definitions of the term domestication can be found inherent the American settler colonial project of land disposession, establishment of a white spremacist racial order, subjugation of Indigenous peoples, and the imposition of heteropatriarchy (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Glenn, 2015). Domestication is also deeply entwined with the work of parenting, and of schooling, part of the central goals of raising children into society. Here we see how domestication is not a metaphor but instead a far-reaching project, one that starts at home and continues into newly-claimed territory, as the proverbial young man "go[es] west, and grow[s] up with the country."[22]

The work of domestication is inexorably linked, through practices like schooling, to discipline and violence. As Katherine Sklar theorizes in her work on domesticity and imperialism, educators like Catherine Beecher were writing for "women teachers in new communities, and aimed at those 'in moderate circumstances,' *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* was written for white settler society" (2019, p. 1258). Even more, Beecher sounded the alarm and called for more women teachers,

> "The great crisis is hastening on," she wrote, "when it shall be decided whether disenthralled intellect and liberty shall voluntarily submit to the laws of virtue and of Heaven, or run wild to insubordination, anarchy, and crime." Ninety thousand teachers were needed immediately, she claimed, and women were "fitted by disposition, and habits, and circumstances, for such duties." (Beecher, 1845, pp. 106, cited in Sklar, 2019)

The domestication of the Cults was thus elevated, even as it was translated and transposed from the home to the school.

As increasing numbers of American fathers left home for work, women gained primary responsibility for shaping children's characters. In 1833 *Mother's Magazine* contrasted the old, patriarchal approach to childrearing with the new maternal one. The magazine condemned an old-fashioned mother who "undertook to conquer her little son. A whip was placed on the chimney in the sitting room; and this, with the dark closet where he was told ugly creatures would catch him, frightened William into decent behavior while in the presence of his mother" (Whittelsey, Mead, & Sewell, 1833b, p. 152). In her absence however, the boy was willful and disobedient. In contrast, a successful mother responded to her son's misbehavior with the warning that if it continued, "I would not smile upon you, I should not receive your flowers, but should have to separate you from my company." "Mother," the boy responded, "I should rather have your sweet kisses, and your pleasant smiles than ten rolls of gingerbread. I could not be happy if you did not love me" (Whittelsey, Mead, & Sewell, 1833a, p. 26).

[22] This turn of phrase is variously attributed to the newspaper magnate Horace Greenly and the poet John Babson Lane (JBL) Soule, in a race to encourage manifest destiny (Taylor, 2015, July 8).

Meanwhile, much of the moral work of motherhood was being appropriated by the school. "The only perfect guardian and cherisher of free self-activity," wrote kindergarten reformer Elizabeth Peabody, "is the mother's love, who respects it in her own child by an instinct deeper than all thought, restraining her own self-will, and calling out a voluntary obedience (the only obedience worthy of the name)" (quoted in Grumet, 1981, p. 172). Horace Mann campaigned to replace the harsh discipline of schoolmasters with a gentler (and cheaper) approach by women teachers.

Examining the concepts of domestication and discipline side by side, there is clearly a great deal of overlap. Yet domestication is the broader and more descriptive term, as it always carries within it hierarchies of power and control. "Domestication" also subsumes "discipline" by containing each definition of discipline, in both protective and punishing functions and in each mode of domestication. Rebecca Raby (2012), writing on school discipline, offers us this list of different connotations of the term (p.76):

1. As mastering a discipline
2. As providing order needed for learning
3. As an independent good
4. As cultivated self-discipline

As Raby discusses each of the definitions presented, she acknowledges that there are voluntary and coercive forms and, read within the context of this work, modes that are protective and punishing. Take, for example, her first definition, "mastering a discipline" which is theorized in the scenario of learning a martial art or in classroom pedagogical practice. Raby cites Watkins (2010) who "draws on both Emile Durkheim and Foucault's later work to argue that discipline can be both enabling and constraining…" depending on the nature of skill building, habit, and environment (p. 76). Discipline is thus formulated as a necessary feature of domestication, with both protective/nurturing and punishing/repressive elements.

Domestication is thus the concept that brings together all of the relevant concepts of protection, punishment, discipline, and parental power. As I will explore, schools and families have shared, and contested, the work of domestication and authority over domesticated subjects/children. Physically, domestication relies on invocations of cultivated reproduction. Intellectually, domestication relies on cultured representations of masculinity and femininity. Morally, domesticators and domestication processes claim authority by asserting moral superiority rooted in adherence to tradition, propriety, and performance of gender roles. In combination, the Cult of Domesticity, as an aspirational framework–in both its commission and ambitions–relies on, negotiates, and ultimately recreates gendered Subjects.

During the exact era that the Cult of True Domesticity was held up as the correct and definitive social order, American families and schools were engaged in the parallel domestication work of nation-building and spirit-taming. As scholars of American history (considering both the Antebellum period and Reconstruction), Western expansion, and the colonial project of Manifest Destiny examine, the project of inventing America required first imagining a "domestic" state–both political and familial–against which both "foreign" nations and savage Others could be judged. Re-defining domesticity in this way productively conflates concepts of "nation" and "home" and understands how meaningful work was accomplished in each of the gender-bound "separate spheres." "Thus," writes Amy Kaplan, "another part of the cultural work of domesticity might be to unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home" (Kaplan, 1998, p. 582).

At the same time, educators like Catherine Beecher were professionalizing what would later be called the Cult of Domesticity. Beecher's 1845 "Treatise on Domestic Economy; For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School," provides endless examples of the American project of gendered domestication. Beecher believed Domestic Economy should be elevated in girls' education. She instructs women to fully embrace their feminine work as mothers, housewives, moral authorities, and educators, repeatedly stressing that, in so doing, they fulfill their true purpose and calling. This position subordinates them in relation to men, but only insomuch as men and women have different roles to play, and women's work is necessary for the American projects of democracy, Christianity, and economy. She writes,

> No American woman, then, has any occasion for feeling that hers is a humble or insignificant lot. The value of what an individual accomplishes, is to be estimated by the importance of the enterprise achieved, and not by the particular position of the laborer… The woman, who is rearing a family of children; the woman, who labors in the schoolroom; the woman, who, in her retired chamber, earns, with her needle, the mite, which contributes to the intellectual and moral elevation of her Country; even the humble domestic, whose example and influence may be moulding and forming young minds, while her faithful services sustain a prosperous domestic state;—each and all may be animated by the consciousness, that they are agents in accomplishing the greatest work that ever was committed to human responsibility. (Beecher, 1845, pp. 116-117)

Beecher frequently, as here, speaks of mothering, teaching, homecraft, and moral uplift as tasks in the same domestic occupation.

In several places in her text, *A Treatise On Domestic Economy*, Beecher talks explicitly of how parental authority should be shared between homes and schools. For example, she writes, "[God] has given children to the control of parents, as their superiors, and to them they remain subordinate, to a certain age, or so long as they are members of their household. And parents can delegate such a portion of their authority to teachers and employers, as the interests of their children require" (Beecher, p. 95). In her work on Catherin Beecher and domesticity, Katherine Kish Sklar finds that Beecher was heralded as a hero for standardizing domestic practice and, in her book *Treatise on Domestic Economy,* "prescribing one system that integrated psychological, economic, religious, social, and political factors, and in addition demonstrating how the specifics of the system should work" (Katheryn Kish Sklar, 1974, p. 152). In short, Beecher established domesticity as the preeminent system for organizing the whole world and herself as the authority on that system.

In 1850, Common School Reformer Horace Mann's "A Few Thoughts for Young Men," an able companion for Beecher's text, cautioned young men to guard their health and morality against the perils of excess, temptation, depravity, and ignorance. He advocates temperance, civilization, and hard work (Mann, 1887). In short, he constructs a masculine vision of domestication that disciplines the self, as well as one's environment, so that men can be fit to lead the family and the nation. Mann's ideals, like Beecher's, make little distinction between the work of education for or by schools, and in or serving family.

The Progressive School movement further blurred the line between home and school domestication. John Dewey, in particular, advocated for a vision of childhood that blended the two and modeled education on the familiar contours of family. He wrote that the "ideal home," generalized and organized, was the "ideal school" (Dewey, 1899). Dewey writes in his essay *Utopian Schools* (1933) "the most Utopian thing in Utopia is that there are no schools at all" but instead "large grounds, gardens, orchards, greenhouses" and other small buildings with "none of

the things we usually associate with our present school. Of course, there are no mechanical rows or screwed-down desks. There is rather something like a well-furnished home of today, only with a much greater variety of equipment and no messy accumulation of all sorts of miscellaneous furniture; more open spaces than our homes have today" (Dewey, 1933). Dewey goes on to posit that teachers should be married persons, heralding a shift from the the common school era when teachers were largely unmarried. An editor's note published with the essay in a 2021 collection of Dewey's texts posits that "one way to interpret Dewey here would be to read this passage as advocacy for women's liberty as employees in the schools" but that "the tone of it today sounds like a requirement for quality teaching" (Dewey, 2021). I argue that, in context, we should read Dewey's preference for married teachers as part of his overall celebration of the virtues of family life, domesticity, and family as the ideal structure for education.

These ideals were not merely theoretical, but were put into practice via the curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching force. Just as home spaces were being constructed by experts like Beecher as educative, so too were schools being constructed as needing to replicate and teach the foundations of good homemaking.

The feminization of teaching in the 19th Century is a well-documented phenomena, (Grumet, 1988; Strober & Lanford, 1986) but what is salient for this is discussion is the way that logics of domesticity fueled the shift from male to female teachers. As Jo Anne Preston writes, the feminization of teaching, (measured in her work by the teaching force becoming comprised of 80% or more women, which took place in New England between 1840-1890), with "a shift to female educators, borrowing language from the newly emergent ideology of domesticity, argued that the most effective teacher would draw upon the female qualities of emotionality, maternal love, gentleness, and moral superiority" (Preston, 1993, p. 533).

As the teaching profession became increasingly feminized and women were held up as model teachers, young white women frequently passed between serving as unmarried classroom educators and married home educators. These same white married women often then used their expertise as former teachers and mothers to make claims about their fitness for leadership in the realms of benevolence (Ginzberg, 1992), social welfare (Goodwin, 2007; Koven & Michel, 2013; Muncy, 1994), public health (Buhler-Wilkerson, 2007), Native education (Jacobs, 2009), immigrant education (L. Gordon, 1999), and urban schooling (Collins, 2011). This passing back and forth between home and school reveals how the separation between the spheres is fictive, but further how it is women's roles as domestic subjects (and their work as domesticators) that allows them to pass between these spaces. As I discuss in *Chapter 7: Teaching, "I've Always Been a Teacher,"* many of the homeschoolers in my study were also previously classroom educators, a role they used to claim expertise and, in conjunction with their identity as mothers, make claims for control to children's education.

Historians have also worked to rescue the history of subjects like "home economics," (long a field seen as inherently antifeminist) recognizing that its inclusion in schooling was part of the effort to professionalize domesticity, elevate it's status, and bring science into the home (Stage & Vincenti, 1997). At the level of higher education, Rosalind Rosenberg details that the "feminization" of the academy at the turn of the 20th century split pre-existing disciplines into the theoretical (male) and practical (female) experts, students, and subjects (Rosenberg, 1982).

What we see in this era is a solidification of white women's roles as being in allegiance to the goals of domestication, both at home and in the classroom. It is women's labor that makes domestication in each of these spheres possible, and it is their allegiance to the racial and economic order that undergirds their participation in this system. Even in contemporary practice,

American parents (particularly mothers) are expected to be incredibly involved in the real work of education–everything from homework (Hutchison, 2012) to committees and PTAs (Woyshner, 2003)–with high-status parents contributing (and being expected to contribute) more time, money, and resources, a reality that contributes to vastly better schooling outcomes for well-of schools (Lareau, 2000).

At the same time, through the entanglement of home and school, we see an entanglement of notions of domestication and learning. These ideas become so entwined in the American education system that we make little difference between composure or decorum and education. A well-behaved child is a well-regulated child is a learned child. When people talk about notions of being well educated, or a "good kid" or "a good student," it often gets to the point whereby the transitive property of domestication, a good student is actually a well-behaved student. I posit that unpacking and understanding how domestication has linked home and school illuminates this vital aspect of schooling, while also explaining how the concept of homeschooling has flourished in the United States, whereas it remains unpopular or even illegal in other countries. While homeschooling (or "home education") is legal in several other countries, American homeschooling–in its form, popularity, and rationale–is unique among them.[23]

The Third Shift

Barbara Welter contends that the Cult of True Womanhood contained within it the seeds of its own destruction, namely the women's liberation and suffrage movements. If we follow this narrative, successive waves of feminism movements came along and swept out the cult of True Womanhood. If I was telling a simple narrative of feminist history, it would go like this: Women of my grandmothers' race, class, and generation were expected to stay home and raise children; despite education or inclination, many of them did not have access to meaningful careers. Women of my mother's class and generation were much more likely to work outside the home; gender equality was constructed as being synonymous with economic competition. I was raised at the end of second wave feminism, came of age in the riot grrrl '90s, and reached personal and political adulthood in the era of third wave feminism that stressed narratives about not just the accessibility but value of workforce participation. This progression looks like progress (even after noting its class and racial biases), if we miss the ways this story doesn't account for non-normative stories and dialectical contradictions inherent in each of these eras.

Yet we still see signs that the Cults of Domesticity and True Womanhood–at least in powerful forms of rhetoric and logic–are alive and well. In 2020 at the Republican National Convention, Abby Johnson, who supports "Head of Household" voting, spoke to a national audience. In May of 2020 Johnson answered the question "But what happens when the husband is a Republican and the wife is a Democrat or vice versa?" in a Twitter Q&A. Her answer: "then they would have to decide on one vote. In a Godly household, the husband would get the final say" (Becker, 2020, August 25). And as legal scholar Allison Anna Tait points out in analysis of the *Obergefell vs. Hodges* (the 2015 Supreme Court case that legalized same-sex marriage) decision, while the case ostensibly eliminates the legal doctrine of coverture, "the substantive

[23] As the various authors in *International Perspectives on Home Education* (Rothermel, 2015) make clear, the American version of homeschooling is unique in a number of respects, notably the degree of freedom American parents demand and receive to educate their children at home. In a number of countries (ex. Germany) homeschooling is illegal, as states require oversight of children's education in an effort to prevent fascistic teachings and in some states (ex. Belize) it is legal only for non-citizens/Ex-pats. In some places, Americans (particularly Christian missionaries) are at the forefront of importing homeschooling abroad.

image of marriage that [Chief] Justice Kennedy set forth subconsciously uses conventional, historical tropes that construct marriage as a relationship of hierarchy, gender differentiation, and female disempowerment" (Tait, 2015, p. 99).

There have been a number of shifts that have made motherhood less obligatory and stay-at-home mothering less ubiquitous. These shifts have been, on the whole, positive for women in terms of economic and educational achievement and have allowed for much greater levels of autonomy and self-determination (L. Gordon, 2012; Holmes, Hoskins, & Gross, 1981). Yet they can also make individual choices like homeschooling seem outré or at odds with the core of the feminist agenda. Women today have access to higher education, work opportunities, and contraceptive options that were unthinkable in earlier eras. As Linda Gordon reminds us in her history of contraception[24] and women's rights, birth control has (re)shaped sexual subjectivity, the voluntary quality of motherhood, the centrality of heteronormativity, and possibilities for gender parity (L. Gordon, 2002). It is undoubtedly true that a number of factors, including higher educational attainment, career, and contraceptive use, have been driving the average age of first-time motherhood up[25] and the average number of children down[26]. What birth control has still not done, however, is solve the biological fertility question. And, as homeschoolers I interviewed discussed, questioning whether "staying home" or "going to work" (as if this were a binary choice) is more feminist is far too simplistic.

Such a question pretends that the feminist movement has ever been unified in its aims, goals, or message, or that women have ever agreed about what constitutes power within a system defined by patriarchy. Instead, I would like to rewind and take a short excursion through the history of the feminist movement through the lenses of (and tensions about) educational history, domestic labor, reproductive motherhood.[27] In particular, I'd like to work towards a place where we can situate homeschooling as educational labor and understand the value and political import of that labor. To that end, I am conceptualizing of educational labor as *the third shift.*

The Third Shift

This theory of a third shift builds on a concept that has long been discussed in feminist discourse and analysis: *the second shift.* The term, first coined in 1989 by Arlie Russell

[24] The history of (access to) birth control is a particularly complicated and contested one with symbolic and practical implications that, as Linda Gordon reminds us in her history of, are "embedded in ideological, political, and social conflicts" (L. Gordon, 2002, p. 360). In particular, it is crucial to mention that birth control champion and founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, held eugenicist views. The history of access to birth control is yet another example of the protection/punishment dialectic: on the one hand encouraging/supporting "fit" middle and upper class white women to have more (control over their fertility/) children while, on the other, sterilizing and restraining the child-bearing of "unfit" Black and poor mothers. There is a powerful through-line here of the state's interest in controlling women's bodies and fertility, (though the political purpose and means vary) though today.

[25] The CDC finds that in 1970 the mean age of mother at time of first birth (across all racial groups) was 21.4 years. In 2000 this number went up to 24.9 (T.J Matthews & Hamilton, December 11, 2002) and in 2014 it went up again to 26.3 (T.J. Matthews & Hamilton, January 2016).

[26] In 1800, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) or expected number of births that an American woman would have in her lifetime, was 7.03. In 1900 that number was 3.84 and when the Great Depression hit it dipped to a low of 2.01 in 1933. Between 1940-2018, the TFR was highest during the post-WWII baby boom (1946-1964), peaking in 1957 (3.77). During "Generation X" (1965-1980) the TFR fell from 2.91 to 1.84. The TFR rose somewhat and remained stable through the Millennials ("Generation Y," 1980-2000) and the beginning of the Post-Millennial cohort ("Generation Z," 2001-2020), hovering ~2. However, in 2007 the TFR began falling again and in 2018 hit 1.73, a record low (Hamilton, January 10, 2020; O'Neill, January 22, 2020).

[27] I am also focusing on the United States, as this is the lens through which my history of homeschooling and educational labor is told.

Hochschild and Anne Machung in their book "The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home" (reissued in 2012) explored the amount of domestic labor (the second shift), in addition to paid formal work (the first shift) performed by each member of heterosexual couples with children. Hochschild and Machung found that, despite their equal participation in the paid workforce, women still did the vast majority of the unpaid domestic work and child-raising[28], leading to marital tensions, lack of sleep and leisure time, feelings of guilt and inadequacy (on the part of women), lack of sexual interest, and even divorce. In the time since the term was popularized, the second shift, and it's corollary, emotional labor (which describes the work associated with planning and executing the many tasks associated with the second shift) have become watchwords for both the lingering inequity of women and the ongoing double standard baked into social hierarchies and cultural practices. The second shift is one explanation for how and why women simply "entering the workforce" hasn't resulted in gender parity or the destruction of the patriarchy. The second shift theory makes systemic issues that can feel deeply personal, particular, and individualistic. The second shift is also a useful framework because it explicates how the private domestic sphere is intimately tied to public issues of labor, politics, the economy, and law.[29]

Scholarship is in general agreement about the first three "waves" of feminism–their historical periods, goals, and major landmarks. First wave feminism (which took place in the 19th and first half of the 20th Century) was animated by many questions–women's suffrage, the right of women to hold and own property, women's education, divorce–but it was also crucially divided about the question of separate spheres taken up in *Chapter 1: The History of Home/Schooling*, of this work. What was the proper place of women and and from what vantage point should they engage with the world and politics? One realm in which this crucial question became especially salient was in re women teachers who, as we have seen with Catherine Beecher via Sklar's work (Katheryn Kish Sklar, 1974; Kathryn Kish Sklar, 2019), were seen as both a necessary labor force and as an extension of the maternal into the (unsettled) world.

The separate spheres doctrine continued to hold sway into the 20th Century and effect the conversation about women's proper social and educational roles. The 1923 tome on "The Education of Women" by Willystine Goodsell begins with an acknowledgement that "the whole vexed question of woman's 'sphere' and of her education and vocational training viewed in the light of that 'sphere' has troubled men for more than a generation and is at the present time the subject of more or less partisan controversy" (Goodsell, 1923, p. v). The partisan controversy Goodsell waves away, however, was the stuff of very real debate and animated questions about women's proper role in the world. The financially secure women who could both rely on men's wealth and benefited from the separate sphere doctrine of domestic control weren't interested in

[28] In the 1970s, their found that full-time employed mothers did about 4 additional weeks of 24-hour days more of domestic labor and childcare than did full-time employed fathers (Hochschild & Machung, 2012, p. 3).

[29] Updates to conversations about the second shift have not found vast improvements to domestic labor equity despite the original text's 40-year-old publication date. Neither have investigations into same-sex partnerships found that non-heterosexual couples have solved the problem of the second shift. In 1999, Christopher Carrington replicated the second shift research with gay and lesbian working couples with children (Carrington, 1999) and in 2011 Mignon Moore continued this research (Moore, 2011). Both Carrington and Moore find that the second shift persists for gay and lesbian working couples, with the lower-income partner doing the larger share of the domestic labor. In their 2015 article, Blair-Loy, Hochschild, Pugh, Williams, and Hartmann argue that the second shift both persists and that the stalled gender revolution ("Stall 1.0") of the 1970s and 1980s has been replaced by "Stalled Revolution 2.0. New bad news has been added to the old bad news, including a widening social class gap that leaves many workers more vulnerable" (Blair-Loy, Hochschild, Pugh, Williams, & Hartmann, 2015, p. 436).

ceding power or considering the needs of working-class women. In advocating for women's education (but not always suffrage), wealthy first wave feminists sought to answer the "vexed question" by treading lightly. Some wanted to bring women "out" into the world by giving them a political voice (suffrage) while others were content with expanding their intellectual sphere. The quest for women's education proceeded along two rationales: on one, access to the same subjects and materials as men (i.e., full equality). On the other, the separate sphere doctrine was leveraged to professionalize women's work and "preparation for homemaking as a profession was conceived to give the position dignity" (A. D. Gordon, Buhle, & Schrom, 2012, p. 57).

Ultimately, education by and for women became a key part of both the feminist movement's agenda and their political platform. First wave feminism centered on the wealthy and elite and its victories–namely the 19th Amendment and expanded access to higher education–benefited that same demographic.[30] And Seminaries, later women's colleges and elite institutions like the Seven Sisters (founded between 1837 and 1889) served largely if not entirely wealthier white student populations (McGonagill et al., 2019). By the Interwar Period, feminist thought had carved out a popular vision for women's equal participation in the world and posited education as crucial to that vision, yet crucial inequities still remained in both the movement and in women's place in society.

The second wave of feminism was kicked off by the events surrounding WWII and it's political, social, end economic aftermath. Coinciding in the United States with the Civil Rights movement for racial justice, second wave feminism sought to transform societal institutions defined by patriarchy (Evans, 1995). This era (roughly 1960s-1980s) was exemplified by a dialectic between rapidly changing social and gender norms on the one hand, and efforts to maintain traditional systems of power and control on the other. This contestation occurred not only between women and men but also between women of different political affiliations and orientations towards traditional gender norms. While women teachers formed the backbone of the first wave, they were largely seen as a problem and to be rejected in the second wave (Morgan, 1970).

During the war, women entered the workforce in record numbers and, though many left again as men returned home, those advancements had begun to radically reshape American society. In response to workplace discrimination and unequal working conditions, women fought for and won victories like the 1963 Equal Pay Act. This era also saw the legalization of abortion ("Roe v. Wade," 1973) and changes to other laws like no-fault divorce. Should women be able to make choices about their reproductive labor, in a very real sense? Could motherhood be a choice?

The era was also characterized by bitter debates between women about the role they wanted to assume in society; between women who embraced second wave feminism and the new freedoms that came with that movement and women who cherished more traditional gender roles and were concerned about losing their sense of identity and place. While "radical feminists concluded that the traditional nuclear family oppressed women" traditional homemakers rightly felt that they were suffering a "status degradation" in a society that decreasingly prized their domestic chores and child-rearing responsibilities (Mansbridge, p. 105 & 107). This echoes my conversation with homeschoolers who feel neither seen as feminists for staying home, nor fully appreciated for their hard work as educational and domestic laborers.

[30] While the 19th Amendment expanded access to the vote to many women, it did not ensure it for Black women, Native women, immigrant women, or others. Thus a victory, it was a victory only for those white women at the center.

One such place this debate raged was in the fight to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This political battle became a proxy war for the question of women's roles in society, the family, and politics. The ERA was considered by many conservatives, especially women, to be a dangerous attempt to undermine women and family values. Conservative advocate Phyllis Schlafly particularly mobilized conservative women against the amendment by arguing that the ERA would open the door for a dangerous kind of equality, one in which women could be drafted into the military or lose protections such as alimony or preferential treatment in child custody cases (Critchlow, 2018; Schlafly, 2014). Schlafly wrote that,

> …women's liberationists. Their motive is totally radical. They hate men, marriage and children. They look upon husbands as the exploiters, children as an evil to be avoided (by abortion if necessary), and the family as an institution that keeps women in "second class citizenship" or even "slavery" (Schlafly, November, 1972).

Rhetoric like Schlafly's was countered by burgeoning theory and research that would coalesce into ideas like the second shift, which recognized that women's work was unseen, under-appreciated, and materially unpaid. This ideological opposition, while not necessarily an irreconcilable conflict of interest, was politically positioned as one, with neither side willing to concede points or compromise shared interests.

The fight over the ERA is just one of the instances in which women with very different visions of agentic womanhood stood vehemently opposed. Those in the second-wave feminist movement positioned choosing to work outside the home as liberatory and equalizing and saw any other option as anti-modern and anti-feminist. Yet homemakers and others, for example those within fundamentalist religious groups committed to traditional gender roles, saw women's choices to stay home as equally agentic and rejected the notion that doing so was antithetical to women's authority. The era of second wave feminism neither reconciled this existential dispute nor gave society the nuanced rhetoric necessary for thinking and talking about these shades of gray. Instead, this era from the 1960s-1980s also saw the Culture Wars in society and culture; the Curriculum and Math Wars in education and curriculum; and the rise in religious fundamentalism and partisan politics.

The postwar era was also one of expanding access to (higher) education–for men. With the GI Bill, more men than ever were going to college and more women than ever were noticing the disparities in educational opportunities between higher education enrollment and graduation; STEM participation; and things like sports funding. Title IX, passed in 1972, mandated nondiscrimination in admissions, access, and treatment in all educational programs offered by institutions that were the recipients of federal funds. In practice, Title IX led to the expansion of extracurricular, particularly sports, funding for girls' and women's sports and the co-edification of colleges and universities that received any federal funding.[31] Studies of the effects of Title IX find that, in "in 1972, only 1 of 27 high school girls played varsity sports. In 1998, that figure was 1 in 3, whereas 1 of every 2 boys participated in varsity high school sports" (Lopiano, 2000). As legal scholar Maggie Jo Poertner Buchanan notes, however –indicative of the era in which it was written–Title IX still takes a binary view of sex and gender and leaves trans students and athletes without adequate legal protections. She writes, "the policies improving equality for female athletes must be expanded to also take into account the special needs of transgendered

[31] Yet the Ivy League only went co-ed between 1969 (Yale) and 1981 (Columbia), a timescale that routinely shocks my undergraduate students.

athletes, so sex equality does not become pigeonholed into addressing only the needs of men and women" (Buchanan, 2012, p. 93).[32]

Third wave feminism picked up in the 1990s with a critique of the earlier waves and their middle-class whiteness, as well the gender essentialism exemplified by Title IX. The third wave was concerned with political engagement, reclaiming sex and sexuality for pleasure, queering the narrative, and building a "bigger tent." In many ways, writes R. Claire Snyder on her essay defining the third wave, this era was a response that made three "tactical moves" to

> …A series of problems within the second wave, First, in response to the collapse of the category of "women," the third wave foregrounds personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism. Second, as a consequence of the rise of postmodernism, third-wavers embrace multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification. Finally, in response to the divisiveness of the sex wars, third-wave feminism emphasizes an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political (Snyder, 2008, p. 176).

Each of these elements of the third wave had important strategic political and practical implications.

The first character Snyder identifies–intersectional personal narrative–has been important for building that bigger tent and bringing to the core activists and identities previously pushed to the margins. Black scholars identified and named theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Roberts, 2011) and drew attention to the way that Black women, queer people, and poor people were being overlooked and underserved by both the movement and systemic institutions. In 2000 bell hooks published *Feminism is for Everybody* (hooks, 2000), a text that argues patriarchy harms all genders. This emphasis also encouraged the rise of the Mommy Blogs we've seen throughout this work, as well as the popularity of other first-person narratives like Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* (Ensler, 1996).

Second, Snyder recognizes third wave feminism's desire to move away from just abstract theory into concrete action. This impulse can be seen in the growing efforts to name and address rape culture on college campuses in the 2000s. Millennial women, newly initiated to the third wave of feminism, also embraced a broad political platform that included elements of racial and social justice; gender issues beyond just abortion rights; and economic, environmental, and local issues (Heywood, 2006).

Third and finally, Snyder calls out the third wave's own political ambivalence and uncertainty about what constitutes the boundaries of feminism. Some call the third wave feminism's own era of reckoning, when the movement had to contend with its own failures, oversights, and growing pains. At the same time, the movement was forced to challenge the beginnings of pop cultural post-feminism and the generalized sentiment that the aims of the feminist movement had all been achieved. The central observation of post-feminism, and those that write about it, is that there was a growing societal pushback against the gains made by women (Faludi, 2009), the response to which was a desire (or resentment) to claim that the goals of feminism had all been achieved. As Susan Douglas writes in her book *Enlightened Sexism* (her term for post-feminism),

> Enlightened sexism is a response, deliberate or not, to the perceived threat of a new gender regime. It insists that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism–

[32] Even Poertner Buchanan's language here, written in 2012 at the 40-year anniversary of Title IX, is somewhat outdated, with current nomenclature preferring "trans" or "transgender" to "transgendered," indicating how quickly the thinking and language within the queer and feminist movements moves with regards to these issues.

> indeed, full equality has allegedly been achieved–so now it's okay, even amusing, to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women (S. J. Douglas, 2010, p. 9).

As evidence of post-feminism, scholars point to the resurgence of traditional gender norms, ideas of femininity, and girlishness exemplified in popular culture by the Spice Girls, Sex and The City, Legally Blond, and Bridget Jones (S. J. Douglas, 2010; McRobbie, 2004). As the dominant visual landscape moved to valorize hyper-girlishness, third wave feminism had to reconstitute its platform and reconsider its relevance.

Given the contentious social and political battles that characterized the era of the second wave, the third wave has had an ambivalent stance on feminist agency. While, as Snyder points out, the movement purports to broadly support the choices of people of all genders, there were still clear internal contradictions and evidence of earlier attempts to curtail or narrowly define feminism as "anything you choose, as long as you select this progressive ideal." The slogan "my body, my choice," started as a pro-choice marching chant but, as women from across the political spectrum have pointed out, their bodies, their choices, too.

Simultaneously and over the same period that women have made political and economic gains, childhood and parenting became more complicated, time-intensive, and anxiety-producing. Whether termed "competitive parenting" (Friedman, 2013), "helicopter parenting" (Cline & Fay, 1990), "anxious parenting" (Stearns, 2004), or "Tiger Mothering" (Chua, 2011)[33] researchers and cultural critics have widely noted the cyclical pattern of increased expectations and increased fear that have come to define American family life. These authors detail the way that, analogous to and interconnected with the rise in academic credentialism (Labaree, 1997), parenting has become a symbolic and material arms race. Whereas historians of the early to mid-20th century era note that the perfect housewife of the Post-War era was redefined by her (indirect) consumerism (L. Cohen, 2004; Friedan, 2010; Scanlon, 2020), contemporary scholars of "heightened" parenting note that capital consumption, and even competitive consumerism, have extended into every facet of a marketized childhood (Pugh, 2009). This buying pressure puts lower- and middle-class families into debt trying to keep up, and sends families of all economic backgrounds into paroxysms of guilt trying to figure out what is too much, too little, or exactly the right thing to buy for their children.[34] Kids, and by extension their parents, feel pressure to hyper-plan and oversee their schedules and activities. Conversely, the kind of freedom of movement and play that used to be considered a normal part of growing up has been rebranded "free-range parenting" (Skenazy, 2009), and is seen as something inherently risky, bold, or even dangerous after decades of stranger-danger fear campaigns (K. Brooks, 2018).

Ours is an era of extreme wealth disparities, economic disenfranchisement, and the gig economy. Amidst all of this, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated our not-so-gentle slide into income inequality, housing instability, student loan debt, and unequal medical care. In this environment, women have been asked to take on the bulk of pandemic-schooling labor, a task that has made the weight of educational labor more visible while, of course, making it heavier. In their 2015 article updating their work on the second shift, Blair-Loy, Hochschild,

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[33] Amy Chua has been critiqued both for her aggressive parenting and her essentialist and individualist ideas about race (her book The Triple Package on model minorities with her husband, Jed Rubenfeld, was widely panned) and in 2020 it was reported that she was involved in a messy #metoo scandal at the Yale Law School (Widdicombe, 2021, June 19). Yet despite Chua's personal ups and downs, her concept of the "tiger mother" is one that has remained culturally durable, for all its flaws and problematic elements.

[34] Larreau argues for class differences in parenting in which working class parents do not seek to compete (Lareau, 2011). While there may be an element of truth in this, other scholars have demonstrated the reverse (Leath et al., 2020).

Pugh, Williams, and Hartman called the the 2010s the "Stalled Revolution 2.0" with regard to domestic labor and gender parity. They couldn't know that in just a few short years a cataclysm was on the horizon, one that would combine the pre-existing work of the educational third shift with the disaster patriarchy of a global pandemic, a combination that is efficiently and viciously leading to what is surely a Stalled Revolution 3.0.

Conclusion

Guided by this historical framing, the following study and chapters ask: How do homeschoolers think about how the navigation between public and private shapes care, work, teaching, and their advocacy within a state which, despite their privilege, views them with suspicion?

Chapter 4: Research Design & Data

In this chapter, I review the research design and methods of data collection and analysis for this study. I begin with a discussion of an overview of my study design, beginning with my use of feminist theory, and then an overview of my phenomenological study design, focusing on how the design contributed to my ability to address my research questions. I describe the bounding of the data, data sources, data collection methods, and analysis. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the research and my researcher positionality and subjectivity (Lather, 1986). I provide a high-level overview of the dataset and conclude with a section on my contributions.

Overview

Feminist theory. As described in my conceptual framework, this study and dissertation were developed with a specific emphasis on and interest in centering carework and domesticity. I was influenced by my own experiences with carework as well as my own studies of educational policy that made little mention of the gendered work of education. I was also influenced by my own researcher positionality, a topic which I explore at greater length later in this chapter. As I elucidate in my conceptual framework, this study was influenced by my own feminist standpoint epistemology (Nielsen, 1990) or theory of knowledge. Feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1992; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012) posits that my own researcher perspective can never fully be removed from the research process nor, contrary to the goals of prior empirical traditions, is such a standard of researcher subjectivity desirable. Further integral to this feminist standpoint is a feminist ontology or way of knowing, which centers women in their experiences and expertise as MotherScholars (Lapayese, 2012b).

Phenomenological research study design. This study is a phenomenological qualitative research study. As Michael Patton, (1990) writes about the aim of phenomenological research, there is

> the assumption that *there is an essence or essences to shared experience*. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to the identity of the essences of the phenomenon, for example, the essences of loneliness, the essence of being a mother, the essence of being a participant in a particular program. *The assumption of essence, like the ethnographer's assumption that culture exists and is important, becomes the defining characteristic of a purely phenomenological study* (pp. 70, emphasis in original).

In this case, I began with an assumption of an essence or essence to shared experience of homeschooling based on extant literature and the knowledge of a strong homeschooling community. As phenomenology is focused on individuals' meaning- and sense-making (A. Wilson, 2015), this type of research requires investigating "the way that a person experiences or understands his or her world as real or meaningful" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 183). Because a phenomenological approach requires the perspective of those individuals who have first-hand experience of the phenomena in question, it is imperative to gather data directly from them about their shared experiences and the meaning they make of that experience; in this case, homeschooling. This led me to interviewing homeschooling parents about their experiences, as well as immersing myself in the world of online homeschool support networks, blogs, and listservs.

Research questions. As Merriam notes, "phenomenological research is well suited for studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences" (2009, p. 26). Phenomenology thus lent itself well to answering not just questions about homeschooling (what is happening within the domestic home) but what layered meaning those actions took on. As such, this approach was well-suited to addressing my research questions:

1. What is the gender work of homeschooling?
2. Is homeschooling a form of choice? Of advocacy?
3. What is the political work of homeschooling?

Data Collection.

For the purpose of investigating my research questions, I conducted a qualitative study of homeschool families in the state of California.[35]

Bounding the study. Due to the state-by-state nature of educational laws, my study was confined to families homeschooling in the state of California. In order to further bound my pool of participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994), families were selected based on the following criteria: A parent or guardian currently homeschooling their child(ren), homeschooling for at least 1 academic year, at least 18+ years old, and residents of California.

Stage 1: Stage 1 of the study began in February of 2019 and was ongoing through May of 2021 when my IRB concluded. Stage one consisted of joining and observing 50+ social media groups on homeschooling curriculum, parents rights, parental peer support, meetups, etc. I created a separate Facebook account specifically for the purpose of joining Facebook and Instagram groups, which listed my full name, institutional affiliation, and information about the study. In every case, upon joining a group, I publicly identified myself as a researcher.

From the social media groups I also collected photos, posts, memes, links to other websites (blogs, youtube videos, etc.), and screenshots of conversations. These artifacts have all been saved with relevant information about their provenance and coded for themes and language. This use of social media was covered in my IRB protocol and provided background for this research; I also plan to use it for future publications.

Stage 2: For the second stage of my study, beginning in February of 2019, I began recruiting and conducting interviews with homeschooling parents. This stage ran concurrently with Stage 1 and lasted from March 2019–May 2019. I created a flyer (Appendix 1) as both an image suitable for posting to social media and for use as a PDF/email. These I sent to listservs I had identified during Stage 1, including every currently active homeschooling listserv in the greater Bay Area[36] and to the better-established state-wide listservs and homeschool support networks. In a few cases, admins and moderators declined to post or forward my announcement, but my call for participants ultimately went out to 300+ homeschooling parents email lists and online social media groups with an invitation to conduct an interview.

I was contacted by 117 homeschooling parents. Of these, I was able to schedule interviews with 74, or 63% of those who responded to my research recruitment. I conducted interviews using an open-ended interview protocol (Hoffmann, 2007; see Appendix 2) which I iterated during the interview process when it became apparent that I needed additional questions about the prior in-classroom teaching experiences of my participants.

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[35] The Institutional Review Board (IRB) review process for working with human subjects began in the spring of 2018 and clearance was granted in February, 2019.

[36] That were still active, these listservs have a way of going dark as parental involvement wanes.

Interviews were conducted in-person when possible, and via phone or video conferencing when necessary. Several parents were interviewed together (more below) but 26 interviews (35%) were conducted remotely and 48 (65%) took place in person. Interviews ranged in length from 36 minutes to just short of 3 hours. Interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder. Two parents declined to be audio recorded and I also attended two park days[37] and two mothers' homeschool support groups that I did not have permission to audio record.

Sampling. In addition to soliciting interview participants directly from homeschooling groups and listservs, I also conducted snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) where interviewees would refer me to additional participants. As Noy (2008) suggests, this "method can generate a unique type of social knowledge–knowledge which is emergent, political and interactional" and is especially dynamic in semi-closed communities like homeschoolers.

In my full participant list of 74 I am also counting three "bonus dads"–fathers who were not the planned initial subjects of my interviews but, because of the circumstances of our conversation, were present on the day. In two cases I was interviewing a first mother when a second was invited to join our conversation; I considered each of these as separate participants.

Instead of selecting a target interview number, I instead chose a time frame during which to conduct Stage Two and sought to conduct as many interviews as possible during that window. This timeframe was flexible; however, I felt that I achieved a sufficient number of participants. By the end of my interviewing I was also reaching a certain saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015) of data in order to address the research questions.

Data Analysis

Written notes and memos. I took written notes during interviews and field notes regarding my interviews, observations, and other time spent with homeschooling mothers. As a first pass at identifying emerging patterns in the data, I used a system of symbols to denote common themes and noted these in the margins of my written notes.

Data collected. I interviewed 74 parents yielding just under 101 hours of interview audio. I transcribed these using an AI speech-to-text software, which yielded about 2k pages of interview transcripts. This software yielded only approximately 75% fidelity to the spoken audio, so written transcripts then had to be cleaned manually. In addition, I also collected the emails, text messages, field notes, and hand-written interview notes (comprising 7 small notebooks) I amassed during my fieldwork; these were all also transcribed.

The codebook for this project evolved in several stages. Codes in the first, preliminary codebook were developed based on a review of a) my research questions and conceptual framework, b) topics and questions asked in my interview protocol, and c) the emic language of homeschoolers. Emic language is "the internal language and meanings of a defined culture" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and was especially used to code how homeschoolers talk about themselves and their practice. The first two data sources relied on a deductive process that occurred before the data collection process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Emic code development relied on an inductive process (Thomas, 2006) that emerged during the process of data collection and review. The desire at this phase of the coding process was to allow patterns to emerge inductively out of the data, avoiding high-inference codes while "establish[ing the] broad

[37] A common and cherished feature of the homeschooling community, park days are freeform, all-ages meet-ups in parks where homeschooling families play, socialize, eat, and sometimes learn together. They are generally set times (say, every Friday afternoon at a particular park) so families can drop in whenever their schedules allow. They offer unstructured play time for children and socialization and support for homeschooling mothers.

outlines of the phenomenon studied" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 192). All transcripts were first coded using this mostly descriptive codebook. This first analysis of the coded transcripts allowed me to triangulate patterns and findings across the experiences of the different participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 266-267).

As a second stage of the coding and analysis process, I focused on particular subsets of interviews. In particular, the experiences of homeschoolers with prior teaching experience emerged as rich exemplar cases that both spoke to the particularity of this experience and allowed me to "process relationships among these clusters of meaning" (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003, p. 872). These individual accounts were treated as "cases," (Stake, 1995) though there were enough of these case to be more generalizable to my larger interview population. I also focused on exemplar cases where mothers had particularly rich narrative accounts of their homeschooling practice. After spending months engaging with my interview transcripts, some narratives emerged as better able to engage with the meaning- and sense-making of my phenomenological research approach and I, again, treated these interviews as cases that, with across-case comparisons, could reveal generalizable findings about the larger homeschooling community.

In subsequent coding and analysis phases, I also iteratively developed higher-level etic codes–the "structures and criteria developed outside the culture as a framework for studying the culture" (J. W. Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007, p. 100)–to theorize and situate homeschooling within broader narratives, histories, and understandings. As others have noted, (Olive, 2014), moving between emic and etic coding was a both difficult and productive phase in the process of analysis.

Throughout my process, I used various approaches to verify my findings. After adding new etic codes I went back and recoded some of the material I had previously coded, engaging in an "extension" of the coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 62). Throughout the coding and analysis process I also paid attention to what I termed "rich confusing moments" in the data, i.e., surprises, "outliers," or especially complex stories that did not necessarily fit into the narrative of the rest of my interviews and considered whether these were exemplary cases, or examples of homeschooling narratives not well-captured by the rest of my data. As Miles and Huberman (1994) caution, "A good look at the exceptions, or the ends of a distribution, can test and strengthen the basic finding" (p. 269).

Bounding and Limitations.

Limitations & Biases. By casting an initially very wide net (300+ homeschool lists and groups) I hoped to account for some issues of bias, both in terms of selection and reporting. At the same time, because I was trying to get a generalized picture of the homeschooling experience, neither exact coverage of the homeschooling landscape nor depth of any one homeschool community was my primary objective.

I recognize that the study may contain biases in that my study might only represent a certain "type" or select "types" of homeschool mothers, especially as some populations of homeschoolers may have been hesitant to speak with a UC Berkeley-affiliated researcher. Homeschoolers from religiously-affiliated parent's groups and advocacy organizations have in the past had an adversarial relationship with educational researchers and I found that these were the lists least likely to forward my call for participants. In some cases, I was able to gain trust through my snowball sampling methodology, however, using word-of-mouth to gain entrée into ever-more-insulated homeschooling parents. Several times I followed a line of leads to a more

religious or more conservative; i.e., someone who would have been less likely to see my CFP or less likely to reach out to me. The conversations went something like this (these were often informal conversation conducted after audio recording had been completed, only the second conversation with "Homeschooler B" was captured on tape):

> Homeschooler A: Well, obviously I'm not one of those crazy homeschoolers.
> Faw: I mean, sure. Do you know any of those?
> A: Yeah, I know a few. Well, I know one from our park day.
>
> Homeschooler B: "Well, I'm religious, but I'm not devout."
> Faw: "I see. Well, I'd love to speak to someone who is devout. Do you know someone like that who you think might be willing to speak to me?"
> B: "My sister-in-law might talk to you. I'll call her."
>
> Homeschooler C: Well, I'm observant, but not, you know, prairie-wife dresses.
> Faw: Ah, ok. Do you know any homeschoolers like that? I'd love to speak to them.
> C: [Laughs] Yeah. But no, they won't talk to you.

And so the trail would run dry, and I'd see who else homeschooler B or C knew. I never did get to the "prairie-wife dress" homeschoolers, though, and I suspect that would take a period of specific, focused, and intensive ethnographic work to gain the trust and respect of this group; again, this was not the focus of this work.

It is not only religious homeschools who are leery of university researchers. Although homeschoolers include women of all racial groups (see: *Introduction*), my interviewees were disproportionately white. Explicitly BIPOC homeschool listservs and support groups exist; I joined or subscribed to many of these online and sent my same call for participants to these groups. I had two Black homeschoolers reach out to me, only one of whom scheduled an interview.

Researcher Positionality and Subjectivity

As I indicated in the introduction to this work, this dissertation was motivated in part by my desire to foreground issues of care and women's labor. This interest, in concert with my feminist standpoint epistemology and the phenomenological research design of this study, require that I acknowledge that I, as the researcher, cannot ever be removed from the work. Indeed, it is not my intention to do so, but instead to be highly mindful and present in the ways that I showed up, presented, and did my own kind of gendered labor in my work as a researcher. Further, I am interested in writing about homeschooling in ways that is familiar and legible to homeschooling mothers. As a political project I don't believe that scholarship should be be produced *about* populations that is not also *for* them.[38]

The way that I prepared for, engaged in, and thought about the very physical work of conducting research was both a reflection of my own allegiances and part of the iterative process of doing this work. My practices–which I discuss in greater length in my researcher subjectivity & experience appendix, see Appendix 3–of how I dressed, drove, and engaged with public space, were not merely incidental to the work but part of the work itself. The phenomenological methodology I discuss in this chapter was born out of my own experiences, a visceral part of conducting this research, and integral to the learning process of this dissertation. Through it, I

[38] In this, I am inspired by many activists, but especially the disability movement and the ideology of "nothing about us without us" (see Charlton, 1998).

learned vital truths about homeschooling, my own research identity, academia, and the wider world.

For the purposes of this chapter, I would like to say that I discuss at length how my own gender presentation was transposed and reified through readable cultural symbols. My analysis in this dissertation is driven by recognizing the ways systems constrain outward-facing actions, choices, and behaviors. Just as I "make choices" about what to wear, those choices are constrained by capitalism (supply), class (my purchasing power), geography (access to goods), cultural norms (what is "acceptable dress") and gender (what is "feminine"). So, too, are choices about schooling, motherhood, and work constrained and shaped by existing structural issues, cultural narratives, and physical factors. I have discussed here how my own gender presentation was transposed and reified through readable cultural symbols. My analysis in this dissertation is driven by recognizing the ways systems constrain outward-facing actions, choices, and behaviors. Just as I "make choices" about what to wear, those choices are constrained by capitalism (supply), class (my purchasing power), geography (access to goods), cultural norms (what is "acceptable dress") and gender (what is "feminine"). So, too, are choices about schooling, motherhood, and work constrained and shaped by existing structural issues, cultural narratives, and physical factors.

As I shopped, drove, bought coffee, and navigated the domestic landscapes of homeschooling, I reflected constantly on how these factors were shaping my identity as a researcher, and a woman. These experiences prompted me to think about, ask, and engage with ever more complex questions of these themes in my interviews. As I lived this research, I discovered that these visceral experiences were key to my questions, and my understandings. If I'd simply had all of my study participants come to the Berkeley Graduate School of Education (GSE), for example, to conduct their interviews, they would not have been as good. Not just because the conversations wouldn't have been as warm and open if they'd all been conducted on my "my turf," but because engaging with freeways, cul-de-sacs and row houses, for example, prompted me to ask questions not just about driving, but also loneliness and isolation. Where did homeschooling fit into the landscapes, emotional and physical, of suburbia? What was it like to be a mother, when all of your friends were at work, or a thirty-minute drive away? As I got dressed every day I wondered how the mothers I'd be talking to that day thought about her own outward-facing persona, gender presentation, and social identity. What was her work of womanhood? These questions suffused my work, during every part of this research project.

Participant Demographics

For the purpose of anonymizing my 74 participants, I have assigned them each a first name[39]. While it might be standard procedure to provide a table listing these individuals with demographics such as their ages, races, general location, number of children, and other salient information (for example, their prior classroom teaching experience, which I will discuss in *Chapter 7: Teaching, "I've Always Been a Teacher"*), doing so would immediately render my interview subjects legible and nullify any attempts made to preserve their anonymity. Instead, I will provide here a high-level overview of my interview pool demographics.

[39] I developed this list of neutral named by using the 100 most common girls names in 1980 and then eliminating duplicate spellings (Caitlin and Kaitlyn, for example) until I had a list of 67 women's names. I used the top seven men's names from the same year.

Table 3
Sex of Interview Subjects

Female	Male
67	7

As noted above, this number includes all of my planned participants: 67 mother and four fathers, as well as 3 "bonus dads."

As evidenced by Table 4, my interview population was largely white. As I discuss in the introduction, the longstanding stereotype of homeschooling is that it is an entirely white phenomenon. This was born out by my interview sample, though my data might have been skewed by a number of factors, including recruiting largely from the San Francisco Bay Area (an area with a high cost of living). Therefore, while I was able to collect observational data from BIPOC homeschoolers online, this study can only speak to the racial experiences of my participants. Yet rather than a limitation, the racial identities of my participants should be seen as a bounding feature of this study. Being able to speak to the particularity of their experiences both gives me pointed insights and helps me think about how this group is both like–and not like–other parents, both homeschoolers and not.

Table 4
Race of Interview Subjects

Race	# Count	%
White	59	79%
Asian **Chinese (5)** **Filipino (1)** **Indian (1)** **Indonesian (1)** **Japanese (1)** **Korean (1)** **Taiwanese (1)**	11	15%
Latinx	3	4%
Black	1	1.3%

All of the 64 married women and 7 married men are in heterosexual relationships. Of the 3 single women, 2 began homeschooling while married to men and continued their practice after getting divorced. I was contacted by one nonbinary AFAB[40] person but was unable to schedule an interview with them.

Table 5
Marital Status of Interview Subjects

	Married	Single
Women	64	3
Men	7	0

[40] Assigned female at birth (AFAB).

Regarding the ages of my participants and their children, these encompassed a wide range. The youngest mother I interviewed was in her late 20s and the oldest was in her early 70s. The majority, however, were in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. Correspondingly, their children ranged from an age just entering kindergarten (4 years old) to high school-aged children. In addition to homeschooled school-aged children, younger siblings (ages 1-4) were often "homeschooled" alongside their older siblings. Amongst older children, many were engaged in hybrid homeschool-junior college courses of study. I also met several women who were homeschooling a "second round" or assemblage of children, either a combination of step/biological children, biological/foster children, or two distinct age cohorts. One mother, for example, had homeschooled three older children who were now grown and off to college, when she decided to foster a younger child, now 12, who she is also homeschooling.

Contributions

When I first encountered the literature on homeschooling, these practices were framed by education policy discussions as a version of extreme choice or of the extreme privatization of the neoliberal educational landscape (See, for example, Cervone, 2017). This is where they "fit" in the available narratives but these were not necessarily the frames, theories, and narratives that best explained the homeschooling experience.

Homeschool families are quite literally "left out" of discussions of schooling and educational system demographics (though, in many cases, they are enrolled in homeschooling charters and, as I have argued here, I believe homeschooling should be included in our broader analyses of schooling). Attending to the homeschooling experiences of families not routinely included in conversations of educational policy and research both captures a fuller picture of these overlooked families and their experiences, but also helps research see more clearly the full picture of the American schooling system. While imagined as "outliers," homeschoolers actually exist at the very center of the American schooling experience, speaking volumes about both themselves and the larger institution. Failing to capture their unique perspectives on the American schooling system is a huge oversight. Homeschoolers are frequently represented as affluent white women whose privilege is served by neoliberal privatization (Burch, 2009) in education. This formulation both makes them sidekicks to the implicitly male world of school and economic policy, and renders invisible the actual diversity in homeschooling.

The homeschooling mothers' experiences conveyed in this study represent just a tiny slice of the homeschooling community and, yet, their stories still contain richness, diversity, and the ability to shed light on the experience(s) of homeschooling. Because homeschooling doesn't happen in a vacuum and is, I argue, a considered response to particular economic, political, religious, racial, and social factors, the decision to homeschool should be seen as both reactionary and agentic. In this, homeschooling gives us a picture of both what is problematic, and what is possible, within the larger structures.

The question, then, isn't one of a specific race or class but of a class niche, racial ideology, or orientation towards the state/institutions. Proponents of homeschooling argue for laws and educational policy that would allow for more leniency in homeschooling, but this raises two questions: 1) can homeschooling expand in the absence of other social supports and 2) should it? These questions are largely outside the scope of this research, but I want to remain attentive to the ways that homeschooling is unpaid educational labor that represents both individualized and systemic opportunity costs. As we have seen so clearly with pandemic-schooling, home education puts huge care-giving and domestic labor strains on mothers. While

the educational policymakers and practitioners have approached COVID as simply a new–albeit cataclysmic–moment for schooling, this research prompts us to consider whether it is also a new moment for labor, women's work, and the family.

Chapter 5: Work
"Homeschooling is Parenting on Steroids"

If you're attachment parenting, homeschooling is the logical next step.
Homeschooling is parenting on steroids.
(Megan, April 9, 2019).

While feminist scholars have drawn meaningful attention to issues of women's labor, in the area of educational policy and research, women's work remains a vastly under-studied and under-theorized area of concern. Scholarship has focused on the ways that education, particularly teaching, has become a feminized field (see, e.g., Boyle, 2004), but what of highly labor-intensive unpaid education roles like homeschooling? Much remains to be said about this type of unpaid educational labor that women perform, and what this labor reveals about the whole of the American schooling system. Building on the prior framing chapter, *Chapter 3: The History of Home/Schooling,* this chapter understands homeschooling as combined domestic-educational labor, work that takes place at the crucial intersection of schooling and the home. In this chapter I begin addressing the first of my three research questions, asking, "what is the gendered work of homeschooling?" As the mothers I interview made clear, homeschooling practice, while rooted in parenting, is a distinct kind of educational labor separate from domestic labor or outside employment. As such, homeschooling mothers develop a highly-focused educational expertise (in the practice and their children) that frequently precludes them from doing other kinds of (paid) labor. This labor is often unseen and always unpaid, both by their families and the larger economic system. Homeschool mothers give their labor–often joyfully–for the practice, but recognize that they are made economically vulnerable by it, too.

This chapter is organized into three main sections. In section one, I begin by framing my discussion of educational labor as the third shift, drawing a distinction between domestic labor and educational work. This section asks–rather than whether or not homeschooling is a feminist choice–the degree of agency and support a mother has in her educational labor. In section two, I explore mother's conceptions of the job of homeschooling. What do homeschooling mothers think is the work? This analysis suggests that mothers closely relate the work to that of parenting, and invoke maternal images of care while at the same time taking on a new homeschooling expertise. In the third and final section of this chapter, I look at how homeschooling is an all-consuming occupation that requires most mothers step back from their paid labor outside the home. In so doing, I find, they are left economically vulnerable; a position that is at odds with the professional identity and expertise they have assumed.

Is Homeschooling Feminist?

One of the most common questions homeschoolers are asked–and that I myself am guilty of posing–is whether theirs is a feminist choice. Underlying that question is a value judgement and a provocation: did you really choose this? Are you equal? Are you happy?

As the homeschoolers in my study affirm, they choose, and have the privilege to choose, to stay home and educate their children and, as Rachel told me,

> I think that for me, I do feel I, I feel that I am a feminist. And I don't feel anti-feminist because if, I guess depending on which way I'm a feminist they're talking about, but if it's all about women being able to choose what they'd like to do, and doing anything they

> want, this is what I love and what I want. And I know that that's not necessarily very common, but I feel like I'm pretty radical in a lot of other ways. Like being a Christian unschooler, but yes, so, to me, it doesn't feel like this very safe and, like, lame thing to do. Because it's what I choose and what I want. Yeah, I do. I don't feel that I'm being trapped in this (Rachel, April 15, 2019).

Rachel is wrestling with the exact contradictions and definitional questions that have animated 3rd wave feminism. She starts to clearly claim her feminism ("for me, I do feel I, I feel that I am a feminist"), doubles back on herself to consider how others might define her choices from the outside, ("I guess depending on which way I'm a feminist they're talking about"), defines it for herself as agentic choice ("if it's all about women being able to choose what they'd like to do, and doing anything they want"), asserts her homeschooling as meeting that definition ("this is what I love and what I want") and adds that she is radical in her choice because of her combined identity as a Christian and an unschooler.

After declaring hers a feminist choice, Rachel goes on to say that she believes the true feminism and radicalism of her actions is unseen, both by a society that likes to prop up mothers in name only and by people who judge her (for homeschooling). It is in her comments that I see some of the populist, anti-statist sentiments that bring people to homeschooling, but also some of the same frustrations that could unite people–women, workers, mothers–across the political spectrum in a renewed feminist agenda. Rachel says that,

> Yeah, society, everybody will say, Wow, being a mom is really important…moms are the heroes, they're here, the real MVP, but literally at the same time our society craps upon you, you can't live in this [Silicon] valley. Also, yeah, just piles and piles and piles against you. Yeah, it's just like, it just feels very unfair. So in that way, I feel a little revolutionary in terms of just like, just holding down the fort here doing the thing that I want to do, you know? (Rachel, April 15, 2019)

Assertions like Rachel's lead me to consider whether we are in a new fourth wave of the feminist movement, one in which such internal "disputes" can take on new meaning. In many ways the country has clearly moved–as a social, political, and cultural entity–past Spice Girls vs. Riot Grrrls. Some scholars have indeed pointed to a fourth wave, one characterized by the digital landscape and the accessibility of social media. Their argument is that blogs and platforms like Facebook and Instagram have democratized communication and connected disparate communities, allowing for women to find new avenues of expression and young people, especially, to connect (Blevins, 2018; Householder, 2015). In this reading, it would be shared commitments to faith or unschooling, rather than disagreements, that would unite Rachel with other women.

Many of the mothers I spoke with cited online homeschool groups, listservs, blogs, and forums as just such spaces of connectivity and support. Without these, say some, homeschooling can be "so isolating. So you're just at home all the time, and it's just two of you. And you're both bored at home all the time and same four walls" (Erica, April 11, 2019). These homeschool groups are supportive of not just their practice, but also of their desire to be highly engaged, highly labor-intensive mothers. Says Maria, she was grateful to fall in with a burgeoning homeschool support group right when her son turned five. She'd tried going to a traditional (non-homeschool) mom's group, but

> every single woman there was saying, 'Oh my god, I can't wait till my kid is five, and I can like go to the gym and get my nails done and go to the spa.' It's like, why did you

> have kids? Because do you just want to, like, procreate and then like, turn them over to the state? (Maria, April 15, 2019)

Judgmental tone aside, Maria was looking for validation and support of the kind of educational labor she wanted to be expending.

A galvanized fourth wave of feminism could be an intersectional moment of abandoning old disputes about individual choices and identities and, instead, a new assault on the systems of power and inequality that force mothers into untenable positions and agonizing choices. Rather than recapitulating the same old fights in feminism and feminist discourse we could, instead, launch our attacks at the systemic issues that so position women, and mothers.

After several years of asking homeschoolers the "are you a feminist" question, I am sure that it is the wrong one. For one, it is glaringly obvious that one can choose something but that it can still be hard and one can still be, frequently, unhappy; this was the "revelation" of the early era of Mommy Bloggers who set out to talk more openly and authentically about their experiences of parenting.[41] For another, this question falls into a kind of absolutist thinking and zero sum logic that is typical of the postfeminist era (Hall & Rodriguez, 2003; McRobbie, 2004; Spigel, McRobbie, Tasker, & Negra, 2007); something either is fully realized feminism or fails to meet some abstract standard of equality. Neither of these issues– the "yes, but" or "shades of gray"–is adequately or satisfactorily answered by a question as seemingly simple as "is your homeschooling a feminist choice?"

Instead, the interviews I conducted with homeschoolers led to subtler, and more complicated questions about the degree of agency and support a mother has in her educational labor. Do you choose to give this amount and kind of educational labor? Do you have access to other types or kinds of educational labor systems and institutions or are alternatives too expensive, inaccessible, poor-quality, or otherwise not available? Do you and your (male) partner give the same amount of educational labor and how did you decide to divide it? Are you satisfied with the amount of educational labor that is required of you? What is the effect of this educational labor on the rest of your life? These questions apply to all mothers, and they speak to educational practices and phenomena broader than just homeschooling. When we speak about educational labor in this way, we can begin to reckon with the time and space it takes up in women's lives, questions of educational labor equity, and educational labor opportunity costs. When we do this, we begin to see the enormous space educational labor takes up in women's lives. Here, I am speaking of educational labor as the *third shift.*

The work, and the burdens, of the second shift, are demonstrably still present for working mothers, but my research uncovers educational labor as the vast *third shift* not captured by these earlier discussions. The second shift literature is attentive to issues of care-giving and childcare, and well as domestic chores like laundry, cleaning, and cooking. Buried in these tasks is certainly educational labor, and yet this type of work–which occupies a materially and intellectually significant portion of time–is never explicitly discussed.[42]

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[41] I explore the phenomenon of Mommy Blogging in more detail in *Chapter 1, The History of Home/Schooling.*

[42] Hochschild and Machung categorize the second shift into three categories: housework, parenting, and management of domestic life. In parenting they do include both physical care of the child and a catch-all "educating the child (for example, daily discipline, reading)" (p. 282). However, nowhere in their text do they mention time-consuming activities like helping with homework, volunteering at school, class projects, or other types of educational labor. This might be due to the fact that they were focusing on families with children under the age of 6, but since they remained with families for several years and conducted follow-up studies, there was ample time for this type of labor to emerge.

Homeschool mothers, and the work they perform, make clear that educational work and household maintenance are of a significantly different nature, even though they both take place in and around the home. And even though, as we will see, many mothers relate homeschooling to parenting, educational labor requires a different level of focus, time, and care. Kristen talked about tasking her husband with more of the household domestic tasks like shopping and laundry because homeschooling was such a demanding role and required so much of her undivided attention. She talked about days when she tried to multi-task between homeschooling and domestic chores, and how that simply wasn't possible,

> You can't just run off to the other room. And that's awful. I mean, to try to be home and be engaged with your kids, and have something enriching and fun and exciting happening and for you to be either mentally checked out because you're making a grocery list, or running back and forth to put the clothes in the laundry. It's awful. I mean, that's the worst. Because they're not having fun. You're not having fun. And then you're just you're doing chores, but you're "homeschooling" that day, right? I hated those days. I mean, if I'm going to be home with them and we're going to be doing stuff. It needs to be 100% present all of us there all of us engaged, what we're doing not use it over there and do that because I've got my own work to do. But that's a cost too, though. So I think you know that those times that you devote to that you have to set aside, your email or whatever else has to be answered, the phone that rings you know, and try to carve that time out (Kristen, April 15, 2019)

Not only did Kristen not feel free to multi-task with domestic chores, but she also didn't feel able to do other types of work (her email or answering the phone) while serving in her role as homeschool educator. Of course, some unschoolers would push against Kristen's sentiment, as their pedagogical approach makes everyday life the stuff of schooling. At the same time, unschooling also recognizes that in order to transform the everyday into education, parents and children must approach tasks with an eye towards growth and development. If anything, the very intentional "learning by doing" model of unschooling makes it clear that educational labor not simply the same thing as other domestic work.

As educational labor is distinct from domestic work and additive to the other work of parenting, research needs to to start talking about education as the third shift and reframing educational labor–from nightly homework help, to large-scale science projects, to bake sales and PTA meetings, up to and including homeschooling and pandemic-schooling–as part of the educational third shift.

At the same time that we tally the unpaid labor of mothers in the third shift, we should also include the unpaid and underpaid labor of female teachers. Doing so might seem in defiance of the concept–isn't teachers' labor, however exploited it may be, counted as their first shift? Yet I argue that the third shift is where we should capture all of the "extra" time teachers spend on their work, as well as their out-of-pocket expenses (see, e.g., Spiegelman, 2018). Together, the unpaid and underpaid labor of women combine to fuel the educational economy and without their third shift labor, the educational landscape would simply fail to function.

Considering the work of mothers and teachers as a combined educational third shift labor force has a political as well as practical utility. In addition to recognizing that much of the work done by women is similar in scope, aims, and practice, this is also (as demonstrated by my findings in this chapter) attentive to the fact that women engaged in third shift labor move between roles as, for example, classroom teachers and homeschoolers. Other parents may shift between and even simultaneously occupy the roles of mother, teacher, and pandemic-schooler. In

noticing that people and their roles move between the classroom and the home, we should also notice the ways that the educational third shift unites women's work across the private domestic and public school spheres. As examined in *Chapter 3: The History of Home/Schooling*, the distinction between these spheres is fictitious and is bridged by educational labor. The third shift, explicitly named here as work, helps to bring into sharper focus the connection between these two spheres and the women's labor that helps to bridge them.

The homeschooling educational labor that I record in this chapter is work–joyfully, meaningfully, fraughtfully, tirelessly, tiredly given–but it is work. Because homeschooling takes place in the home, and because it is largely women's work, it falls into a double-blind space of being unseen and unappreciated, but I insist on calling it such because moving an action into the realm of "work" and an action into the category of a "job" has real material and symbolic meaning in a capitalism system. When something isn't work, or a job, it can be neither quantified nor compensated, neither seen nor figured into the vast economy of doing-things that makes the world function.

What is your Job?

In every interview I conducted with a homeschooling mother, I explicitly asked the question, "what is your job?" Without explanation of this term, some took the question to mean, "what is your day-to-day work as a homeschooler?" Others interpreted the question as one about their role, i.e., their relationship to their children, within the family, or to the homeschooling experience. Still others saw the question as an inquiry about goals and objectives: "what are you trying to achieve?"

I more I talked with homeschoolers, the more the *job* of homeschooling emerged as a central animating concern of the dissertation. How the mothers I interviewed interpreted and answered the question about their job offers the beginning of an exploration into the complicated positionality of women's–and particularly mothers'–educational labor. Further, their answers begin to unpack the multifaceted definition(s) of work, and the implications, intersections, and consequences of women's labor that this research seeks to explore.

However homeschooling mothers understand the term "job," the matter of their labor–how they spend it, for whom they toil, how it is valued and compensated–preoccupies them. Since the common school era, American teaching has been–to a significant degree–women's work, but that work has shifted. Originally, women teachers were expected to be young and single but in the mid-twentieth century married women and mothers became the norm (Donahue, 2002). With this shift, the expectation is no longer that a woman will automatically move from unmarried teacher to married (stay-at home) mother. Women advocated for and successfully won the right of married women to remain teachers and yet, in part because of teaching's ongoing status as a "pink" profession, working conditions remain poor and burnout among teachers is notoriously high (e.g., Lee, Loeb, & Marks, 1995). Third wave feminism has also been notoriously ambivalent, even antagonistic, towards women who now choose to stay home (whether they homeschool or not) after marriage and children. The examination of homeschooling labor thus offers a particular but illuminating approach to the intersection of mothering, teaching, and work.

The Work of Homeschooling

As homeschooling moms moved into the work, they began to clarify for themselves what the "job" (as I phrased it) would be and what that would would entail. How would they approach the work? Where did homeschooling end and parenting begin?

When she first started homeschooling Tracy thought her job was just to "be a good mom, to have a good environment for them to spend maybe the morning doing academic things, but making it totally fun. So it didn't feel like school" but as her kids got older and her own sense of the practice grew,

> I began to see it as a 40-hour week job, where we had to spend a certain number of hours in school. And it was okay if I was up till 11 o'clock at night preparing for the next day, because this is what it was going to take to do a good job. And so it went from being really relaxed to 'this isn't only going to be the mornings, this is my life.' And it's a 40-hour-a-week job. And then that's where I started to see that I needed to have an undivided focus on homeschooling. So that had to be my priority. And so other things like hobbies, household maintenance, I mean, those kinds of things had to take a backseat, because this was my job. I was going to do the best job that I could for my kids (Tracy, April 30, 2019).

Before becoming a homeschooler, Tracy was a physician, a career she stepped away from to after she saw her older sister successfully homeschooling her children. Her devotion to the practice was such that she ended up attending all of her children's Junior College classes with them.

Other homeschooler's echoed Tracy's commitment to professionalism and went about "studying up" on curriculum, pedagogy, learning philosophies, and other educational approaches, Jamie, however, started off hyper-concerned about standards and "doing school" and gradually relaxed. She doesn't homeschool "the same way with my fourth as I did with my first," remembering

> In the beginning, I think I was doing school like somebody was chasing me, you know. I was like, am I doing enough? You know, are they up to standards? Are, you know, can they hold a conversation with their peers? I mean, are they to behind it? Have I let this one slip through the cracks? And now, you know, time has been on my side, it's like, oh, gosh, they're fine. We have plenty of time. We're good (Jamie, April 5, 2019).

The pressure on homeschooling parents to "prove" that their children are doing well and that the experiment is working–to family members, friends, and even outside authorities–can create a huge work load on mothers. Trying to ensure that homeschooling is a success is an educational as well as psychological burden.

Homeschool mothers largely share that burden alone, or in community with other mothers. Many do not get substantive material help from their (male) partners and in several cases were actively in contention with their husbands about continuing homeschooling. Dad David, previously a business executive, had worked long hours. But with two old children transitioning to junior college and he and his wife in a work flux, it made sense for him to take over the full-time homeschooling. He'd spent about a year preparing to transition to his new role and was on week eight of the new job when we spoke, finding, "I do feel with being home for eight weeks now, it is true, the more I'm around them, it definitely feels different. If you're home a lot more, right. It's easier to get frustrated" (David, April 8, 2019). He also expressed the hope that he and his wife would continue to do the kinds of hand-offs that they had done when she was the primary homeschooler and she was frustrated. Emily, who taught for 11 years and has been homeschooling for four, said her husband "took a long time to convince, and is probably still not 100% convinced that this is the best thing" (Emily, April 19, 2019). Mothers talked about being the "facilitator," "general," or "commander" of both the house and the homeschooling endeavor, adding that their husband ("dad") takes on particular tasks that play to

his strengths, both around the house and in homeschooling. Mary's husband works long hours so he's generally uninvolved with the homeschooling, but

> …he's like my Science Guy. Like if we gave him a chemistry question, oh, if you do the atoms this way, but then you can do that. So he's just like–last night I was just talking to him. So he's just backup. I don't necessarily have him, like, teach. He just does a lot of informal, just talking with the boys… (Mary, April 7, 2019).

Informal chatting still leaves Mary with all of the formal work of schooling, as well as all of the domestic labor.

Fascinatingly, two women responded to my call for participants who were not the implementer of the homeschooling (both had full-time jobs) but did all the work of planning and executing the homeschooling curriculum. Angela, a full-time social worker for the VA in Southern California, planned to homeschool even before having her 4-year-old daughter. As a social worker who works with homeless veterans, her first cited concerns and reasons for homeschooling were all about holistic health: sleep deprivation; mental health; being able to move and eat freely during the day; and being closely bonded with vital adults. Yet she didn't seem to trust her husband to manage the homeschooling process, "I pretty much organize everything and then he will implement" (Angela, March 28, 2019). When talking about their general approach to chores and the management of the house, Angela acknowledged that her husband is "easygoing" and "spacey" but,

> what's great about my husband is he doesn't, you know, ascribe to that [strict gender roles], and he, he's very much open to sharing, you know, whatever is fair in the family and having everybody be happy. And he's okay with me sort of dictating that since he's so spaced out, and he wouldn't, like he doesn't even have the capacity to know, like, what would fair be I guess, right? And I'm fair, so he's okay with me dictating. Or delegating I should say. Not dictating (Angela).

For Angela and her husband, this division of labor seemed to be a fair one, with him doing his fair share of the cooking (all of it) and cleaning (much of it) in exchange for Angela's organizational acumen. Alternately, Amanda's husband was a "bad match" to homeschool her 2E son and so, even though she has a PhD and very demanding, full-time job and he was out of work, she was still in charge of the homeschooling.

> Faw: So I find it interesting that you're the one who has the full time job.
> Amanda: Yeah...
> Faw: ...yet still also trying to be the homework police. [Her term]
> Amanda: Oh is this about like feminism and the second shift?
> Faw: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
> Amanda: I don't have anything bright to say on that subject. Sorry.
> Faw: I just think it's really interesting who does the work of schooling. Because it sounds like you are?
> Amanda: Yeah. I do.
> Faw: And I get that, in your family, there's a good personality-fit feature of that. But it also seems like…
> Amanda: bullshit?
> Faw: Yeah. Like you kinda got stuck with it a little bit.
> Amanda: [emphatically] Kinda.

Amanda did not think that her educational labor arrangement was a fair or equitable one and when her husband started his new fulltime job in the fall they were planning to hire a homeschool nanny they couldn't really afford to implement their son's homeschooling.

Emily thinks the job of homeschooling is very similar to the job of parenting, which is part of the difficulty of the work. Because

> sometimes you can get better results out of a child when they go to the stranger. They want to impress or they want to, you know, they want to, they want to earn that. So I think it's really hard to be a homeschooling parent, and to figure out how to manage both roles in your child's life. At the same time, I think it comes really easily and naturally because we're our children's first teachers anyway (Emily, April 9, 2019).

Many see the work of homeschooling and parenting and inexorably intertwined, yet through their practice they also came to a new identity, that of the expert.

Homeschoolers constructed, or re-constructed identities as teachers and experts, both in home-based education and in their own children. They invested deeply in the practices, routines, and rhythms of both care and one-on-one or one-on-few education. In this, they generated a new kind of educational expertise, one based in a shared domestic-maternal labor. For many, like Cynthia, an older mother whose children were in college and high school, that expertise began with the experience of pregnancy, "It was really empowering to have a baby at home and and to kind of take control of that, you know, that was certainly... And, and I'm a person who, who does like to consider alternatives. So it appealed to me" (Cynthia, May 8, 2019). Recognizing that motherhood could be a source of self-determination (as is explored further in *Chapter 6: Advocacy and Agency, "I'm the Mom I'm Going to Work It Out"*) was the beginning of empowerment that led, for some to homeschooling and homeschooling expertise. Even for mothers who didn't find that the process of expertise started this early, they shared in a sense that they were experts about their children's wants, needs, personalities, and capacities.

Others, like Erica, really struggled to figure out what their job, and the work of homeschooling, would be. When she first started homeschooling

> I didn't know what my role would be. Would I be a teacher? What I, you know, I can't I'm not a teacher. I'm not trained to be a teacher. How do I even find classes? How do I how do I know that it's meeting California standards? You know, I not even sure what classes to sign up for? Do I have to do everything at home? Is he going to be at home? all day, every day? You know, all these all these questions, you have no idea (Erica, April 11, 2019)

That homeschooling is so individualistic, and so decentralized, is part of its appeal, but it also makes the work that much more focused on any individual. Many homeschoolers talk about finding the practice and discovering their "village," but I heard equally about the sense of loneliness homeschooling can bring and the feeling mothers had that they were working away alone. Because homeschooling takes place in homes, it suffers from some of the same problems of isolation of pandemic-work-from-home. In addition, motherhood comes loaded with the cultural expectations of sacrifice and selflessness. Homeschooling mothers take on this narrative of totally devoted love, as Jill did,

> Jill: I think moms love you more than anybody in the world, even your spouses, I do. I think there's just really something about a mom that –because my son has this girlfriend (Not the one getting married, the other one), And I said something about well, "I love you the most" or something. And he kind of went ehhh... and I know. Trust me. I love you. I love you more than that girl. Way more.

> LF: Is it different too, like the selflessness? Especially with homeschooling, right? [We'd just been having a conversation about the idea of selflessness, her term]
>
> HC: Yeah. I mean, if the boat's going down, I'm picking my kids and... I'm letting my husband go. I mean, that's, I mean, he knows that. He knows, you know, that. You know, I mean, moms. That's just how moms are. Moms go after their kids... Thank you [husband] for the life insurance (Jill, May 14, 2019)

Yet not every homeschool mother accepts this narrative so blithely. Jill left a corporate career to be a homeschooler, first for her teenaged foster son and then two biological children. Here, she frames homeschooling as her new "job."

> Jill: You know, I mean, I put my career aside for a while. And that was fine. You know, in some careers its harder than others. But I didn't want to be CFO. So I, you know, it was never my goal, right? But I do like my job, right? And so now I can do both. You know, so trying to find that balance where you can do both, you know, but you don't have to do one or the other way.
>
> Faw: I think women are told you can do all of it.
>
> Jill: *You cannot.* It's not possible. It's being home is a big job. Working is a big job…You know, it's just, it's a lie. But you cannot do it all. It's a lie. They lied.

Carrie also "chose my kids over my career" and she considers the financial ramifications of that decision, "if I would have stayed, we could retire a lot younger than we are now. Yeah. But I don't regret the time that my children Yeah, I just, I, you can never get back to this time with your children. And, and, you know, I just, I don't regret that (Carrie, April 23, 2019).

Work Unseen, Work Unpaid

One of the biggest sources of frustration for homeschooling mothers was feeling like their work wasn't being seen, recognized or appreciated–either by their families or the outside world. Cynthia knew that the work she'd done was valuable and the contributions she'd made to her family and society were precious but "then I, it's a little hard because I get, you know, my Social Security statement every year and it says zero" (Cynthia May 8, 2019). Lisa echoes, saying,

> It takes a toll. Yeah. You know, it's a big sacrifice. Yeah. A huge sacrifice on my career, on my education, when I have no social security and very minimal income because I've been 20 years of staying home with my kids. If my husband would up and leave me–I'm screwed. To be honest, I'm screwed. I mean, pretty much (Lisa, April 2, 2019).

Knowing that she couldn't easily leave her marriage or didn't have financial independence (something she was keenly aware of after being a single mother) was something that weighed heavily on Lisa's mind. Cynthia sent me a follow-up email after our interview to continue the theme of economic vulnerability that we'd discussed in person. She wrote,

> While I loved homeschooling the kids (usually!), I did feel "economically vulnerable," dependent on my husband for financial support, and that bothers me. I feel that the time I spent away from work was "worth it" in the sense that it gave me and my family a lot in return. But I didn't like that I had no plan B if anything went wrong with my marriage, or if [Husband] could no long support us for any reason.

> That economic vulnerability is the reason I feel ambivalent about recommending it to others, including my own kids. Homeschooling is a fabulous education–but it does come at a price, especially for the parent who stays home (especially when that parent is female).
>
> Of course, that IS a factor that could be at least partly remedied by changing public policies around the "work" of parenting, and gender equality, and redefining "education"–and better parental support, less discrimination, and more individualized learning could have a very positive impact on society on so many levels… :) (Cynthia, email, May 8, 2019)

This lingering financial issue wasn't the issue of living on just one salary, as we might guess from the outside looking in at a homeschooling family's finances but, instead, an economic vulnerability that she acknowledged made her especially vulnerable as the parent who stays home and doesn't earn a wage. I met one mother who–out of a special concern for anonymity I won't name– suggested that she at one point considered leaving her marriage but then realized she wouldn't have the financial resources to do so because she'd spent the last decade homeschooling.

Conclusion

While homeschooling mothers related to their "job" and the work of homeschooling differently, they agree that it is, indeed, work. What's more, homeschooling is difficult work that precludes other types of (paid) labor, making it difficult for homeschooling mothers to work for pay outside the home. While I met a few homeschoolers who did work for pay, they were in the minority. Most had non-traditional jobs with non-traditional hours, including freelancing or running their own business/non-profit, or in professions with very unusual hours (for example, a first responder who worked 4 straight days on and then a week off). A few others who worked for pay had very young or older children who either attended a day care or were largely self-sufficient.

Ultimately, many homeschooling mothers framed their work as occupying the protection/punishment, care/discipline dialectic. It is their job to keep their children safe and nourish them every way possible while simultaneously guiding and regulating them to their brighter future. The protection/punishment dialectic also works on them, though. As Lisa notes, while many joyfully choose the work of homeschooling, they cannot leave without being "screwed." This economic process serves to both carve out a protected niche for their homeschooling work while at the same time regulating their labor through devaluation.

The question, then, isn't whether the educational labor of homeschooling is feminist or not, but whether the work is, ultimately, one that allows for certain kinds of agency. This is the topic that will be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 6: Advocacy & Agency
"I'm the Mom, I'm Going to Work It Out"

At first when my kids were, even preschool level, you know how kids can be obnoxious. And do all these things. And I'm like, this isn't–I don't really like being around, little little kids like that. But I'm the mom. And I'm gonna, I'm gonna work it out. And like the discipline, I'm the mom, I'm going to work it out. I'm going to figure this out. I'm, I'm doing this. I feel like I'm, I'm just really focused on this. And I'm going to make it work. Whatever it takes. It was like that (Tracy, April 30, 2019).

In this chapter I turn to the second of my research questions, asking, "is homeschooling a form of choice? Of advocacy?" Following the previous chapter, *Chapter 5: Work, "Homeschool is Parenting on Steroids,"* advocacy is seen here as a subset or type of work, a kind of labor by homeschool mothers *on behalf* of themselves and their children. Using the framing of love, the homeschooling mothers I interviewed make claims to parental rights by declaring that the state cannot possibly love their children the way they do, and further asserting that love is the essential characteristic for teaching. While the homeschooling mothers in my study do find salience with the frames of advocacy and agency, as I explore in this chapter I find that they use homeschooling as an advocacy tool, rather than as an advocacy target. Echoing Stevens, Lampmt, and Wuthnow (Stevens et al., 2003), I find that for these mothers, homeschooling was a way to advocate for themselves, the individual and educational needs of their children, and in critique of a schooling system they found lacking.

In recent decades, often called a neoliberal era, educational policy and politics has witnessed the growing strength of charter schools and the declining legitimacy of traditional public schools. In this environment, home schooling is frequently framed as an extreme manifestation of neoliberal privatization, a highly individualized solution to a highly individual problem of education. And yet homeschooling attracts adherents from rural right-wing fundamentalist Trump-county districts as well as from boho-progressive, tech-adjacent affluent enclaves like Marin County[43].

This chapter seeks to understand how, then, the personal and political advocacy and agency of homeschooling is actually constructed and what that construction achieves. In this chapter I also use the concept of agency, which I define here using the definition theorized by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). They write that, due to the uncertainty of future events and the inexorability of action from situated context, agency cannot simply be defined as power or action, but should be instead situationally and temporally situated. Their definition of agency recognizes individuals' capacity for "formulating projects for the future and realizing them, even if only in small part, and with unforeseen outcomes, in the present" (p. 964). Feminist scholars of agency would add that the concept should also include the power to shape not just events, but also meaning and perspectives, such as the ability to shape a narrative framing (O'Meara, 2015). Agency is thus the ability to plan and execute, but it is also the ability to make meaning and take charge of "the story" of events.

[43] Which, in 2019, had the the sixth highest income per capita of all U.S. counties.

This chapter is organized into three main sections. In section one, I explore homeschoolers' claims to educational rights via their assertion of parental rights. Building on earlier sections of this work, this section asks how maternal labor is positioned as a form of agentic action and how, in deploying their labor, homeschoolers assert their claims to their children's education. In section two, I explore notions of advocacy, and consider homeschooling as both a form of advocacy and mothers' explicit advocacy efforts on behalf of homeschooling. I ask, what is the gendered work that reciprocally fuels homeschooling as, broadly, advocacy? In the third and final section of this chapter, I move from the individual to the collective, and consider the larger political project of homeschooling.

Love Makes a Teacher

Homeschool mothers' assertion of parental rights, in opposition to the parental rights of governmental schools, rely on several key assertions, one of the most critical being the essential educational value of love. Homeschool mothers frequently invoked the issue of love, not just as a matter of care, but to assert their parental rights and to make claims to educational decision-making rights on behalf of their children. In a neoliberal policy space wherein public institutions are inherently suspect and individualized solutions are the only politically tenable option for systemic problems, mothers logically reassert their right to educate children by framing familial love–over academic competency or any other skill or quality–as one of the fundamental to the schooling process. Homeschooling mothers further make the case that maternal love is a critical qualification of the teacher, setting up the conditions for an impossible-to-resolve institutional tension. In interview after interview, homeschooling mothers argued that institutional educators are both too professionalized (i.e., not loving enough) and not sufficiently trained (i.e., incapable of caring for the unique needs of 30+ children) to be good teachers.

Karen chose her son's elementary school because it had a garden program and did restorative justice–she was looking for somewhere "that I thought I would love and that I thought fit him really well" but it quickly turned out to be "kind of like a huge failure." Her kindergarten-aged son was energetic and got in trouble for playing around too much, spent a day in a conference room attached to the principal's office, and wasn't making any friends. When Karen went to observe and volunteer for a garden session, "it was like a 20-minute session. And every time we went, it was more about like having the kids walk out in line. And it wasn't there was a little very little garden garden made. And it was more about like, following rules" (Karen, April 30, 2019). As Karen, who was not a classroom teacher, put it, in speaking to administrators about her decision to remove her first-grader from the school,

> I went into school, and I said 'I'm going to take him out.' And they said, 'Where are you taking him?' …The supervisor said, 'I don't know what makes you think you can teach your kid.' And I said…'I don't know what makes you think one person can teach 30 kids'… So you know, you can't meet my child's needs. But you're telling me I can't meet my child's needs (Karen, April 30, 2019).

Karen was angered by the notion that institutional professionals would presume to know better or care more deeply than she could, and her path to homeschooling was paved by her certainty that they were wrong. Echoed David, a conservative Christian father,

> I'll say it's, it's a powerful thing that I can decide, for my children. what is best for my children without somebody else, my government, my teacher, my principal telling me that they know better than me… The principal and the teacher did not have children of their own. They're both very young. I have no problem with that. But the very way it was

> presented was that 'we know better for your kids than you know.' I'm lucky. I know what motivates my son, what encourages him. It's not just about book smart. It's not just about what he's learning. You're creating adults here. So that's the one thing, you know… I see my child as a unique individual…I can promise you I love my children, my wife and I love our children more than any teacher, professor, more than any administrator. Which means when we make decisions, that's what we're thinking about more than just what the school district says I should do or what the right procedure is. Here I can individualize everything (David, April 8, 2019).

This work finds that homeschooling, an educational field dominated by mothers, uses the framing of love, particularly a notion of instinctual maternal love, as a means of asserting and claiming space within the contested field of parental educational rights. Homeschooling mothers argue that love, translated to attention and something like Noddings's notion of care (Noddings, 1988), is the necessary foundation for a good education. Their central claim is that the loving mother will do whatever is necessary to provide a good education for her children, whether it is teaching them herself or finding the appropriate resource. Further, in this framing, love functions not just as a proxy for quality of expertise but as a guiding ethos, a mother's instinct for what should be done.

The homeschooling mothers considered love the core of instructional practice, superior the expertise and worthy of equal legal standing. Moreover, for them, love involves more than an abstract sense of duty; it requires attending to the particular needs of a particular child. In my interviews, "love" is an active verb. My very first interviewee, Jennifer, framed this claim to educational rights via parental rights even more strongly. She was talking about her reasons for homeschooling, which included wanting to live a simpler life inspired by her European roots and being concerned about some health problems her children were exhibiting.

> So my, my reason to homeschool…is just very much, I feel, the birthright of parents and children being able to be together. I feel it is equally strongly for the parents well, so strongly for the parents–and if, if I have to weight it, I guess, more strongly for the kids. You know, they're the real innocents here coming into the world. And, you know, I just feel like parents need to do the best they can by their kids, which looks different in every family…I have had bad school experiences…I just was not gonna, I was not gonna sacrifice them. (Jennifer, March 8, 2019)

In this answer, Jennifer creates a forceful dichotomy between the family, wherein parents and children have a "birthright" to be together and schools, which would be sacrificing them.

When I asked about her teaching style, Sarah, a former Montessori teacher who closed her school to focus on exclusively homeschooling her children when her eldest reached the third grade, said,

> I am, I mean, I am in charge, I know I'm in charge of–but I want them to understand the reasons behind things. I think that's the ideal. And we all have moods. So one, what works really well one day may not work well in next. So as far as my parenting style, I mean, I just love being with my kids. And I think that it can be really stressful for other people too. So it mean, it may not work for all families. But for us. I mean, I just I've always wanted to be a teacher. But my idea of what that looks like has definitely evolved and changed. I think more I see myself as just a parent than a teacher (Sarah, March 16, 2019).

Many of the parents I spoke with didn't phrase this core ethos as "love," but they did joke that they "actually liked" their children, or enjoyed spending time with them. They made the claim that this was unusual, or that other parents were obviously comfortable being separated from their children for the day. Rachel, commented on the skepticism and pushback she sometimes gets from non-homeschoolers,

> … I don't know. They seem to be, now, these people don't know my kids yet. So I think there is an element of like, you know, yeesh. But yeah, And a lot of it is just the whole, like, Don't you need a break? Oh, my God, I could never, if that's the element– that I think and honestly, that I would rather I would push against that more so than any academic thing. Because I'm like, not saying that you don't, but I actually enjoy being around my children…

And is concerned about the way other parents talk about their own children and the time they spend together. She knows parenting isn't easy and isn't trying to paint it as such, but doesn't like the cultural narratives that make it a punishment, either.

> I know, it's hard to hear that because I'm like, sometimes their kids can hear too. And you're like, you're like, Okay, you know, not that you should never be away from your children. I'm not saying that at all. But like, sometimes they'll just go and be like, 'actually it's a break and I think they like it anyway and blah, blah, blah,' you know. And you're like, okay, I really I do I like I said, I feel that it's a calling and I feel very happy to be among my little people. It's hard. Obviously, there are many frustrations, but like, I don't know, I honestly don't know what I would do with my time. Maybe get a great job. I don't know (Rachel, April 5, 2019).

Rachel wants to shelter her children (and others') from any suggestion that their parents would rather be doing something else with their time and she, a pastor's wife, frames her love for her children and for homeschooling as a devotional "calling."

The few fathers I spoke with talked about how it was a love born out of the deep well of expertise that grew from spending extensive time with their children. Jason, one of the few fathers I spoke with, was working on tech to "disrupt" the education system. His central complaint with traditional schooling was that it was a monopoly, but he also hated how it disempowered parents by creating the narrative that they couldn't teach. He said,

> Yeah, and one big thing is, I believe our schooling system, the way that we've promoted with the world and with the adults is we tell the parents, you're not qualified to teach. You can't, you can't teach your children–you need to send them to us so your children can learn. We envision empowering parents, because I believe everyone on this planet has something to teach, has something to offer. And if we start empowering parents to say, hey, you're qualified to teach your children, a lot of times is more qualified than a teacher is. Because you–in the sense that you know your child more than the teacher does–you see the habits, you see the patterns of your child from birth (Jason, April 2, 2019).

Jason's use of the term "empower" here, possibly stemming from his background in tech, speaks to the the underlying agency, or ability to act and produce change, that homeschoolers seek to gain through their assertion of parental rights. More often, however, this love was one of care and often framed in terms of maternality, or a mother's love. Alison talked about it as central to her practice, and frustration, with teaching, like when her children didn't take her authority seriously: "For me, it was just more understanding that mom had those teacher expectations, too.

But now I'm, you know, I'm more than happy to not expect, which is the sense that like, at the end of the day, now, they know that mom loves them and isn't going to get too mad" (Alison, May 6, 2019). Jill said

> I think moms love you more than anybody in the world. Even your spouses, I do. I think there's just really something about a mom that –because my son has this girlfriend and I said something about well, 'I love you the most' or something. And he kind of went ehhh... and said I know. Trust me. I love you. I love you more than that girl. Way more (Jill, May 14, 2019).

The parents I spoke with were not merely pointing out how much they loved their children to win recognition for their good parenting or to create a warm feeling of togetherness, but to make claims about how and why they should be in the position of making educational decisions on behalf of their children.

Conversely, due to the absence of love in schools and the classroom, homeschooling mothers maintain that the state should not have ultimate educational decision-making rights. While homeschoolers concede that some oversight may be necessary and that abuses can occur, their argument is that, in the absence of love, the state cannot hope to correctly tread the delicate balance between protection and harm. They define love as a deeply personal set of connections and behaviors, highly focused in its approach, and impossible in an institutional setting. Some, like Natalie, a religious homeschooler, went so far as to claim that such connections were impossible outside the setting of the family. She told me,

> Natalie: Somebody who cares about the kids needs has to be home. And you can have grandparents help out. But when it starts, the minute it steps out of that circle, then you start stepping out and step in. And pretty soon it's the nanny "who just loves my kids." No, the nanny doesn't love her kids. Not–no.
>
> Faw: So it needs to stay within sort of like a family love unit?
>
> Natalie: Yes. Because that's, those are the people who are willing to stand up from the table and do something about a problem or read a book or play another game again, when you just want to sit down and watch TV. But a nanny doesn't have that pressure, right? You can sit down, you can watch TV, or you can check your phone. Got it, you have to have that feeling that pressurizes you when it's hard.

Many homeschoolers I interviewed might not go so far as to claim that tight, loving bonds can only be formed within the confines of the family, but frequently emphasized the lack of love in institutional settings.

This critique is an astute one, and it should be taken seriously for a number of reasons. First, as explored in the last chapter, many of the homeschoolers I spoke to were former classroom teachers and their insider knowledge about the "lack of love" in institutional schools should be understood as a call coming from "inside the house." Despite many of these teachers adopting parental roles, they still felt that their former places of employment lacked love and care. This is an assertion bolstered by research that finds schools to be sites of reproductive sites of structural oppression and violence-racial, gendered, and economic (Dumas, 2014; Weis, 1988; P. E. Willis, 1977).

Second, because while they would not necessarily recognize it as such, this critique contains elements of both the Reproductive/Weberian (Apple, 1982) and Romantic (Illich, 1971)

critiques. That is, they see schooling as both reproducing an unjust social order as well as an institution that crushes the individuality of each child. Stemming from their professed deep love of both their children and learning, homeschoolers claim not to want to reproduce the "status quo" of the existing educational system. While there are homeschooler who gun for the Ivy League (See, e.g., Penn-Nabrit, 2003), when I asked my interviewees what would constitute success, most answered that they would be satisfied if their children were happy, healthy, curious, and creative. My favorite answer came from Kim, a homeschooler with a background in child welfare who also taught college-level social welfare courses part-time: "I want my kids to not be assholes and hopefully visit on the holidays" (Kim, March 28, 2019). She went on to talk about how, past that, it's "abelist" and elitist to shoot for a certain level of intelligence, education, or pieces of information and how she sees homeschooling as "for us, it's just like developing all these practices that you can't learn in the classroom that I just hope will be the foundation. I could totally be wrong. And I'm fine with that" (Kim).

While homeschooling by its very nature is in individualistic, if there if there is one thing you can say about homeschooling across the board it is the desire to disrupt the traditional systems of schooling. And in centering a practice of love, at the very least individualized care, for every student, homeschooling also recognizes one of the central concerns of the Romantic critique of schooling, that educational systems suck the joy, and the individuality, out of schooling. I met only one homeschooler in my 74 who told me she tried to make her practice "feel like school" and the rest actively rejected the "Labrador retriever" model of education, where children are trained to "sit, stay, speak" (Crystal, April 1, 2019).

Homeschooling as Advocacy?

When I first encountered homeschooling in my study of education policy it was usually framed by issues of privatization, choice, and extreme parental advocacy (See, for example, Cervone, 2017, Corporatizing Rural Education: Neoliberal Globalization and reaction in the United States). I wondered what, if any, salience, these issues held for homeschooling parents and whether they saw homeschooling through these same lenses of power. Did they understand their homeschooling as a form of advocacy and, further, did they advocate, politically or personally for homeschooling?

The answer was a qualified yes, but not necessarily in the way the pieces on neoliberal choice I'd been reading had framed either the nature or the import of advocacy. When I began speaking to homeschoolers, our interviews were suffused with themes of power; "speaking up;" "questioning what I'd been told;" championing a worldview or way of living; and having freedom or independence from systems that didn't fit or didn't work. What was this if not advocacy? At the same time, I found conspicuously absent any notions of competition or a broad vision for systemic change. If anything, homeschooling was the desire not to invest energy in changing systems, but to flee them. To the extent that homeschoolers coalesced around a shared political platform, it was to protect their right to homeschool, freely and in peace. At the same time, in the practice of homeschooling they also articulated a vision of the "public" that, absent governmental institutionality, harkened back to an older form of association, akin to the era of the Settlement House or even suburban bowling leagues (Putnam, 2000). This is the abandonment of pre-existing institutions, but not of association.

Advocating for Family & Time

For many of the women I spoke with for this research, homeschooling functions as a kind of answer to the problem of modern parenting, an attempt to find a way of life that is familiar outside of state institutions. For mothers on both the left and the right, homeschooling comes out of other non-institutionalized birthing and child rearing practices such as home births, co-sleeping, longer breastfeeding schedules, various co-ops and collectives, and mothers' groups of different kinds. The mothers I interviewed expressed the sense that midcentury, post war, baby boom, or millennial approaches to parenting (that they themselves experienced as children and were then being offered as parents) were sterile and hands-off and left them feeling medicalized, unconnected, and un-agentic. Instead, they have a longing desire to be deeply embedded in community and rooted in and connected to a sense of wholeness with their parenting. Contrary to the public perception of homeschooling as isolated and homeschooling children as un-socialized, the women in my study frequently and repeatedly speak about fellow homeschoolers as their people or their "tribe."[44] In large part, homeschooling is for many of these mothers a part of their effort to recapture some degree of control over their bodies, their children, their families, their homes, and their lives.

When I asked Alicia, for example, what brought her to homeschooling, she began her answer with a story about wanting a natural childbirth and a long breastfeeding schedule. She explained,

> Before, even before I had kids, I kind of realized that I didn't really want to do things the way you were expected to, I didn't want to have the birth in the hospital with everybody in, you know, scrubs and, and feet up in in stirrups and stuff. And, you know, that's, that's what, the way it was, I guess when I was born. I, by the time I had kids, it wasn't quite that bad. But it was pretty bad… My oldest one actually, I had to have in a hospital because she was six weeks early, but I was planning on a home birth with her and I ended up having a natural birth in her as natural as you can have in the hospital. And the boys were born at home. And and then I was going to breastfeed them. And I ended up breastfeeding for years and years. And so it just was kind of a natural progression. The idea of sending my, my, you know, adored child at the age of five off to school, which is– I hated school myself. It was torturous. I was one of those kids who was who was very good at being invisible, so that I wouldn't get bullied. But of course, every once in a while they see you and they bully you. And I just couldn't. And the idea of just sending my kid off to school and not being with her every day. It just did not appeal to me. A friend of mine did a she was in a cooperative nursery school. And she said, Oh, you've got to do this. And I was like, Well, I'm gonna homeschool. I don't want to do it a nursery school. But I went ahead and went to it and really fell in love with it. And it was like, it was like homeschooling, but messing up somebody else's house… So they were really, you know, so was really from from day one. And, you know, at the beginning, I didn't really know what it was I had imagined, you know, I mean, the whole idea. And I did, I

[44] Margaret Jacobs (Jacobs, 2009) would hardly be the only Indigenous scholar to point out the irony of white women co-opting the language of tribalism while participating in the long history of settler colonialism. As the Native American scholar and cultural critic Adrienne Keene wrote pithily on twitter, "Today in things that increasingly bother me: the use of 'tribe' and 'tribal' to describe anything other than an Indigenous nation. [Frowning face with side-eye emoji.]" (Keene, 2018, July 9). Additionally, there is an Evangelical homeschooler who runs a popular YouTube account called our Tribe of Many. She is a white woman from the US, her husband is a Black man from Kenya and they have 10 interracial children. Her most popular videos are "grocery hauls" where she explains how she feeds her large family (Our Tribe of Many).

> started this with the whole childbirth thing, this whole idea of 'you don't have to do it, just because everybody else does it that way, you don't have to do it that way, you can do it a better way.' And so by the time the schooling came along, I was already, I had already learned that in a couple of ways. And it was really, you know, mind, opening. And, you know, it was just, it was really incredible think that way (Alicia, April 23, 2019).

For Alicia, homeschooling is inexorably connected to these non-interventionist birthing and mothering practices and the desire not to be separated from her children. In many ways, homeschooling is the obvious culmination, both emotionally and practically, of her "mind-opening" journey to realizing that other forms of parenting and family life were possible. Despite what I had read in grad school, the women who talked to me sounded more like Emerson or Thoreau than like Phyllis Schlafly or Donald Trump.

For the mothers I interviewed, homeschooling was a kind of advocacy for themselves as much as for their children. In this framing, the construction of an identity–which I describe as a teacher/educator identity in the previous chapter–was extended to Alicia's "freethinker" identity, or someone who didn't go along with the mainstream ways of doing things. The homeschoolers I spoke with took pride in speaking up, making waves, asking for what they needed, and going against the grain of what was expected. This often ran contrary to what their families wanted or might have expected of them, and put them in the position of advocating for homeschooling. And in reclaiming the activities not just of parenting and teaching but of reproductive motherhood (birth, breastfeeding) they were asserting their rights and power as women.

Homeschooling was also a way to connect with an experience of motherhood that was, for some mothers, denied or delayed. As Christina, who became mother at 37 and Leslie (who felt, after infertility, like "my son was a gift from god") describe in *Chapter 7: Teaching, "I've Always Been a Teacher,"* homeschooling was a way to spend more time with their precious children. Lori echoes this sentiment, saying,

> I started homeschooling because I had my children late…I always tell people, I had my children, like I said, I had [son] when I was 42, I had [daughter] when I was 52. And I didn't feel like 'I waited this long to have children, to turn them over to somebody else for the better part of the day. And then I would get them back when they're tired and cranky, and they have to do homework' (Lori, April 4, 2019).

Spending whatever possible, intense time with her children was a high priority for Lori. After our in-person interview, Samantha wrote me an email to follow up on our conversation and tacked on the thought that "An experience that influenced my choices around homeschool is that our second baby died, which has given me a fuller picture of what time with my children means to me. Not to say that I am always fully present because of it, but it is something that influences my desires" (Samantha, email, May 6, 2019). This was not one of the reasons for homeschooling Samantha originally cited in our interview, but it clearly began to surface for her as a rationale as she reflected on our conversation. In each of these instances, homeschooling acts as a kind of advocacy for the identity of mother and the act of mothering. Christina, Leslie, April, and Samantha all felt that time with their children was especially precious and used homeschooling as a way to maximize that time.

Advocacy also sometimes looked like fighting for homeschooling, sometimes against their own spouses and families. This fight for the practice could be seen as political advocacy for homeschooling, but they also saw it as personal advocacy for their children and families. Several homeschoolers told me about family members, specifically grandparents, who were distraught,

when they began homeschooling, convinced that their children weren't going to get an adequate education. Alison, a first-generation Asian-American homeschooler and teacher, told me her parents were especially concerned when she started homeschooling, worried that she was squandering all of the opportunities they had worked so hard to provide her. She told me,

> Both our parents said, That's crazy. Like, we don't know anyone who's homeschooled. Um, why would you mess with the American educational system? It produces, you know, XYZ kinda kids. You guys have an Ivy League system, a whatever it's called, you know, it feeds into, you know, this ivy league system, whatever, right? All of that Asian parent dream. You know, they were both, both sets were immigrants, right? Why would you mess with any of that? You know? And so I'm fighting against that (Alison, May 6, 2019).

After we talked about what the benefits of homeschooling had been for her family, I asked, "And did the grandparents come around?" She laughed and explained that both her husband (a surgeon) and the two sets of grandparents (both Asian-born immigrants) at first required quantifiable proof of her success, the only time I heard of such specific "proof" of homeschool's efficacy. She said,

> They eventually came around. It took them a couple more years. When they were–so I did have a deal with the grandparents and my husband. Were probably, the majority of us probably more left brain meaning we're just more black and white, more the science, the math and my husband's like, 'Okay, look, we got to quantify this, like, okay, can they take a standardized test at the beginning of the year, and a standardized test at the end of the year?' And I said, 'Okay, agree.' So we did that. And the grandparents were happy to see those improvements. And they saw it was quantified. And so it helped to bring around the grandparents that it wasn't just this, 'okay, like you're just traveling around the world kind of a thing.' And gallivanting, you know, to different places. And so, and then they, they saw different social changes. They realized that, [daughter] at that time, fourth, fifth sixth grade, you know, late Elementary, beginning middle school years that she was just, they saw a lot of middle schoolers in their area and their church just in that awkward, but they saw her really like blooming, not afraid to talk to adults, kind of a thing. And she was able to interact with older kids, younger kids, same thing with my son, even at a younger age. And they noticed that the two are getting along. I mean, they're like, 'wow, you notice that they're really looking after each other?' (Alison)

In combination, the pre- and post-test results, plus the observable social skills were enough to convince both her husband and the grandparents that homeschooling was "working," but Alison had to remain a steady champion of the practice for long enough for these effects to be measurable. Notice in this quote she says it took "a couple more years," meaning her advocacy had to persist through several years of doubt and strong suggestion that the children move back to a system that produces Ivy League teachers and surgeons like her and her husband.

Other homeschoolers found themselves facing this same tide of family' and friends' disapproval, skepticism, and ill-informed questions. As such, the very act of continued homeschooling became a kind of ongoing advocacy for the practice and against the doubt of the naysayers. Homeschoolers told me that they lost friends whose children were in brick-and-mortar schools, both because of disagreements about homeschooling and because their lifestyles began to diverge too radically. Forming a new community of other homeschooling families, and

particularly other homeschooling mothers, acted as an additional form of advocacy and as a bulwark against the disapproval of those not in the community.

Working Within and Around Systems

While critics of neoliberalism often portray homeschooling as ideologically driven, for many it was it was a form of open-minded problem solving. One of the most common advocacy narratives I heard was on behalf of children with either special educational needs, (neuro non-typicality, cognitive delays, ADD/ADHD, or other issues that might commonly fall under the heading of special education) or children being called "twice exceptional" or "2E," (the current nomenclature for "gifted" kids). For these students, institutional schooling was a bad fit and students were failing to thrive emotionally, socially, and/or intellectually. In each of these cases, homeschooling was a way for the family to solve the problem of insufficient schooling and provide a more individualized educational plan for their child's needs.

In several cases, these families were "mixed" schooling-type families, where one child was homeschooled and one or more child(ren) attended institutional schools. This truly demonstrated both the family's agnosticism towards schooling type and main focus on finding the kind of approach that suited each of their children best. For Amanda, a university professor, that meant putting her 8-year-old in a traditional public school and her 2E 12-year-old, who also has a profound sensory processing disorder, in homeschool. After trying public school, and then private school, the family turned to homeschooling,

> Because we have a kid who's got behavior issues and has special needs, those aren't going to be met in a private school setting–if they're not being met in a public school setting. So then, so that's really what brought us to homeschooling sort of desperation and a real bad fit. And he was so, he was so miserable. And he had so much anxiety. And then we were going to enroll him in second grade. It was like two weeks before second grade. And he started like, twisting and curling and his hair and yanking them out and bloody fingernails. And it's like pulling, okay, okay, all right. All right. All right. This is really, this isn't going to work at all (Amanda, March 14, 2019).

This narrative is ultimately about finding the right kind of schooling for a super-smart kid who was reading full novels at the age of two and three, but the inflection point for schooling sounds a lot like Elizabeth's or Jessica's, where a child was in extreme distress and homeschooling became the way to keep him safe. Similarly, Stephanie (and, bonus, her husband Michael, who was on the call in the car during our interview) told me about how her middle child's dyslexia caused him extreme anxiety, depression, exhaustion, frustration, and social-emotional distress. Yet despite paying for an outside assessment, their school refused to acknowledge the findings of the educational specialist's report. As Stephanie describes it, her middle child's problems (he was in third grade at the time) in school put the whole family into turmoil,

> Stephanie: So not just intellectual development, I think, from my perspective is actually his emotional well-being. At this point he was like a basket case. I mean, he was like, the anxiety, the temper tantrums, it was like walking on egg-shells around him. Like he can explode so, like set off so quickly. He was even, he wasn't in a good place. I mean, mental health wise (Stephanie, March 29, 2019)

It wasn't until they withdrew their son from school and enrolled him in a homeschool charter that the school even acknowledged the report they'd spent thousands of dollars to obtain.

> Michael: I guess, in terms of when when the study, where the findings of the study were shared with them. There was, you know, that there was a reluctance on their part to, I think, accept some of the, the, the diagnosed possibilities. Because any anytime that, you know, we talked about a condition of dyslexia, or, you know, other issues that were raised, it was like, Oh, you know, let's just wait and see, it was always, you know, I wouldn't say it was just, it was sort of dismissive, but it was, like, let's, let's not jump to those conclusions. And let's try to start addressing those things. Let's give it some more time. Like kind of along the lines of, let's let some time pass and see how, you know, how underwater this gets.

Yet Stephanie and Michael knew without "waiting and seeing" that things with their son had already gotten to the breaking point and they feared for both his mental health and ongoing intellectual development. Getting no response from the school, homeschooling seemed like the only way forward. The school district (an affluent one on the San Francisco Bay peninsula) was surprised that anyone would remove their child from their ostensibly very good school. AN said that the,

> Stephanie: …the school definitely has the attitude that, you know, you guys will provide tutoring and then whatever, private, yeah. Go ahead and do it. I mean, I guess, nobody, maybe it's not typical to pull this the kids out, maybe they just tutor them that way or, provide, you know, maybe like that, you know, whatever, drugs, whatever, so they can keep them in the classroom with them. Whatever, so they can keep them in the classroom with them. Yeah, a lot of people will kill themselves to get in.

Rejecting the framing that their affluent school and district knew best, or couldn't be rejected because of its desirability, Stephanie and Michael used homeschooling as a rebuke and the same kind of advocacy we have repeatedly seen on behalf of children's emotional and educational safety.

The other major form of advocacy I heard about, was homeschooling as a form of defense or support for children's needs and disenchantment with the schooling system.

The first such story I heard was about a kindergarten student with such extreme asthma that she's almost died a few times in her short life. Her mother, Jessica, is a respiratory therapist in Southern California who also suffers from asthma–it runs in the family. Despite having a doctor's explicit direction to carry her inhaler at all times, Jessica's daughter was prevented from doing so in transitional kindergarten (TK) and she began having anxiety attacks when on the playground (there was an inhaler inside but not outside during recess). Getting nowhere with the school, Jessica escalated the issue from the school to the district

> …and tried to do everything I could to get them to let her carry it and they would not do it. So I opted not to enroll her at all, because TK is optional. And I was trying to look into private schooling and figure out what it is that I was going to do. I'm a single mom, and I work. So homeschool wasn't even on on my radar. But as I escalated up the chain and I talked to the district nurse, homeschooling was something she suggested. So I started looking into it (Jessica, March 14, 2019).

As a working single mother, Jessica never planned to homeschool, nor did she have any specific complaint with the quality or curriculum of her local public school. If it had not been for her daughter's medical issue, specifically the school's unwillingness to accommodate that medical

issue, she told me she certainly would have enrolled her in TK and then subsequent grades. When her concern about her daughter's medical issue went unheeded at the school and then district levels, however, she felt like homeschooling was the best possible option for her family.[45]

This pattern of attempting to work first through the school, then district, then finally turning to homeschooling in a kind of last-ditch effort would be familiar to AI, a mother in San Francisco who runs an environmental non-profit. She and her son experienced trauma when he was young and they came to San Francisco to closer to her family and support network. She got him into therapy and put him in school because "Okay, that's what we're supposed to do, we're supposed to go to public school. I was a student of public school" (Elizabeth, March 22, 2019). Elizabeth looked around and,

> I found a school. That was the smallest school in the district. And it was a support group of parents that had kids that had PTSD. And, and it was art based, art based project learning, smallest school in the district, like 230 students at the time. And all of these reasons encouraged me to want to get into that school. So I advocated for him and I got him into that school (Elizabeth).

At each step of the process, Elizabeth was fighting for her son. She began to realize that the school environment was a bit chaotic–a few inexperienced teachers, the principal left, noisy classrooms–and with his PTSD her son wasn't doing well, so

> I volunteered almost daily, because there were issues starting the beginning of that year. And I was very involved in the school in general. But when he started having issues I, I really, I said, Okay, I've got to prioritize this. And I went in several times a week for volunteer time to make sure that he was okay. He was, he was actually being attacked…(Elizabeth).

After continuous bullying and endless conversations with the school and then the district that didn't change anything, her son was badly beaten up, received a concussion, and had to be put on brain rest. After this, there was no question of him going back to this school and the family, somewhat reluctantly, began homeschooling. Elizabeth was not a first-choice homeschooler, but the practice was clearly the only option she saw left after trying every other possible avenue of advocacy available to her. As their homeschooling has progressed her son has thrived, though she said she didn't know whether they would homeschool forever.

Finally, calling back to the Romantic critique of schooling, in some kinds of models, homeschooling serves as advocacy for child- and inquiry-led schooling, a call for educational forms homeschoolers believe are generally missing in institutional schooling. Again, not all forms of homeschooling are child- and inquiry-led; on a continuum of styles, Classical homeschooling (emphasizing the classical core subjects) is probably the least and unschooling is certainly the most. Beyond investing in this kind of alternative schooling (and, as we have seen, alternative parenting), homeschooling also allowed parents to feel like they were able to advocate for and engage in alternative types of relationships with their children. As Amy, a mother who'd run a co-op preschool before becoming a homeschooler, put it, "the ability to homeschool, and my personality and my beliefs, have made it more likely that he will survive

[45] At the time of our interview, AC was managing the issue of childcare for her daughter and a younger sibling with a flexible work schedule, family support, and an in-home daycare. I often wondered how she, a respiratory therapist, was faring during COVID, but my several follow-up emails went unanswered.

and succeed in life is being his advocate, as opposed to his prison guard" (Amy, March 19, 2019). Kim, the social worker who hoped for "not asshole" children, echoed a similar sentiment. She, who practiced deschooling (a period of "school detox") followed by unschooling, found that homeschooling allowed her to practice being a "parent by connection, not by correction. And so this is just more space wrestling into that more deeply" (Kim).

Conclusion

All of these forms of advocacy–for self, for the practice, for children's unique circumstances, for educational needs, for a type of parenting relationship–combined to create layered stories of homeschooling as both a tool and an end result of agency. Together, they combine to create a picture of homeschooling as a practice that, for those who can access it, creates freedom from (certain) oversight, incursion, and institutions. As these different manifestations of advocacy and agency also reveal, advocacy is one of the ways by which homeschoolers navigate the messy space between public and private. In seizing the tools and resources available to them, the mothers in this chapter creatively wend their way through complex systems and find solutions to difficult problems of home and schooling.

That their advocacy leads them away from institutionality is sometimes seen as a retreat or a selfish choice. If they really cared about improving schooling, shouldn't they remain in systems and devote their energy to fixing them from the inside? This is a critique addressed head-on by the former classroom educators I profile in the next chapter, *Chapter 7: Teaching, "I've Always Been a Teacher,"* but homeschoolers would refute this charge in other ways, too. Homeschool parents wouldn't be alone in this kind of self-serving use of the educational system; most parents of means and affluence try to "game" the system in some way, whether by buying into a good suburban district, making use of gifted or honors tracking, or by pouring resources into their schools (time or money. And, ironically, the very labor that would be asked of them should they remain in those systems (joining a PTA, volunteering for a school) remains similarly embedded in the work of parenting. If theirs is a selfish choice not to invest in public schooling, it is also a more utopian one. The community-building they imagine is in the longstanding American tradition of a thick civil society with voluntary associations (De Toqueville & Mill, 1859) and a network of strong and weak ties forged by social and civil engagement (Putnam, 2000). Instead, it is much truer to say that theirs is a vision more committed to one notion of the public over a different, competing vision of the public. Homeschooling's version of populism might be, ultimately, exclusionary, but it, like the practice itself, is quintessentially American.

Chapter 7: Teaching
"I've always been a Teacher"

> *I'm a person who likes education. Like I said, I when I was a little girl, I used to play that I was a school teacher all the time. I've always been a teacher. But you know, that, I feel like it starts at birth, that there's this real pressure on parents to not– we have, I feel like we have a cultural bias where we think that children gets smothered by parents, and that they get spoiled. And I don't I just don't believe that. I believe that children, I, you know, I really believe that children get their cups filled and then, and then, and then they go freely. And that, that our role is to keep filling the cup and keep filling the cup until they stop bringing it to us (Cynthia, May 5, 2019).*

In this chapter I continue addressing the research questions and themes of the two prior chapters, seeing teaching as an extension of both gendered labor and as a kind of advocacy. I explore how homeschooling mothers, many of them former classroom teachers, construct critiques of the system of which they had been a part and tried to change from the inside. Rather than seeing these mothers as "outsiders," as the literature often posits them, my research theorizes them as insiders looking in from the outside.

One of the largest subsets of women's work in homeschooling is, clearly, their labor as educators, and yet this is the part of their role that is also most frequently called into question. Do homeschooling moms have the capacity and expertise to teach their own children, both in terms of subject-level knowledge and also because of the educator role that teaching requires? In this chapter I discuss two findings that pertain to this discussion. First, my finding that amongst my interview pool, 27 of 74 (36.5%) had former classroom teaching experience of some kind. I look at why classroom educators choose to leave their former practice and the critiques they level at the traditional schooling environment, finding that they have two interrelated realizations about trying to combine teaching and mothering: 1) The teaching profession and being a parent are incompatible, and 2) I don't want my children in the system I've been teaching in. Finally, I examine how "leaning out" is, for classroom teachers, as for many homeschool mothers, a rejection of the "hamster wheel" of work and home offered up by second wave feminism. In the previous chapter, I found that homeschoolers establish and build a new professional identity that they apply to their practice. Here, I illustrate how, in leaning out, homeschoolers must embrace a new gendered work reality and make peace with being this new kind of teacher.

Former Teachers

Early in my fieldwork, I noticed that many of my research participants were former classroom teachers. I went back to the literature and found prominent examples of the phenomenon. John Holt, the unschooling trailblazer and major champion of the homeschool movement in the 1960s and 1970s, spent six years as an elementary classroom teacher. After this career he wrote the highly influential texts, *How Children Fail* (1964), *How Children Learn* (1967), *Escape From Childhood* (1974), and *Teach Your Own* (1982). Another favorite author of the homeschool community, David Guterson, was a former High School English teacher on Bainbridge Island, off the coast of Seattle in Washington State. In addition to being the author of the novel *Snow Falling on Cedars,* Guterson decided to homeschool his own children and wrote the text *Family Matters: Why Homeschooling Makes Sense (Guterson, 1993)* about his

experiences. Notably, both of these authors are male and I went searching for any women with the same narrative. The closest I found was Kerry McDonald, who holds a MA in Education Policy from Harvard, and is a prominent homeschooling proponent. She homeschools her four children and wrote *Unschooled: Raising Curious, Well-Educated Children Outside the Conventional Classroom* (2019). Nowhere in the literature, however, could I find larger note of this phenomena.

I brought up this observation about homeschoolers and teaching at a meeting of my research group, sitting around in my advisor's sunny backyard one spring morning. I thought it was interesting, but didn't yet know what to make of it. Talking informally to this group of my peers, I said "and so far it seems like about half of the homeschoolers I've spoken to were teachers before becoming homeschoolers" and this group of education graduate students exploded with questions. What did it mean that they had been teachers? Why did they leave classroom teaching? What did they think about teaching in the home versus in a school? Did they homeschool differently than they taught in the classroom? All excellent questions that I wanted to be able to answer for them, and myself, and so I added a series of probes or provocations to my open-ended interview protocol that I could use to inquire about a homeschooler's formal educational system experience, if I discovered in the course of our interview that this was relevant to their background.

In the end, of my 74 homeschool parents, 27 had experience working in the formal (non-homeschool) educational system educational system prior to becoming a homeschooler. Another 4 gained additional experience with brick-and-mortar schooling while in the course of their homeschooling. Of the 27, their experience encompassed a range of ages (0-higher education) and degrees of training and professionalism. Some examples: preschool teacher; background in early childhood education, masters in special education; subject-level high school teacher; masters in education; two masters in education; EdD, researcher; PhD in school psychology, higher education instructor/professor. This list is meant to be indicative of the range and kinds of experiences represented among my research participants, rather than a complete accounting of all of the educational expertise held by the parents I interviewed. Table 6 lists the prior classroom teaching experience the homeschool mothers profiled in this chapter. For the sake of anonymity, I have not matched the classroom experience and pseudonym of all the mothers among my interviewees.

Table 6
Prior Classroom Teaching Experience Among Homeschool Mothers Profiled in Chapter 7

Christina	Private High School and public Middle School teacher, dean of students
Sarah	Public middle school teacher
Leslie	10 years as an Elementary classroom teacher; credentialed
Kristin	Owned and ran a Montessori preschool
Lisa	Taught at a private day school
Misty	Former credentialed subject-level teacher
Cynthia	Majored in education in college
Dana	Obtained a teaching credential and student-taught but never employed as a teacher

As evidenced by this list, their experiences with 0-college, non-homeschool educational settings are extensive and wide-ranging. The four parents who gained additional experience in

brick-and-mortar education while homeschooling worked as a substitute teacher, private Christian school teacher, charter school educational specialist working with homeschooling families, and a preschool teacher at a Waldorf forest school.

I also found that not all of the parents in my study ceased their involvement with the formal, or brick-and-mortar[46], schooling system when they became homeschoolers. Quite a few of them remained engaged with formal school settings, or moved back and forth between formal school environments and homeschooling depending on different variables such as time and the ages of their children. Of primary interest to me, however, was why educators who were demonstrably invested in formal schooling environments would–also or instead–engage with homeschooling, choose this method of schooling for their own children, and what this chose said about their work as teachers.

Most homeschoolers spoke about their time in formal schooling favorable, or at least not with the kind of disregard I was primed to imagine from parents who had "chosen out" of these systems. They spoke their time in the classroom–whether it was brief or constituted a 10-year career–with a certain degree of satisfaction and, certainly, professional pride. Christina had worked as a middle school and high school subject teacher, and eventually grade-level dean of students at her high school. She said,

> Oh, my God, I loved it. I absolutely loved it, the dean position was my calling, you know, the intuitive aspects of it, of how to manage what the students needed, and what the teachers needed and what the parents needed (Christina, April 1, 2019)

Here you can hear Christina's clear enjoyment of the work and sense of satisfaction with her role. So why did she, and so many other of the classroom teachers I spoke to leave this beloved work and homeschool? I generally heard two stories about why homeschoolers chose this practice, and the effect that this shift in the educator role had on them.

Realization 1: The teaching profession and being a parent are incompatible

Many of the mothers I interviewed expressed that they loved teaching but discovered that this work was incompatible with parenting. The difficulty of being a mother and a classroom teacher broke down in two (not necessarily mutually exclusive) ways: First, they found the working conditions of being a teacher all day and then a parent at all other times simply too overwhelming. For these teachers, the hours and work of being at a brick-and-mortar school were fundamentally incompatible with being a parent, especially of very young children. Second, for many mothers, the paradox of being a teacher because they "loved kids" but then being parted from their own children all day seemed too painful, and too absurd. They were simply unwilling to leave their infants or toddlers in the care of others to go back into the classroom. These mothers often made the claim that it was their very character and training as teachers that ill-befitted them to take on these dual roles.

The stories of three are representative and capture the nuances of the experience of being a classroom-teacher-turned-homeschooler. They were selected because their narratives are indicative of the larger body of data but also because theirs so excellently captures the nuances of this finding.

[46] A term borrowed from online retailers, "brick-and-mortar" is a catch-all term used by some homeschoolers to refer to any formal schooling institution with a physical presence. They use this to refer to all traditional public schools, private schools, and charters and to distinguish between homeschooling, obviously, but also homeschool charters, online classes, or homeschool group/classes that might be offered by a parent/teacher.

Christina, (April 1, 2019), a private middle and high school science teacher turned high school grade-level dean, began homeschooling and moved from LA to the Bay Area after having her one child to be closer to family, who was 10 at the time of our interview. She is a white woman. Her husband works in commercial sales.

Sarah, (April 15, 2019) was a middle school teacher before having her three children, whereupon she began tutoring and, eventually, homeschooling. Her three children are in their late teens and the eldest is in college. She is a white woman. Her husband works at a County Office in the Bay Area.

Leslie, (May 7, 2019), was a former elementary school teacher who made the decision to homeschool after her child, who was seven at the time of our interview, was born. She has a job working as an advocate for children and families in the hospital system and her husband works in a creative field. She is a Filipina woman. Leslie is a third generation Bay Area teacher and taught in both California and Texas schools.

Regarding the logistical difficulty of juggling teaching and parenting, Sarah is a good example of the classroom teacher who made the move out of homeschooling, by way of tutoring, to ease these technical difficulties. When she began having children, Sarah left classroom teaching and switched to tutoring because the hours were more flexible and self-directed. She says that "before I had kids, and I really never considered homeschooling. Honestly, I thought 'homeschool people are crazy, maybe damaging their kids.' But I got a different perspective on education" (Sarah). After tutoring for a few years, she began to appreciate the emphasis on the "joy of learning" for both students and teachers and came to embrace the second dominant narrative I found, that of "wanting to just be with my kids while they were little and not send them off, you know, for the bulk of the day, to be away from home" (Sarah).

Many of the homeschoolers I spoke with echoed similar sentiments about wanting more flexibility or coming to end of their maternity leaves and discovering that it simply wasn't enough time off. As with Sarah's story, many of these homeschoolers struggles with the working conditions of teaching prompted them to take break from teaching, work out creative non-classroom educational work (like tutoring), or switch careers. After time away from the classroom, they began to gain perspective on their prior careers and reevaluate their identity as an educator, their thoughts on education, and their desire to spend time with their own children. This last concern is what I'm calling narrative two, the desire not to be parted from their children.

A teacher and dean, Christina is one who's story fits this narrative. She was considering applying for a vacant Assistant Principal position and "then I had my son. And we hadn't anticipated my staying home at the time. And I had him and thought, 'Oh, my gosh, I can't leave him with anybody.' So we uprooted our lives [from LA] and came up here where I have family and, and made it work" (Christina). I heard this story, in various iterations, from many former classroom teachers. Said Leslie, the former elementary school teacher, "I didn't want to miss that time. And I just felt like, here I was, I invested so much my time becoming an expert at him. And I would leave him to go teach other kids. It just, it just didn't make sense to me" (Leslie). Again and again, homeschoolers brought up the irony of, as Leslie says, leaving her own child "to go teach other kids" and the incompatibility of their maternal instinct with this dualism.

This incompatibility indicated a strange feature of each of their histories, a perceived disconnect between maternalism and schooling. This came out both as reverence for their current roles as mother/teachers and as a critique that the parents of their former students weren't

engaged in sufficient parenting. Simultaneously, they expressed that their former roles as teachers were basically parenting because of the negligence of their parents.

All three of the homeschoolers I've profiled in this section expressed some version of the former reverence, a love of being with their children and not wanting to be separated from them. The flip side of this reverence was a not-so-subtle critique about the parents at their former schools. Leslie taught at a low-income school she pathologized as being "ghetto." She, a Filipina woman, told me she needed to turn into not just a parent but a "Black Mama" to give her students the kind of tough love they would understand.

> My personal opinion is because I worked with kindergarteners and I was essentially their mom. A lot of them are not ready for school. And I had to take on a lot of mom qualities and I worked in a, I hate to say, ghetto. A Title I school. And I found that I was turning into, I, it just happens, you turn into Black Mama. I mean, I was turning into a person I didn't know. It was because that's what they needed. Because they didn't respond to the gentle 'oh how are you?' they responded to 'you need buck up little one.' I mean, it was just, it shook me, it, was I was changing, I didn't like who I was changing into. But I kind of have to hit some of these needs, because I need to just communicate in a way they understood in order to get the classroom to do what they needed to do. But there was also - a lot of them came to school hungry, or you know, just needing to feel recognized or hugged (Leslie).

Leslie found herself adopting a "tough love" attitude and constructing a teaching model for "other people's children" (Delpit, 2006) using a kind of Schrodinger's Black parent–both so authoritative and commanding that children will only respond to a firm hand and so absentee that children just need to "feel recognized or hugged." Evident also is the work of what James Joy would call a Captive Maternal and Madeline Grumet would recognize as the process of subverting one's own maternal instincts in service of curriculum that "we develop [and] teach not to our own but to other people's children" (Grumet, 1988, p. 28). Still, this isn't necessarily about just race or class and a similar story could be told for privileged white kids. Christina taught at a private school in LA where she saw absentee [film] industry parents,

> Christina: You know, at first I thought, you know, I don't want to teach in a private school. A private school, the kids don't need me. But they did. They did, you know–their parents, we had a lot of industry kids whose parents were never really around. And if they were, they threw money at it. And so, you know, these kids had a lot of pain and teenage angst, too. And so, you know, communicating what the teachers' agendas were, with, what the students really needed, you know, and what the parents' expectations were. I loved that position, because I could really facilitate what education was to each, and find the compromise (Christina).

For Christina, we can see that her teaching and dean role was constructed as having a large parental element because she perceived that her students' parents were missing or trying to substitute themselves with money. She also believed that the teachers on staff and teachers needed her to play this parental go-between role, in absence of the students' parents stepping up and properly filling this position.

Christina also realized, upon becoming a parent herself, that there were assumptions she'd made about the power and role parents actually possessed. She talked about how one of the real learning curves of parenting, and homeschooling, is realizing how much your children are their own people. She told me,

> Christina: As a parent to like, stepping away from everything you knew about why kids were they were the way they were. If they made a mistake, and how it was all about parents. You know, that's the whole perspective shift about the fact that in some ways, they come as a somewhat packaged bundle that you can nurture.
>
> Faw: So interesting. So, as a teacher, you thought that that more was on the parents?
>
> Christina: Oh, totally. Yeah. You know, the kids were struggling, and it must be some parenting mistake. that was because I was a teacher for a long time before I had kids. I didn't have my kids until I was 37. So you know, that's like, as a teacher who's not raising her own kids, like, I really thought I knew a lot about how kids were raised. But I didn't, because I hadn't parented. So parenting changed my my point of view of that as much as the teacher point of view, but I also think I was lucky, I think I taught in schools that were really had a lot of community engagement, a lot of community advocacy, a lot of parent involvement, a lot of like, getting out of the world going on field trips and building things and, you know, trying not to be totally classroom.

Here we see Christina's learning process as a teacher, and a parent, over the past ten years of raising her child and reflecting on her own practice. In this answer she gives both herself, and her former parents, more grace than in her earlier statements where they were painted as simply absentee or trying to throw money at their kids' problems. She recognizes that, as a teacher who didn't have children herself, she might not have been able to see the complexities of parenting and made assumptions about some of those dynamics.

Leslie also wasn't a parent while she was a teacher. Both she and Christina were unconventional parents: Christina was an "old" mom at 37 and Leslie struggled with fertility. When Leslie finally had her son, felt like he was a "gift from god." When Leslie's son was born, she began to reflect on her own teaching practice and draw boundaries around what a classroom should or shouldn't be,

> Faw: That makes sense. So it sounds like you didn't like the person you had to be?
>
> Leslie: Yeah. And the fact that children still need their parents, there are some things I couldn't and shouldn't provide for them. Like one of the things that really irritated me was this poster that said, this classroom is a family. You know what? I do. I care about these kids. But maybe because I've worked in the in the hospital setting where boundaries are really important. You really need to, for your own health, if you don't have those boundaries, the emotional labor, just going to send you over the edge, right? And you're just going to want to curl up in bed and cover your head. Boundaries are healthy, and I just, I feel like in education, there's this, as the parent where all the teachers start feeling like these are my kids, but it's like, you know what, they're not your kids, you actually need to respect that boundary. And that's how I've always felt in my, our class.

Here we hear again Leslie's ambivalence about the intermingling of school and home that I have discussed at length, and of teacher and mother. In this answer she is recognizing and disagreeing with the longstanding physical and especially emotional interconnectedness of school and home ("this classroom is a family") and is advocating for better boundaries. Perhaps not surprisingly, she knew from her own experience that teachers took on a maternal role and, as the stage whisper in her last comment revealed to me, she didn't want her child relating to another teacher in that parental way,

> Faw: I see. So when you envisioned sending [child] off to a teacher, you didn't want them to start feeling like, 'oh, this is my kid?"

> Leslie: Yeah. Which, but I could–I do know that he's going to get attached to a teacher as well. I'm not unrealistic. I'm not like saying, oh, he's all mine–just that, I didn't want to share that.

Realization 2: I Don't Want My Children in The System I've Been Teaching in

Many of the former classroom-teachers-turned-homeschoolers I spoke with mentioned their experience as a kind of badge of expertise, a preemptive defense against the attack against their ability to teach that they expected was coming. As the question "but are they really qualified to teach?" was one I heard frequently–from educational researchers and friends–in my own conversations about homeschooling, I could understand their instinct to hold their credentials, Masters in education, and experience in the classroom out before them as evidence of their fitness.

The fascinating corollary of this expertise was not just their ability to teach their own children, however, but their ability to speak about the realities of the educational system. These were women who got into education because they loved teaching, and children, and they had wanted to make a difference. They majored in education in college, set up their own classrooms, and, in some cases, taught for a decade or more. When they hear the critique of homeschooling, and of homeschooling parents, that if these individuals want to change the system or have so much time and energy to give, they, as Heather (a former traditional public school teacher) did, just sigh and say, "listen, I tried" (Heather, March 18, 2019). Many of the mothers I spoke with who weren't teachers tried, too, telling me about how they were the super-involved classroom volunteer, PTA mom, or co-op preschool teacher. Lisa, who wasn't a teacher, but a very involved parent, first of a set of biological children who went through the public schools and then a second cohort of biological and step children she was homeschooling. She remembers her experience with her step-daughters' public schools, before they began homeschooling,

> I mean, as much as you try to be involved when the kids are in school–[aside to teenage daughter] I was in the library? I think I was your school as a parent, party person. I don't know, parent, classroom parent. That's what it was. That was a parent, classroom parent. I felt like I was doing more than not, I mean, I was doing more than not– And so it was like two full time jobs. I was like, being a parent and then working in the school. I worked in the library. I think I volunteered teaching like economics classes for them. What was the name of that economic program that you guys did? I don't even remember. Different things. I signed up for too many. I was there more than not. And at a certain point, they kind of kick you away, by Middle School. They're like, we don't want parents around anymore. No way. We got it covered. Thank you. Yeah, thanks for your blood, sweat in elementary school, but you're out of here now. But that's usually when the parents need to be more involved. Middle and High School, honestly, like they need to kind of keep an eye on things more. Because schools don't have a handle on things. They need the parents in the picture more (Lisa, April 2, 2019).

In all of the ways that we count, recognize, and usually reward, these homeschoolers tried to affect schooling "from the inside" but, in the course of their careers came to pointed critiques of the educational system.

Many parents told me that they were unwilling to sacrifice their own child's education for the good of a collective system, but none so succinctly as Dana, who had majored in education in college and student taught but then started having children before becoming a full-time

classroom teacher. She quickly realized that she wanted to prioritize her own children's education over spending her time teaching. She told me,

> So that's what it comes down to, is I'm not worried about fixing the system, and sacrificing my child to fix the system. I'm going to put my kid, and make my kid's one life that he has, one childhood that he has, the best it can be, and I feel I can do a better job, because I'm a smart person. And even if I can't teach the thing, I will find a resource to do it, and do it in my own time on my own, you know, in our own way, and in a way that works for my kids and my family, you know (Dana, May 23, 2019).

Dana's story is a little different than that of those who tried, and then left teaching, but her sentiments were echoed by many.

These former teachers also critiqued both the kind of education they were able to provide for their students, and ways in which they felt like they were being forced to teach. Said Misty, a former credentialed teacher,

> But anyone who's been teaching for any length of time knows that you are teaching to the middle. And there are kids at both extremes that are not getting what would be actually the best for them...So when I was working with my kids at home, it was nothing like my classroom, right? Yes, no, not at all (Misty, April 24, 2019).

One of the main reasons they were drawn to homeschooling, then, was the desire to have the kind of professional control over their teaching that being a classroom teacher didn't allow, and to be able to actually engage in the kinds of child- and inquiry-led practices that drew them to education in the first place. These critiques culminated in the ultimate rebuke: choosing to leave teaching and remove their own children from what they considered to be a broken system.

Leaning out

In 2013, Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg published *Lean In*, a corporatist self-help manual for women that became a publishing and popular-culture juggernaut and defined for a generation of millennials the existential terror of discovering that they just weren't working hard enough (Sandberg, 2013). Or, as later research on the topic put it, *Lean In* has become the ubiquitous language for the idea that "women have caused their own under-representation" (and must therefore take a "DIY approach" to correcting the problem; Kim, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2018). This individualist, neoliberal attitude toward feminist empowerment deftly ignores issues of structural and institutional systems, and places the onus of responsibility for change squarely on the shoulders of working women. Many responded to the call and found, as Georgetown Professor of Law Rosa Brooks wrote in 2014, "just as Sandberg promised, the rewards of leaning in quickly became evident. My confident, assertive yet non-threatening feminine charm helped me rapidly expand both my business and social networks" (R. Brooks, 2014, February 25, online/n.p.). Yet Brooks (and so many others) quickly goes on to learn that leaning in–or "doing more work, more often, for longer hours" both at work-work and at home on the "second shift"–is deeply unfair and a recipe for misery, and she ends her account by saying,

> Perhaps the modern equivalent of Woolf's "room of her own" is the right to stop "leaning in" all the time. There is, after all, much to be said for leaning out—for long lunches, afternoon naps, good books and some nice, slow hours in the La-Z-Boy…We need to fight for our right to lean out, and we need to do it together, girls…and we need to bring our husbands and boyfriends and male colleagues along, too (R. Brooks, 2014, February 25).

Brooks's assumption of a heteronormative ideal is noticeable here ("girls… bring our husbands and boyfriends"), as is her use of the term "lean out," an obvious rhetorical choice, given the title of Sandberg's book, and the vision of leaning out she presents is creative, collective, and cooperative. At the same time, Brooks's leaning out exists in the same economic universe as Sandberg's, in which exhaustion comes with career advancement opportunities and well-off women actually get to determine how over-worked they are. In this universe, leaning in and out are both positioned as feminist choices that middle- and upper-class women may make for themselves. One homeschooler I spoke with, Amber, was a lawyer getting burned out even before she had two kids. She worked at a big law firm that served "Fortune 500 Companies" and didn't feel especially good about the work she was going but also felt like the firm was

> …kind of like a pyramid scheme. Like, they don't want you to make partnerships. Because there's only so many people at the top of the pyramid. They really just want like a ton of associates billing and then to make hardly any woman, especially, partner. Yeah, it's, they don't want to like make their pieces of pie smaller by cutting you in, you know. It's gonna be impossible to balance kids and a law degree just generally, let alone with homeschooling (Amber, April 4, 2019).

Amber was positioned as a gunner for working at such a big firm, but didn't find pleasure or enjoyment in the work. She is more satisfied now as a homeschooler, but does consider going back to the paid workforce someday, wondering if she'll continue with law or some other profession. She knows that "it's very difficult to maintain either your network or your skill net. And I mean, that's true of women in general, or, you know, parents, but generally women who take time off from work, you know, re-entering the workforce generally is just a difficult thing" (Amber). For Amber, neither "leaning in" nor "leaning out" were simple feminist choices, or simply about her own search for personal self-fulfillment.

This narrative (about the equally feminist validity of leaning in or out) exists in uneasy tension with contemporary feminist discourse about the nature of women's work and the role of women in the workforce. Both popular and academic feminism have come to de-emphasize wife- and motherhood as obligatory, stressing instead that girls and women can be "whatever they want." Yet feminists and those critical of the movement have noted that this framing is actually a hollow "choice" in that it strives for equality by masculinizing women's lives, rather than truly valuing women's (maternal and domestic) labor. Feminist rhetoric gives lip service to praising all women's choices as equally valid but, ultimately, regards work outside the home as the more liberating than the "mommy track." There is inherent tension in this valuation, considering that while working outside the home may unshackle women from some of the gender expectations of traditionalism, (though it does not, as Brooks found, free them from "second shift" domestic labor), it enrolls them in participation in a new set of class oppressions. Women have never been exempt from capitalism–poor women have always worked and more affluent women have always managed the collective consumption of their households. However, in working outside the home, women are both subjecting themselves to workplace inequalities[47] and actively joining new production chains of systemic oppression.

This critical reality begs the question: are feminism and capitalism compatible? In the United States, it is impossible to imagine "leaning out" without a source of independent income.

[47] The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2017, women's earnings as a percentage of men's, for full-time wage and salary workers, was 81.8. That number varies by race, age, industry, and location (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Indeed, in countries like Japan, Sweden, and Great Britain, where paid parental leave is incredibly generous and childcare is highly funded, feminism is subsidized by the government. In the United States, however, leaning out is as much an economic ideology as a cultural one. Only three of the women I spoke with homeschooled as a single mother; Jennifer began doing so before she was divorced and the other (Lisa, who acknowledged she'd be "screwed") remarried. The third is a full-time respiratory specialist, Jessica, who I profile in *Chapter 6: Advocacy and Agency, "I'm the Mom I'm Going to Work It Out."*

Just after *Lean In* was released, *New Yorker Magazine* published a buzzy trend piece by Lisa Miller positing an increasing phenomenon of highly educated, wealthy women "leaning out" of the workforce to be full-time mothers. Miller can't seem to decide how to portray the subjects of her profile; she recount's Kelly Makino's self-identification as a "raging liberal" and "feminist" in the same section that she calls her priorities "retrograde" (Miller, 2013, March 17). The piece is sympathetic to the allure of leaning out and finding a reprieve to the corporate rate race that still hasn't welcomed women. Alternately–and unlike Brooks's vision for leaning out–Miller portrays this choice as a kind of sumptuous entitlement bordering on obnoxiousness.[48] Miller's account of JD- and MBA-holding mothers dropping out of the corporate track to curate their children's picture perfect lives went semi-viral, in part due to the fact that Miller claimed the practice was on the rise. Reponses to the *New York Magazine* piece dug into Miller's statistics and found that some of her reported rise in the rate of stay-at-home mothers was actually poorer mothers who found it more cost effective to stay home than pay for childcare[49] (Cohn et al., 2014, April 8) and that there was actually a rising trend in stay-at-home fathers (Livingston, 2014). The piece also caused a stir in feminist circles because of the very ambivalence of its tone, which many felt celebrated a neo-traditionalist return to highly proscriptive gender roles, while also opening the door to critique these privileged women's choices.

The *New York Magazine* piece perfectly exemplifies contemporary feminism's ambivalence about the value of traditional femininity. The movement is split between second wave feminist thought that rejected performative gender expressions like makeup and high-femme clothing as oppressive, and third wave feminist thinking that has critically pushed ideas of gender roles and expressions, arguing that feminism needs to validate the full spectrum for people of all genders. These ideas coexist in uneasy parallel, squeezing women's choices between their impossible standards.

The contemporary homeschooling movement is a perfect illustration of the tensions at the heart of "leaning out." Some homeschoolers see themselves as radical, communitarian, and feminist. For many of these families, leaning out in this way is a privileged choice that relies on their social and economic capital to make this choice for their family. Yet in so doing, mothers must make peace with stepping into a new parental role and, usually, out of economic position. Other homeschoolers have elected to adopt the practice as part of a lifestyle that explicitly rejects feminist re-imaginings of gender and family. For #tradlife homeschoolers, the practice is just one part of a life that aims to shape highly traditional gendered reality.

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[48] #blessed

[49] Pew finds that while numbers of stay-at-home mothers are increasing slightly for the first time since 2000, these women are more likely to be young (42% were under 35), have a high school diploma or less (49% compared to 30%), be foreign-born (33% compared to 20%), and less likely to be white (51% compared to 60%) than working mothers (Cohn, Livingston, & Wang, 2014, April 8).

For both groups, homeschooling is embraced by its practitioners as way to achieve self-determination and self-reliance. Whether or not homeschoolers identify themselves as feminist (or liberatory, or progressive, or traditionalist), outsiders evaluate their decisions against a standardized rubric that assumes parents will maintain a certain kind of engagement with public institutions like schools. Failing to maintain this type of engagement is cause for suspicion, concern, confusion, and judgement.

Chapter 8: Community
The Place Behind the Barn

> *I mean, as far as like State Controlling and stuff, there are things that I chafe at, that are small things, but I feel like they're good synecdoche for like larger issues, so, for example, when they get a drink of water at the water fountain. So first of all, if a kid is thirsty at school, yeah, they can't just drink water. They have to ask permission to like, fulfill a basic, yeah, bodily function…. Whereas I feel like a lot of Christians find those things as in like, Oh, they, they read the book Tango, Tango makes three about the gay penguins, right? And for them, it's that same like, I don't want to appropriate a term, but it's like micro aggression, right? Like, against their Christian identity. And for me, like the water fountain thing, it's like a micro aggression against like, human dignity (Maya, March 28, 2019).*

In this chapter I take up the third of my research questions, asking "what is the political work of homeschooling?" In the tradition of second wave feminism, this chapter asserts that the "personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970) to consider how homeschooling engages in revised notions of public and private space, providing the homeschooling mothers I spoke with both an identity and a shared community. This community, which I call "The Place Behind the Barn," engages with the interconnected, unclear, and imprecise issues of school and home that have run throughout this work. This chapter explores how homeschooling, via The Place Behind the Barn, is simultaneously doing and undoing the messy, political work of (re)claiming the domestic and forging a new community.

To say that American politics have become contentious and polarized is, if anything, a gross understatement. In this highly divided political climate, especially since President Trump was elected in 2016, it has been hard to find places in American political, civil, and social society where people with radically different views not just get along, but thrive in community together. Given the highly politicized history of the homeschooling movement, it might seem that this would be another highly divided, contentious community. And yet, homeschooling creates such a strong sense of shared identity and affinity that homeschoolers with radically different politics and educational styles are able to find shared meaning and more than a little common ground.

This chapter examines this political community-building of homeschooling, first through a conversation I had with a homeschooler and friend, Maya, who reminded me of an important conversation we'd had years in the past and suggested to me an important framing of the homeschooling community: The Place Behind the Barn. In section two I develop a theorization of The Place Behind the Barn through other homeschoolers' conversations about what they value about the practice and community of homeschooling. I find that homeschooling constructs its own ideological practices and homeschoolers take on the clear identity of 'homeschooler'– separate and distinct from their work as mothers or educators.

Meeting Maya Again

I meet Maya at an achingly hipster coffee shop in San Francisco's "South of Market" or SOMA district. Walking to meet her from the metro (BART), I think about how, when I was a kid in San Francisco, this neighborhood was light industrial warehouses and flower markets. Now, this area is the white-hot center of the city's tech industry, refurbished warehouses mixed

with ugly new condos. The woman I'm meeting, Maya, chose this location because she used to work at one of those tech companies before her husband's ranching job took the family out of the state and she became a full-time homeschooler. They've returned to California, but she decided to continue homeschooling their three children, a choice she's come to talk to me about while she's in SOMA today to have lunch with some of her former co-workers.

Unlike all of the other women in my study, Maya and I knew each other first socially. We went to the same college, belonged to the same Jewish student organization, and are now friends on social media. The last time I saw her was several years ago when we'd run into each other in our local grocery store and talked about public school choices over organic produce. I'd almost forgotten about this conversation but, when I begin my interview questions she reminds me of it immediately, citing it as one of the first reasons she was willing to consider homeschooling. Apparently she'd been concerned about the schools in their West Oakland neighborhood and I'd told her that, statistically, her white children, living with two well-educated parents, were going to be just fine no matter what school they went to.

Several homeschoolers I interviewed engaged with this same narrative. Dana talked about people who leveled charges of (re)segregation at her, first dismissing it because she (as a white person) didn't have the cultural narrative of having had to fight to get her kids into public schools and then rationalizing that homeschooling families aren't a large enough demographic to make much of an impact on TPSs,

> I mean, okay, so it's definitely, I mean, it's a paradigm shift. I mean, not so much for me, I'm total Caucasian, we don't have the cultural sort of, you know, 'we fought to get into the school history." Like the, you know, Brown Brown versus Board of Education, you know, all of that, like, 'we fought to get into the public schools, how dare you take your child.' And I've heard the argument also of, you know, 'well, if all the good people leave, or all the, you know, parents with gifted children leave, you know, then the schools won't be good.' And, and the problem there is that, I mean, if you think about it, 97% of children still go to public schools…And if they haven't all fixed the system yet, then I don't think our little 3% is really going to make much difference, we would really do 3% difference, you know, and I'm really not worried about the system, I'm worried about my kids (Dana, May 23, 2019).

Kim, a social worker and Bay Area local, struggled more with this narrative. She grew up in the San Francisco schools with parents who were highly involved in advocacy work. She had a good model for advocacy, but didn't see that playing out in the schools her children were attending. Due to the city-wide lottery, her children were assigned to a "good" school in a wealthy area far from their home, requiring a long commute and she found that "it's all very, like, class division. Like it's just not the way I experienced it growing up. So I did not want my kids to be in these classrooms with, like, a token friend" (Kim, March 28, 2019). Having a good model for advocacy from her parents and a practice of advocacy in her job as a social worker, she didn't see authentic advocacy happening in the school. It got to the point that, when her kids were struggling,

> I can keep doing advocacy for other people's kids, or I can do advocacy for my kids. But I just felt like, something's gotta give here. And so ultimately, I just decided, initially, I could set the privileged piece aside, see how sustainable this was. And then as I've gotten into it, as I've met with other people, as we embrace it, it's like, a radical political position (Kim).

As I sit in this over-priced coffee shop with Maya I can't quite remember the particulars of our grocery store conversation but, as it's one I've had with many friends and anxious parents since starting graduate school, I can imagine its contours. Informed by data, research, and my parents' own decision to put their white daughters into primarily Black public schools in Bayview-Hunter's Point, I've tried to convince many other people that the narrative of failing schools is at least partially a political construction, and that the best way to improve all schools is to increase their racial and economic integration. My narrative in these conversations has always been to stress the "little-d democracy" of public schooling, the inherent goodness of this fundamental institution, and the positive political role of parents with high social, economic, and racial capital.[50] As a non-parent this has been an easy enough story to tell, a straight-forward calculus.

What Maya tells me is that, not only was this calculation much harder for her family to solve, but that she took my message to have a completely different meaning. When it came time to put her twins in kindergarten,

> I was researching schools, and we applied to a whole bunch, and we toured a whole bunch, and I looked at a whole bunch, and I was trying to do this assessment in my head of like, where would be the best place to send them? I remember this time I ran into my friend in the grocery store. And I thought about it. And it was actually kind of freeing in a way, because I was like, well, if they're going to be fine, wherever they go, then that actually gives me the freedom to decide that like, I'd like to prioritize my relationship with them. And I'd like to prioritize giving them a longer childhood of, like, play. Because, you know, if that's true for sending them to an F-grade school in West Oakland, is also true for sending them to a "good" school in Petaluma. So I was like…oh, no, I'm not worried about fucking it up. It's gonna be fine (Maya, march 28, 2019).

That Maya took my usual pro-public education spiel as creative license to imagine not enrolling her children in kindergarten is mildly shocking–not because I don't understand her point but because she took my advice seriously. Standing in the grocery story that day I'd told her that her children would be fine, educationally, and she believed me, following that belief to a schooling practice that at that point I'd never closely considered and certainly hadn't intended.

My amazement was also that we could share so many demographics of place, education, age, religion, and race but differ on these fundamental values of work and education. Would I "lean out" of a well-paid career in tech to be a full-time homeschooler, as Maya had? The reality is that whether I would, I could understand the choices and trade-offs, the agonized negotiations that led Maya and the other women in my study to such decisions. In so doing, I had to recognize that my simple narrative in the grocery story didn't begin to account for the ways that families, and particularly, mothers, are grappling with institutional systems that offer them few if any easy

[50] I will acknowledge that this argument sounds much like the one put forth by the "Nice White Parents" in the Serial Podcast of the same name (Joffe-Walt, 2020). It's true that if implemented only in name, school desegregation can reproduce race-based ordination and tracking. At the same time, scholars like Gary Orfield have repeatedly argued that separate is inherently unequal, in part due to the confluence of racial and economic disparities in the United States. In their 2005 work, "Why Segregation Matters" Orfield and Chungmei Lee write, "Segregated schools are unequal and there is very little evidence of any success in creating 'separate but equal' outcomes on a large scale. One of the common misconceptions over the issue of resegregation of schools is that many people treat it as simply a change in the skin color of the students in a school. If skin color were not systematically linked to other forms of inequality, it would, of course, be of little significance for educational policy. Unfortunately, that is not and never has been the nature of our society. Socioeconomic segregation is a stubborn, multidimensional and deeply important cause of educational inequality" (Orfield & Lee, 2005, pp. 4-5).

answers to the problem of contemporary parenting and schooling. Maya and I both looked at the same data, both heard "your kids are going to be fine," and in that sentiment constructed very different meanings. And, because we were both operating in a neoliberal political environment that allows, even demands, individualized solutions to systemic issues, these differing constructions brought us to very different ends.

While second wave feminism rejected the separate sphere ideology, asserting that women should move into the public sphere and compete with men for domination in the workforce, a race that necessitated putting children in childcare or schools, many of the women that I spoke with rejected that narrative. Instead, they've chosen to thrive in a hybridized home-school sphere, with the sense that gives them and their children a great deal of control, a better possibility for agency, and a real sense of ownership over their lives. As I explore in this section, this hybrid space–what I call here the 'space behind the barn'–is not outside of school or home but contains material and ideological elements of both and therefore serves to both uphold and challenge elements of domesticity.

Thus while homeschooling may be perceived as a retreat, I argue that it is, simultaneously, both a retreat and a re-clamation/construction. Homeschooling should be seen not, then, as a simple withdrawal into the domestic, but as a (re)construction of a third-space[51] practice, identity, and imagined community (B. Anderson, 1983). My work finds that homeschooling constructs its own ideological practices and homeschoolers take on the clear identity of 'homeschooler'– separate and distinct from their work as mothers or educators. In this reconstruction, some homeschoolers have come to the conclusion that for-pay work and the equity game were rigged, and so see their choice to "lean out" as an inherently feminist decision, classifying their re-engagement with the domestic as a reclamation of power. Other homeschoolers outright reject feminism, embracing the original gender norms of the Cult of True Womanhood and the hierarchical order it prescribed. Homeschooling and the third space it occupies are thus shaped by proximity to the Cults of Domesticity and True Womanhood, but are not synonymous with them.

Despite this divide in ideology and what is, surely, a difference in voting politics, homeschooling offers up a space of intersectional possibilities that, in bridging school and home, constructs a new ideological paradigm. In our conversation, Maya offered me a name for this third space; she said that homeschooling is where the left and the right "meet behind the barn." As a rancher with progressive politics, she meant this literally, in the sense that homeschooling is one of the activities that has brought her together with other farm families in rural areas, despite their differing beliefs. She also meant this metaphorically, in that homeschooling is one of the places in American life where we can see most clearly the embodiment of a kind of populist, anti-statist, anti-institutional, libertarian ethos that attracts adherents from all across the political spectrum. Homeschooling is the rare practice in our doggedly two-party, bidirectional American political system that both defies conventional electoral politics and elucidates not the often-

[51] Building on the work of like David Pearson who posited a productive "radical middle," (Pearson, 2001), scholars like Kris Gutierrez and her co-authors (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995) theorized an ideological and practice-based "third space" which, in the context of learning environments, they define as "a place where two *scripts* or two normative patterns of interaction intersect, creating the potential for authentic interaction and learning to occur"(Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999, p. 372). The concept of third space has been further applied to conversations of the radical, queer, and critical at both the border/frontera (Anzaldúa, 1987) and intersectional middle (Bhabha, 2012), suggesting that "third space" is a plastic and adaptive concept for signaling and theorizing marginality and intersectionality, as I am using it here.

discussed "middle" but rather a third-way ideology that reveals just how narrow our conception of the political spectrum really is.

The Place Behind the Barn

In this chapter I develop a theorization of what Maya calls the 'Place Behind the Barn,' a third space of ideological positioning with a conflicted relationship to American ideologies of domestication and settlement that creates allegiances across otherwise salient political differences. The Place Behind the Barn purposefully conjures up images of pastoral bliss and is a metaphor for the way homeschooling brings mothers and children together in their shared affinity group. This semi-real, semi-imagined space provides a re-contextualization of the political meaning of homeschooling, both providing valuable insights into the practice itself and allowing us to see how homeschooling fits into the broader educational and political ecology. I argue that, rather than just being understood as 'education in the home,' homeschooling should be understood as an ideologically distinctive practice, one that takes on a stance of refusal ("we aren't participating in traditional schooling") while still engaging with systems (charter schools, online schools, private schools, not to mention other systems like capitalism and patriarchy) and also creating new communities ("join us as homeschoolers"). To use the metaphor: when people gather together in the Place Behind the Barn, they are removed from the work of ranching but remain sheltered by the space of the farm. I thus discuss this third space not as separate from school and home, but as taking on the symbolic and material work of both.

Other homeschoolers also talked about The Place Behind the Barn, if not using the exact same terminology for the idea. The first step of entering this space is taking on the identity of a homeschooler, a moment that many of the mothers I spoke with could pinpoint almost exactly, and talked about with vivid language. This moment of transition, when they went from being people who schooled at home to taking on the identity of "homeschooler" and stepped into The Place Behind the Barn. For many, this transition into new identity came with a shift of focus, intensification of pedagogy, and doubling-down on becoming embedded in the homeschooling community.

In our interview, Amy talked about how her son had been in public school and "I had talked with the principal, I had done work, you know, trying to make things different, but it was obvious I wasn't going to change the school," but that finding and becoming a part of the homeschooling community was a revelation. She said,

> I felt I had the opportunity and the means to just change my son's environment. I would say, you know–so part of just growing up, I was changing as a parent, yeah. Because of what I was experiencing. And I found homeschool, and I found the Homeschool Association of California [HSC], and the people in that made a big difference in my life. Because, as I told you, not just at first–I was a doormat all my life. I had always felt very outcast. My entire view of the world of perception wasn't shared by anybody, anywhere. I had one friend who really understood me and shared my ideas. We met when I was in college. But you know, she lived in a different part of the universe. I never, you know, didn't get to see her much. But I credit her existence with perhaps having saved my life. I could very easily have turned to suicide, taking my life, I felt so disconnected. But just knowing that there was one, at least one other person in the world out there, like me, was enough to keep me hanging on. Then when I joined HSC, and we started by going to their group camp out, so I got to meet in person, a lot of people. All of a sudden, I discovered hundreds of people, very much like me, in those ways that were–where I'd felt isolated

> and alone. And that made a big difference in me as a person in my whole life. I didn't feel awkward anymore. And I knew there was nothing wrong with me, you know? (Amy, March 19, 2019)

While Amy and others didn't use words like "identity," they did talk about how finding the homeschooling community felt like coming home, or at long last finding their people who actually understood them. Several mothers I spoke with said that this identity reshaped their lives in profound ways, giving them a sense of purpose, agency, and meaning, and reconfiguring their social landscapes away from other mothers who were still sending their children to traditional forms of schooling. I also found that, contrary to other research on mothers' identity and homeschooling (see Lois, 2012, pp. 191-193) who found that intensive mothering demands of homeschooling were linked to their identity as homeschoolers being time-sensitive, the women in my study resonated deeply with their homeschooling identity and expressed the sentiment that they were "lifelong homeschoolers" even after their children were grown up or they were no longer actively homeschooling. Even after their era of active homeschooling, they still identify strongly with the practice and often act as an ambassador, pointing other parents to homeschooling resources; assuaging fears or concerns; advocating for homeschooling formally or informally; or working in a more formal role with a homeschooling organization or one of the many homeschooling charters or PSPs. This is not to say that mothers don't often pass in and out of The Place Behind the Barn, but that once there it is a remarkably durable identity space.

In my interviews with homeschooling mothers, many praised the simple luxury of being able to focus exclusively on the domestic sphere and the way it simplified their family's life. Said Dana, in her discussion about domestic work and new homeschoolers' fears of getting everything done,

> Here's the example I give, I say, you know, when you have like two working parents, and you know, they're both go-go-go and the kids get off to school in the morning and you get to work. And then the kids come home, after school things and then its homework and then you know, when are the errands getting done? And when is the laundry getting picked up or done, or when is the cleaning getting picked up? And when are the groceries getting ordered again? When's the cleaning happening and the following weekend–When your family, everything–and it's just like breakneck pace, right? So now imagine if one of those parents became a stay at home parent, right? Much more relaxed, right? So because that that person is now taking on all those tasks that both had to kind of fit in during the week or on weekends, you know, the chores, that dinner is now on the table when the person who's working comes home. And it's planned, because you make time to plan on it now, because you're a stay at home parent, it's a, it's a completely different dynamic (Dana, May 23, 2019).

In this conversation, homeschooling isn't simply "one more thing" to fit into a busy schedule, but instead the freedom from busyness that allows for space to plan and get dinner on the table. Though she isn't consciously using the language of the Cult of Domesticity, the logic of this paradigm is very present in Dana's thinking about the joy of being able to master household tasks with relaxation and authority.

The place "behind the barn" is also useful in that it conjures up visions of pastoral settings and America's pioneer history. This narrative was often invoked[52] in my interviews with

[52] In 74 interviews, the phrase "one room schoolhouse" came up seven times, "Little House on the Prairie" twice, "Pioneers" twice, and "Founding Fathers" three times (to refer to colonial homeschooling), all with positive connotations.

homeschool mothers. In almost 20% of my interviews women named the one-room schoolhouse, Little House on the Prairie, or Pioneers as an ideal to which they were aspiring or a pre-contemporary model that held some virtues we had lost. When I asked, for example, about the gender roles in her family, Natalie told me, in the same breath, that sex differences are real and that she idolized Ma Ingalls. She said,

> So we put no boundaries on what boys and girls can do. And I want [my son], he can make, he can do the laundry. And [my daughter] can reload a gun. We do not do any of this "well it's not proper for a woman." Are you out of your mind? My feminine ideal is Ma from Little House in prairie. And that woman slapped a bear and you know, could shoot a leopard and grind corn. So we are–I think it doesn't make any sense to say there's no gender differences. Women get pregnant. And we are the ones that need to be more careful about who we have sex with. It's, it's silly in my mind to say no, no, no, no, we're all completely equal. When I'm nine months pregnant, hanging onto a toddler, it's different if I get assaulted on the street versus a 25-year-old guy. We're different. But that doesn't mean we're less or they're better or somebody else is less. So everybody does everything in the household (Natalie, May 14, 2019).[53]

Historically, the "pioneer" is co-incidental or an actually largely proto-Cults figure, since the American West was declared closed after the 1890 census, and yet the the image of the pioneer has gained far more cultural cache and remained a far more durable icon in Americans' prosthetic memory. While the Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood focused on a much more subdued and "cultured" homemaking than pioneering, both–especially for women–were concentrated on domestication in its various forms. However, the American version of the Cults built upon the idealized vision of the pioneer woman as the capable, "can do" helpmeet of her husband, raising children, livestock, and subsistence farms, while capably and cheerfully handling any other domestic labor that needed to be done. It is thus fascinating and important to note how homeschooling mothers reach past the Cults to the figure of the pioneer for their espoused values, and the way this signals both their personal affiliations and the way they want to position their political values.

In addition to the ongoing popularity of the 'Little House' books, the image of the strong, gun-wielding pioneer mother (Ma) and resourceful teacher/relatably reluctant farm wife/writer (Laura) are kept alive in the contemporary, unspoken Cult of Domesticity[54] by figures like

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[53] That Natalie holds up Ma Ingalls as the feminine ideal is no accident, but in order to understand this phenomenon we should more properly look to Laura Ingalls Wilder herself and the cultural product she created. The *Little House* books, (released between 1932-1971) were, to begin with, a Depression era nostalgia project to romanticize American rugged individualism. Massively successful in this respect, they have also had an immense effect on American culture. Thomas Dumm writes that "We can think of her work as contributing to what Alison Landsberg has referred to as 'prosthetic memory.' Landsberg has suggested that the personal construction of identity in modern mass societies is deeply dependent on the affective attachment people create between their personal selves and larger historical narratives, those created through films, television, novels, and other media, as much through unmediated experience. Wilder's series of books could be considered an example par excellence of prosthetic memory helping to constitute a sense of rugged pioneer self-reliance through the suturing of one's identity to that of the experience of the the Ingalls family (Dumm, 2019, pp. 158-159).

[54] The contemporary Cult of Domesticity looks a bit different from that of the 1800s, but is no less compelling. It is comprised of a robust landscape of visual imagery (Pinterest, Instagram); retail (Target, HomeGoods); domestic-themed content (HDTV, the Food Network); MommyBlogs and media explicitly for women (Scary Mommy, the View); and advice (everything from *What to Expect when You're Expecting* to *Lean In*). While not the only theme, there is running throughout this constellation an incredibly pervasive "pioneer" narrative of rugged individualism;

cookbook author, blogger, and homewares saleswoman "Pioneer Woman" Ree Drummond (Drummond, N/D). Even Maya, who rejected some of the explicit narratives of settler colonialism–"…you know, Thanksgiving. I don't need my kids dressing up like Indians or pilgrims so that I can tell them why that's racist"–still had embedded in her discussion a goal of letting her children play and spend more time in nature. This "back to the land" motivation was present in some form or another in almost half of my interviews. The pioneer woman–appealing to women from across the political spectrum, and a figurehead crunchy naturalists as well as Libertarian gun-owners find relatable–is central to The Place Behind the Barn. She anchors the space in a kind of rugged, outdoorsy, female-organized, maternality. This conjured vision of the pioneer mother is especially salient when we consider the long history of women educators who moved between their roles as mothers and teachers, leveraging their command of the domestic to make claims to the right to educate children–their own and others' (Jacobs, 2009).

The Political Work of the Place Behind the Barn

The Place Behind the Barn is further defined by the way that it brings together homeschoolers who might, on other issues, be cleaved by deep political or ideological differences. In her discussion of homeschooling and the way it actually revealed similarities, Natalie (the mother who above idealized Ma Ingalls), talked about how much homeschoolers actually had in common. She said emphasized that placing people into rigid activity or political camps is artificial, because everyone contains multitudes, but that homeschooling is good because it brings different types of people together. As an example, she said, "So we go to a Bible study group, we also make kombucha, you know, we would pick what we want to do. And then we go to it. And then you meet people that are different, and that's good" (Natalie). After asking her whether homeschooling brought people together, she mused,

> Yes. Both sides do that. And I think it's a real shame, because I think there's a huge, there's a big community, and we could be bigger. If we linked together a little bit more or just I mean, I don't, I certainly don't have the answer. Yeah, but I know that people will say, 'oh, we're not gonna go do that.' Like, even 'oh, we can't go there.' That's a Catholic group. Oh, my goodness (Natalie, May 14, 2019).

Based on this conversation about how much homeschoolers actually had in common–how much discussion there was for The Place Behind the Barn–I asked Natalie to imagine a Venn diagram and to tell me what topics or issues didn't overlap or were in the "outer edges." Her answer was "strictly Bible" and "politics" but then she quickly doubled back, clarifying a central feature of The Place Behind the Barn. As imagined, it is a space of freedom outside of institutionality, removed from the prying eyes of government oversight or–in the parlance of the farm metaphor–the USDA or Monsanto. A love of freedom, said Natalie, is a political and ideological value that brings together all homeschoolers. She told me,

> Because both groups, if you speak to one or the other, they will tell you how important freedom is to them. So obviously, that's outside of politics, because our country was based on freedom. Yeah, it can be separated entirely from what happens on a day to day basis on the TV…I feel like it is because–if you talk to the "hippies," they'll tell you, we want to homeschool our children so that we can teach them that the earth is sacred, that

self-reliance and self-trust; getting "back" to or "in touch with" the "basics," "your true self/purpose," "nature/the land;" faux-tribal iconography like arrows, tipis, and dream-catchers; and nostalgia about traditionalism. The contemporary Cult of Domesticity does even more to elide pioneering and gendered homemaking than the historical eras from which these practices were born.

> you can grow your own food, you do not need to go to a corporation for your nourishment for your clothing, for your any kind of material purchases, we can make it at home, we can grow it at home, we are able to do it our way. And then you go and you talk to "the gun nuts." And they will tell you, freedom is important to us, the earth is sacred, I want to go out and hunt. And bring home my meat, we can have a garden, and we can grow everything. We don't need to go to McDonald's and I'm looking at them like do you guys, did you listen to yourself? We can all do the same thing (Natalie).

Here, Natalie has identified both the negative freedom (freedom from corporations or institutions) and positive freedom (freedom to be self-sufficient) that brings women into homeschooling and into The Place Behind the Barn. Whether or not such freedoms actually exist (and I would argue that they don't), The Place Behind the Barn offers the illusion of freedom from certain kinds of control and oversight. This space is therefore simultaneously a critique of and refuge within the systems they yearn to but cannot actually escape.[55]

What is so interesting about this construction of the space as primarily defined by 'freedom' is that it posits homeschooling as a practice and a community that exists outside of or separate from institutions like schools or commerce. If the "barn" is where the real work of the farm of ranch gets done by men, the place behind it is where women and children might be free from both oversight and the crushing toil of rural labor. Yet The Place Behind The Barn isn't separate from the farm itself, nor is it free from the material conditions that shaped the rest of the operation. If we drop the metaphor, homeschooling mothers try to claim that by removing themselves from the workforce and their children from traditional schools, they're disengaging with systems of capitalism and institutionalized schooling. I maintain, however, that homeschooling is only possible due to heteronormative patterns of work (two-parent households wherein husbands worked and mothers stayed home to labor as home educators) and as a piece (albeit ancillary) of the larger education system. Homeschooling gives the illusion of being a space separate and removed, just as The Place Behind the Barn conjures up images of quiet fields or *terra nullis,* but both of these images are simply illusions. The Place Behind the Barn cannot escape the home or the school, but takes on the symbolic and material work of both.

Once entered and coalesced, The Place Behind the Barn becomes a space of identity, community, and advocacy, where women bond and share experiences across what would otherwise be political divisions. In this way, homeschooling opens up an unusual–and unusually powerful–third space for community, advocacy, and solidarity. This isn't to say that there aren't still some (very powerful) divisions and disagreements within the homeschooling community, as there are within any diverse group, but The Place Behind the Barn affirms and unites homeschooling families, but particularly mothers, in their practice and identity. In our interview, Amy talked about joining in state-wide advocacy efforts this way:

> I got to meet all these people personally and regularly over the course of many years. We did that even when I wasn't [in my role]. So I really got to meet with and interact

[55] It has been suggested to me that this sounds much like the Marxian concept of religion: "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions" (Marx, 1977). I find this to be accurate, inasmuch as homeschooling functions much like a religion for its practitioners, creating a powerful sense of shared identity, belief system, and community. At the same time, and in keeping with Marx's critique, homeschooling is the decision to invest in a small solution rather than a systemic revolution, wherein individualized remedies wouldn't be necessary. As I discuss in *Chapter 3: Teaching, "I've Always Been a Teacher,"* many of the mothers in my study were previously classroom teachers and elected to homeschool after discovering that systemic change wasn't possible or wasn't going to come soon enough for their own children. For them, a heart in a heartless world isn't perfect, but it's plenty.

> with a lot of people in a lot of different ways. And, you know, that helped broaden my perspective to say, you know, I don't care how you're homeschooling but I'll defend, to the death, your right to do it (Amy, March 19, 2019).

Conclusion

Described in this way by various of my interviewees, The Place Behind the Barn is an imagined space that women enter when they take on the identity of 'homeschooler.' Once there, they find resonance in the figure of the strong, capable pioneer mother who trusts her instincts and her capabilities. In community with other mothers drawn into The Place Behind the Barn, homeschoolers discover common goals, values, and practices. The place behind the bar thus exists symbolically as an imagined space of community and also becomes real in the message boards, advocacy groups, park days, and parent co-ops that the homeschooling community creates.

There is privilege here, surely, but privilege is only part of the story. In education, invocations like "other people's children" are often deployed by people comfortably in universities (who have, like home schoolers become disillusioned with and fled public school teaching) to vilify white women as not only racist but hopelessly racist. Yet like Jane Addams and the settlement house movement, this work challenges social relations even as they echo them. Doing all this invites a vision of how homeschooling helps articulate a gendered, caring notion of the public, a reanimated space not so tightly constrained by logics of capitalism or individuality, but by community and mutual provision.

This dissertation began by tracing homeschooling back, considering the ideological roots of home education and the American tenets at the heart of the practice. I theorize that the very concept of "homeschooling" is only possible because of a symbolic and real intersection between the work of school and the work of home. The overlap between these two spheres is domestication, made possible through women's (paid and unpaid) labor. Homeschooling is thus a case through which we can see how vital American institutions like family and schooling function in tandem, with parallel aims and ideologies. What's more, as a space of confluence, this overlap is also a place of contestation, the nexus point at which tensions between the familial parent (home) and the state as parent (school) vie for control over domestication (i.e., control over children). In this way, homeschooling is a lens through which we may examine how mothers make claims to expertise about, agency for, and control over domestication (i.e., control over children). As we have seen throughout this work, women's labor is a force that brings together the work of "home" and "school" and, in so doing, creates a radical re-imagining of the political possibilities of that confluence.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The findings of my dissertation research on the labor and advocacy of homeschooling mothers reveals homeschooling as both a protest against and capitulation to the institutional features of American neoliberalism. Homeschooling serves as an agentic rebuke against schools, a way for some women (often wealthier on average) to "lean out" of still inequitable workplaces. For many of the mothers I talked to in the course of my dissertation research, homeschooling served as an extension of other holistic birthing and parenting practices or as a means to find a community of like-minded families. Appealing to quintessentially American notions of freedom and liberty, homeschooling simultaneously creates new educational markets and places the onus for reform on individual families (Harvey, 2007). At the same time, in the sense that it is agentic, homeschooling is an individualized solution to systemic problems of education, economy, and family, and, in that respect, functions as a quintessentially neoliberal answer to neoliberal questions. This tension is held in delicate balance by the unpaid domestic educational labor of homeschool mothers, who find that they are able to advocate for themselves and their children at the expense of their own time and effort. That it is a cost many were glad to pay does not negate the price, and the homeschool mothers I interviewed had to shape new identities as home-educators.

As explored in *Chapter 5: Work, "Homeschool is Parenting on Steroids,"* many of the homeschool mothers I spoke with had to make huge trade-offs in paid labor (the first shift) to accommodate for the demands of a fulltime third educational shift. This work does not presume to advocate how parents should devote their time, but it does seek to call attention to the fact that women are disproportionately taking on all three shifts of labor and/or being forced to choose between them when the impossibility of tripartition becomes obvious.

In embracing their identities as homeschoolers, the mothers I spoke with carve out both a new identity and a new political space–the "Place Behind the Barn"–where they can come together with other homeschoolers, to whatever extent. In my observations of online homeschooling communities, it was clear that distinctions and divisions between homeschoolers do still exist and foment no small amount of inter-community strife. In addition, there are bitter disagreements about elements of policy, for example the growing reliance on charter schools and other outside vendors, with some homeschoolers saying that this "dilutes" or "sells out" the practice. And yet these squabbles are surprisingly minor in a community that might easily be cleaved by deep ideological divisions of religion and politics. I met secular homeschoolers praised religious novels for their dynamic storylines and religious homeschoolers who decided to use a Harry Potter "Spellbook" to encourage their children to learn cursive; both books were recommendations from other homeschooling families in their networks.

This dissertation began by tracing homeschooling back, considering the ideological roots of home education and the American tenets at the heart of the practice. I argue that the very concept of "homeschooling" is only possible because of a symbolic and very real intersection between the work of school and the work of home. The overlap between these two spheres is domestication, made possible through women's (paid and unpaid) labor. Homeschooling is thus a case through which we can see how vital American institutions like family and schooling function in tandem, with parallel aims and ideologies. What's more, as a space of confluence, this overlap is also a place of contestation, the nexus point at which tensions between the familial parent (home) and the state as parent (school) vie for control over domestication (i.e., control over children). In this way, homeschooling is a lens through which we may examine how

mothers make claims to expertise about, agency for, and control over domestication (i.e., control over children).

As we have seen throughout this work, women's labor is a force that brings together the work of "home" and school" and, in so doing, creates a radical re-imagining of the political possibilities of that confluence. While homeschooling can, and is by some, seen as an abandonment of the "public," it can also be framed as an embrace of a very different public tradition in American political, social, and civil life. Rather than investing in the public institutions of the state, homeschooling is a practice that imagines a "thick" civil society of voluntary associations and a flourishing network of informal connections between individuals. The women I met doing this research told me that they, as women and mothers, are especially desperate for these types of connections and interconnections and have found them–at least in part–through homeschooling.

Chapter 10: Epilogue
Covid-19 and Pandemic-Schooling

Putting Homeschooling in the Middle

The quiet tidy study on homeschooling I planned for this dissertation changed radically with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was fortunate enough to finish all of my planned interviews by June of 2019 but I certainly never anticipated that homeschooling would have its far-more-than-15 minutes of fame beginning in early 2020. In many ways, my theoretical constructs, methods, and methodology remained unchanged, but I absolutely had to reconceptualize what it meant to be studying something that was suddenly at the forefront of both educational policy and national consciousness. Throughout this work, I advocate for thinking about homeschooling "in the middle" of our educational system, rather than as a sideline or auxiliary piece to it. But I had to spend some dark nights of the soul really grappling with what that meant for me and my data.

I began to see my work as a near history, a look at homeschooling on the very cusp of a public health, education, and economic crisis we couldn't exactly predict but might have foretold.[56] As such, the experiences, observations, insights, and critiques offered by the homeschooling mothers who participated in my study should be seen as both a valuable record of the pre-COVID "beforetime"[57] and as still-necessary reflections of our most basic social structures. If anything, COVID has only magnified all of the flaws and features of the systems I was already studying–education, women's unpaid domestic labor, and the relationships between families and the state. "Homeschooling" may be more familiar to more people now than it was before the pandemic, but that also means that the concerns of homeschooling are more widely felt, as well.

One of the major consequences of the pandemic, aside from the obvious personal and public health implications, has been to shift homeschooling–or at least the term "homeschooling"–to the forefront of our national consciousness. Along with parents and school professionals, educational researchers and policymakers have been reframing how they think and talk about homeschooling, reimagining it not as a practice on the margins of the American schooling system but as something that is, urgently, at its center. Yet, perhaps it belonged in the middle all along. Certainly the scale and scope of the pandemic-schooling experiment are unprecedented, but this moment is just another in a long string illustrating the interconnectedness of American homes and schools. In addition, the pandemic has placed heavy burdens of educational labor on women, highlighting the import of the third shift and its impact on women's lives. Current struggles with pandemic-schooling are symptomatic of larger cataclysmic changes to family, home, work, and life, many of which were well underway long before COVID. The pandemic has only laid bare the anomie, opportunism, and privatization of neoliberalism (Duggan, 2012; Gilmore, 2006; Harvey, 2007), as well as the fragile but essential set of childcare, nutrition, and education services provided by schools. If we frame the issues of

[56] Indeed, both scholars and journalists have predicted a global pandemic, specifically a novel respiratory disease or flu. They have warned that, based on responses to outbreaks of H1N1 and Ebola that national governments were unprepared for such an eventuality (See Lancet Editorial, December 17, 2016; Osterholm, 2005; Schoch-Spana, 2017)

[57] What many are calling the pre-COVID era, in a nod to both post-apocalyptic/dystopic narratives and the shared sense that time is moving slowly in quarantine.

schooling during the pandemic as merely questions of education or only a problem of the economy and labor, we will miss the deeply interconnected ways home and school overlap and how women's labor is tied to carework. Thus the pandemic faces us not with education problems and labor problems, but with an education-labor problem, one which is increasingly being born by women.

We're All in This Together, Alone

"HEY. Can you talk homeschooling stuff? I need to freak out. So many questions."
Text message from personal friend and mother of two in Oakland, CA. April 14, 2020.

"Leah! SOS here. Homeschooling resources. Can we chat at all today? =(
Doing lessons for the next 30 minutes."
Text message from personal friend and mother of three in Portland, OR. October 20, 2020

"Hey, I'm a friend of ___ and she told me you're studying homeschooling. I'm sorry to bother you but can I ask some questions? Need to decide what to do about this upcoming school year and in-person plans. Thank you!"
Text message from social contact and mother of two in San Francisco, CA. August 3, 2021.

In the spring of 2020 my phone started buzzing with inquiries about homeschooling. In a way, this wasn't unusual, since I'd been conducting this work on homeschooling for about a year at that point and I was used to getting texts, calls, and emails from homeschooling mothers about my research or participating in my study. What was different, of course, was that these parents were homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were not "first choice" homeschoolers (Lois, 2012) or even second or third choice homeschoolers, but parents facing a new kind of *pandemic-schooling* (M. H. Wilson, 2020), at home.

Pandemic-Schooling

In the early days of quarantine, schools were slated to close for a week, maybe two, but neither schools nor parents anticipated that they'd be "homeschooling" for long. By April of 2020, however, many states and districts around the country were making plans to finish the academic year remotely, and the question of homeschooling began to take to take on increasing immediacy. So, too, did the phone calls from friends and friends-of-friends; suddenly, everyone had questions about "homeschooling. "

In the world of education, we are accustomed to incrementalism—at both the macro and micro levels, public schooling is slow to change. Yet, it is difficult to overstate how quickly and thoroughly the American education system has transformed during the global COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019 and 2020, traditional forms of schooling were replaced by school closures, hybrid learning models, multi-family "pods" (Wenner Moyer, 2020, July 22), and in-home education. As the 2021 school year tentatively began, in-person plans were quickly forestalled by positive test results, super-spreader incidents (Rehman & Ong, 2021, August 27), (delta) variant(s) spikes, vaccine and mask mandate debates, and repeated quarantines. In a world of uncertainly, one thing is clear: schooling has changed, and radically. One major implication of the COVID-19 pandemic is that homeschooling, once a niche educational practice, overnight became a common, if not the de facto schooling mode. The radical shifts prompted by COVID-19 have galvanized the largest educational experiment the country has ever seen; a set of practices I believe we should call *pandemic-schooling.*

The term *pandemic-schooling* comes from practitioners within the homeschooling community who want to make clear that the fraught, claustrophobic, technology-burdened experiences of families during quarantine are not, in fact, an accurate representation of homeschooling or what first-choice homeschoolers (Lois, 2012) had been choosing for their families. Those in the homeschooling community shifted quickly from welcoming America to the fold to loudly proclaiming that "this current situation is not homeschooling;" suggesting instead the terms "*pandemic-schooling* or *quarantine-schooling*" (M. H. Wilson, 2020). Conflating pandemic-schooling with homeschooling misses their crucial differences and overlooks the thoughtful critiques of traditional schooling forms by homeschooling families. We should be careful not to elide the two practices nor confuse pandemic-schooling for homeschooling.

Indeed, although many American families are currently schooling at home—one of the hallmarks of homeschooling—their experiences miss many of the other characteristics of flexibility, adaptability, and sociability that homeschooling families prize[58]. And as discussed in *Chapter 8, The Place Behind the Barn,* Homeschooling is as much about identity, community, and autonomy as it is about the location of "home." Conversely, pandemic-schooling–despite being re-located from the school to the home–is simply a new iteration of old institutional policies, curriculum, and relationships, all bent and stretched by the human and technological capacities of this current moment. The longstanding homeschooling critique of state control over education has new meaning now as accounts of suspensions (Jankowicz, 2020, September 8), new foster care cases (Vázquez Toness, 2020, August 15), and juvenile detention imprisonment (J. S. Cohen, 2020, July 14) have all been linked to the technology and oversight inherent in pandemic-schooling. This is a practice born not out of maternal creativity and agentic advocacy (as we saw is the case with homeschooling in *Chapter 6: Advocacy and Agency, "I'm the Mom I'm Going to Work It Out,"* but of the logics of disaster.

What we see in pandemic-schooling is a recapitulation of old inequities along race and class lines. Rich families with the time, resources, and access to the social capital of whiteness are forming pods (Wenner Moyer, 2020, July 22) and hiring private tutors–nay, governesses–often out-of-work educators or college students on a gap year while higher education is similarly on a remote platform. Meanwhile, poor, racially minoritized, families—more likely to be low-paid frontline and essential workers—are suffering the increased technical surveillance of the state. After six months of quarantine, homeschoolers also found the 2020 "back to school" fall a monumental challenge. They may be used to schooling at home, but this is not homeschooling. The pandemic has temporarily suspended many elements of choice, customizability, and community that homeschoolers cherish. Yet in late-night text conversations, they tell me they consider themselves better off than pandemic-schoolers; not because they've practiced this, but because at least they are free from tedious zoom meetings, intense scrutiny of their teaching, and state incursions into their homes.

[58] Variety and variation are central to homeschooling, but the practice is generally characterized by five features: (a) Education is parent-directed; (b) education is customized/customizable to meet child and family needs; (c) education can take place outside of classrooms and "book learning"; (c) education is primarily home-based; and (d) within state homeschooling laws, educational choices are up to the parent (Definition adapted from the HSLDA, 2020, January 10).

Pandemic-Schooling and Mothers' Work

The three text messages I've cited above were all sent to me by women, though all three were married to male partners, two of whom I also know personally and definitely have my cell phone number. Of the many parents who have reached out to me during COVID–in clustered waves around the first quarantine, back-to-distanced-school in the fall of 2020, and back-to-in-person-school in autumn 2021–all were women. As Hochschild and Machung write about the second shift, perhaps women are more socialized to care about and pay attention to educational work, and just "felt more *responsible"* (Hochschild & Machung, 2012, p. 7) for educational labor. Yet there is also no denying that there is a greater expectation that mothers will know, care, and be informed about their children's education than fathers and, as we have seen throughout this work, maternalism and teaching have been perhaps inexorably conflated and combined.

In *Chapter 5: Work, "Homeschool is Parenting on Steroids,"* I found that homeschool mothers must devote themselves fully to the work of home education, meaning that many do not work for pay outside the home. Similarly, pandemic-schooling parents are finding that juggling between paid work and the unpaid labor of pandemic-schooling is incredibly difficult. Mothers, who are particularly saddled with a greater share of childcare and pandemic-schooling responsibilities (Cain Miller, 2020, May 6), despairingly proclaim that there is no way to do both (Dickson, 2020, July 3; Perlman, 2020, July 8). Pandemic-schooling mothers are discovering what homeschooling mothers have known for some time: Absent institutional supports, the family's capacity for agency and stability is predicated on a mother's capacity for unpaid labor.

The stresses and burdens of pandemic-schooling offer us heightened versions of the same basic truths that homeschooling mothers' experiences illuminate and that my research into homeschooling before the pandemic reveals. In particular, pandemic-schooling has made clear the enormous burdens of the educational *third shift*–the way that the burden of educational labor falls disproportionately on women, and how educational labor crosses into the domestic sphere of home and family life. In the new work-from-home reality of COVID-19, parents are facing the reality that they have three full-time jobs: the first shift of paid labor, the second shift of domestic work, and the third shift of pandemic-schooling. With many social, institutional, and paid support systems offline or inaccessible, parents–and specifically mothers–are picking up all of the slack.

The fact that the United States has forced parents into such an inequitable patchwork of pandemic-schooling goes back to the same tension at the heart of homeschooling: It is an individualized solution to national education, childcare, and public health crises. Further, pandemic-schooling represents a wholesale failure of our institutions—failure to believe in and follow the dictates of science, which would have allowed us to get back to something like normal schooling, and a failure of imagination to create centralized or systemic responses to what is a national public health emergency, as other countries are doing.[59]

Disaster Patriarchy

During COVID, what is shared across both homeschooling and pandemic-schooling parents is a sense of isolation, frustration, and abandonment by state institutions. The promise of homeschooling is that it offers families some (educational) reprieve in the storm that is

[59] In Mexico, for example, national television and radio broadcasts have been turned over to educational content. A simple but highly effective centralized strategy, as the Mexican Education Minister, in his announcement about the move, reported that 94% of Mexican schoolchildren had access to a television (Esposito, 2020, August 3).

neoliberalism. What COVID-19 has shown, however, is that there is nowhere to hide. Whether families were invested in the individualistic solutions of homeschooling or the "brick and mortar" system of traditional-school-turned-pandemic-schooling, families were equally left, un-seen and un-supported, to sort out the impossible burdens of childcare, schooling, unclear health protocols, and social distancing (Lewis, 2020, March 19). The often-repeated rhetoric that "we are all in this together" rings especially hollow for mothers on the third shift.

The findings gathered from this inquiry are perhaps even more salient now than when I began my research, as the United States finds itself in the third academic year of pandemic-schooling. Some researchers who specifically study parenting and paternal labor have found that, for fathers, increased work-from-home and flextime hours during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns has somewhat balanced the load of routine childcare and domestic labor tasks between men and women (Chung, Birkett, Forbes, & Seo, 2020) and speculate that lockdown may be the "jolt" that gender equality has been needing. Every day, stories of pandemic parenting are full of fathers having revelations about the undiscovered country that is domestic labor, full-time parenting, and (the impossibility of) juggling work and family. One recent journalistic example, albeit about British fathers, from *The Guardian*, is full of quotes like,

> 'And I had no idea about the hidden labour of childcare until I did that,' he says. 'It changed my whole idea of parenting.' He continues: 'I hadn't understood before how you can finish your day, you're exhausted, you try to pivot to adult company, and your brain is just mush. I suddenly understood why my friends who are mothers have this whole canon of jokes around being so fucking tired. If you do it properly, if you take on the responsibility of colouring their world, it takes everything out of you.'(T. Lamont, 2021, February 20)

This work looks at the unseen labor that fathers have the luxury of newly discovering. It also asks why it's taking a global cataclysm to reveal that domestic labor is, simply, a lot of work. Because if the pandemic has been a "jolt" in the direction of parity for fathers, overall it has been a cataclysm in inequity for mothers. Whereas the pandemic has offered new avenues of "disaster capitalism" (Klein, 2007) for Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Elon Musk (Tesla, SpaceX), Larry Page (Google) and the other .01%[60], it has also been a boom for what we should understand to be a new form of *disaster patriarchy*.

Instead of believing the "we can do it" messaging of COVID-19, we should scratch the surface to see the disaster patriarchy below. Naomi Klein's "disaster capitalism" (Klein, 2007) was an elegant way of describing how, in the wake of upheavals (natural or political), capitalism rushed in to profit. In her analysis, Hurricane Katrina and the Iraq War were both wild successes, profiteering bonanzas. Similarly, disaster patriarchy is catastrophe as rationale for the re-imposition of traditional gender roles, norms, and patterns of work. It is therefore not just logical but actually strategic that many of the "official COVID-19 plans" for the second and third shift– in addition to the additional work of elder care, health protocols, and schooling–boiled down to something like "we assumed moms would do it." And in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen mothers stepping into the void left by systems, institutions, and community, but doing so has come at an extraordinary cost to them. At the same time that the economy has been "closed," women are working harder than ever on the domestic labor of homemaking, cooking, cleaning, childcare, caregiving, and education. Yet this effort is not valued by economists because it is normally shared, hidden, and/or women's unpaid labor. Says Julie Kohler, a social

[60] Forbes reports that America's 650 billionaires made $1.2 trillion during the pandemic, with "just 20 big gainer account[ing] for more than half of the increase in all U.S. billionaires' wealth" (Peterson-Withorn, 2021, April 30).

scientist and fellow at the National Women's Law Center quoted in a recent National Geographic story about families and the pandemic, "I keep thinking about this, that in less than a year we eradicated 30 years of labor gains for women" (Kohler cited in Trageser, 2021, March 1).

Much of the early research on the pandemic has found that, unsurprisingly, the increased work of lockdown, and especially pandemic-schooling, is falling on mothers, (regardless of country; these data come from the UK, Anders, Macmillan, Sturgis, & Wyness, June 5, 2020; Germany, Hipp & Bünning, 2020; and the US, Petts, Carlson, & Pepin, 2020). The annual report from McKinsey on Women in the Workplace, published in September of 2020, notes that, due to the pandemic's increased burdens–the "double shift" of work and home is instead what I call the triple- or third-shift, with pandemic-schooling and no childcare added to the mix–more than one in four mothers are "contemplating what many would have considered unthinkable just six months ago: downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce completely" (Coury et al., 2020). Data from an October 2020 Marketplace-Edison research poll found that 20% of parents (or 1 in 5) with kids learning at home had to quit their job or take a leave of absence (McCartney Carino, October 23, 2020). The report did not begin to account for the number of parents who stepped down in their roles (for example, going to part time or passing up promotions) because of pandemic-schooling demands.[61]

Federal numbers on job losses and cessations (the numbers do not distinguish between firings and "voluntary" partings due to rationale like family circumstance) found that between August and September of 2020 (back-to-school season), 865,000 women left the workforce (4 times the number of men; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020) and that "employers cut 140,000 jobs in December [of 2020]…Women accounted for all the job losses, losing 156,000 jobs, while men gained 16,000" (Kurtz, January 8, 2021; data reported from US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Feburary 5, 2021). Numbers released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for just September 2020 show 800,000 women leaving the job market compared to 216,000 men (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Analysts suggest that these figures are largely due to the loss of jobs in "pink collar" fields, wage disparities, and care burdens faced by women (Gupta, 2020, May 9).

What Now?

The above statistics give just a small hint at the massive transformations–and if I am right about disaster patriarchy, devolution–of women's work and equality. Between health care workers and pandemic-schooling, COVID-19 might have been an opportunity to both reaffirm the value of care work and its essential public role in the economy, society, and life. As the Black Lives Matter Movement (Garza, Tometi, & Cullors, 2014) and striking front-line essential workers (Bogage, October 17, 2021; Covert, April 16, 2020) demonstrate, there is urgent need for a broader, more nuanced conversations about collectivity, care, and the value of work.

We should learn from homeschooling that there is massive value in women's work and particularly their educational labor, but we should also find meaning in the imaginative power of this practice to negotiate the messy, difficult, contradictory, and sometimes un-reconcilable tensions between public and private, home and school. As homeschool mothers have navigated and make sense of this tension, it is in the liminal spaces that they carve out new identities for themselves that live within and amid these junctions of uncertainty.

[61] This is particularly felt by those demographers and social scientists are calling the "sandwich generation," those with both young children at home and aging parents to care for (Archer, Reiboldt, Claver, & Fay, 2021).

Glossary of Terms

Brick-and-Mortar (schools): A term borrowed from online retailers, "brick-and-mortar" is a catch-all term used by some homeschoolers to refer to any formal schooling institution with a physical presence. They use this to refer to all traditional public schools, private schools, and charters and to distinguish between homeschooling, obviously, but also homeschool charters, online classes, or homeschool group/classes that might be offered by a parent/teacher.

Carework: Nakano Glenn (2010) details care work in this way, Caring can be defined most simply as the relationships and activities involved in maintaining people on a daily basis and intergenerationally. Caring labor involves three types of intertwined activities. First, there is direct caring for the person, which includes physical care (e.g., feeding, bathing grooming), emotional care (e.g., listening, talking, offering reassurance), and services to help people meet their physical and emotional needs (e.g., shopping for food, driving to appointments, going on outings. The second type of caring labor is that of maintaining the immediate physical surroundings/milieu in which people live (e.g., changing bed linen, washing clothing, and vacuuming floors). The third is the work of fostering people's relationships and social connection, a form of caring labor that has been referred to as "kin work" or as "community mothering." An apt metaphor for this type of care labor is "weaving and reweaving the social fabric." All three types of caring labor are included to varying degrees in the job definitions of such occupations as nurses' aides, home care aides, and housekeepers or nannies. Each of these positions involves varying mixtures of the three elements of care and, when done well, the entails considerable (if unrecognized) physical, social, and emotional skills (Glenn, 2010, p. 5)

Educational Specialist (ES): An Educational Specialist is an official degree designation (Educational Specialist, Ed. S. or Specialist in Education S. Ed) that is beyond the masters level and is designed to provide knowledge and theory in the field of education beyond the master's degree level. Educational Specialists are employed by homeschooling charter schools to oversee the work and curriculum of homeschooling families and be the liaison between HS parents and the school, though the level of interaction can vary enormously. Any homeschool family enrolled in a charter will be assigned an ES.

Deschooling: As defined by Deschooling pioneer Ivan Illich, deschooling is the process of riding education (and in Illich's argument, society, family life, politic, security, faith, and communication) from the hidden curriculum (Illich, 1971). Many homeschool families will talk about how their transition from a classroom school to homeschool began with a period of deschooling or "school detox" in which the children were allowed free rein of motion, sleep, eating, play, and curiosity as a "reset."

Homeschooling: The Homeschool Legal Defense Association, the country's largest homeschool legal rights and lobbying organization, defines homeschooling as being defined by five features: (a) Education is parent-directed; (b) education is customized/customizable to meet child and family needs; (c) education can take place outside of classrooms and "book learning"; (c) education is primarily home-based; and (d) within state homeschooling laws, educational choices are up to the parent (Definition adapted from the HSLDA, 2020, January 10). Georgina Aubin, homeschooler and educational researcher, defines homeschooling this way in her work, "This study uses the word homeschool as a verb, being the act of engaging in home education. It is

often used in the present participle form: homeschooling, as a verb or an adjective. Regarding parents, it refers to the act of managing their children's home education. Regarding students, it refers to the act of completing their schooling tasks away from a full-time institutional school. A student can also be 'homeschooled', thus receiving the action of homeschooling" (Aubin, 2018). Homeschooling, as used throughout this work, is thus an action and practice as well as an idenitity; one is a homeschooler who homeschools.

Homeschool Association of California (HSC): The HSC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, originally founded by a group of Bay Area homeschooling mothers in 1987 as the "Northern California Homeschool Association." Since that time the group has grown into a statewide organization dedicated to providing support, resources, legal advocacy, and networking/events for California Homeschooling families.
http://hsc.org/home-page.html

Home Schooling Legal Defense Association (HSLDA): Commonly known by its acronym, HSLDA, is the largest legal and lobbying homeschooling organization in the United States. A 501(c)(3) non-profit founded in 1983, the organization is located in Purcellville, Virginia (also home to Patrick Henry College) and is a self-described "Christian organization." HSLDA was founded to defend homeschooling families against compulsory schooling laws. The subsequently added additional lobbying, publication, online academy, and youth programs to their work.
https://hslda.org/

Park Days: A common and cherished feature of the homeschooling community, park days are freeform, all-ages meet-ups in parks where homeschooling families play, socialize, eat, and sometimes learn together. They are generally set times (say, every Friday afternoon at a particular park) so families can drop in whenever their schedules allow. They offer unstructured play time for children and socialization and support for homeschooling mothers.

Private School Affidavit (PSA): One of three ways by which parents can educate their children at home in California. Filing a PSA allows a homeschooling family to operate under the same set of laws and regulations as any other conventional/traditional private schools, private school satellite programs, private online/virtual schools, and certified nonpublic nonsectarian schools.

> California Education Code (EC) Section 33190 states that "persons, firms, associations, partnerships, or corporations offering or conducting private school instruction at the elementary or high school level for students between the ages of six and eighteen years shall file the Private School Affidavit (PSA) between October 1 and 15."

Private School Satellite Program (PSP): One of three ways by which parents can educate their children at home in California. A PSP is a private school which has filed an affidavit. When parents enroll, they become a teacher (of their own children) in that school. Parents' names and addresses do not appear on the affidavit, but the PSP is required to keep a listing of each teacher and his/her qualifications. The school/administrator is responsible for keeping records, and there may be other requirements for attendance/enrollment at the discretion of the school's director.

Public Independent Study: One of three ways by which parents can educate their children at home in California. Public Independent Study in California takes one of two forms. The first and

most widely utilized is the public charter option. In the 2019-2020 school year the California Department of Education School Directory listed 1300 charter schools,

Unschooling: There are several ways of describing unschooling that are useful for description. Karl Wheatly, a university content and curriculum specialist and unschooler, writes "I use… the terms 'unschoolers' and 'unschooling' to refer those families who primarily or entirely let children learn about whatever they are interested in, and use little or no formal adult-chosen curricula" (Wheatley, 2009). Gray and Riley write that "unschoolers learn primarily through everyday life experiences–experiences that they choose and that therefore automatically match their abilities, interests, and learning styles" (Gray & Riley, 2013).

Unschooling (Radical): Extends the concepts of self-determinism and self-direction of unschooling, such that "a child has full and complete autonomy, both over their days and over their individual schedule… Radical unschooling takes the philosophy of unschooling and extends it to tasks of daily living. For example, in some families who engage in radical unschooling, children and teens have full autonomy over when they eat, sleep, watch television, play video games and engage in household tasks. Rather than rules, families live and learn guided by familial principals or basic ethics" (Riley, 2020, pp. 56-57).

Unschooling (Relaxed): In some ways similar to unschooling, "families within the relaxed homeschooling category either have some academic standards and goals for their children, or feel that it is their responsibility as parents to provide some formal academic-based structures for their children. Children or teens within this category are encouraged to explore subjects, ideas, and hobbies that are of particular interest to them, and can spend as much time as they would like on their own self-determined learnings or skills" (Riley, 2020, p. 54).

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Appendix 1

Call for Participants

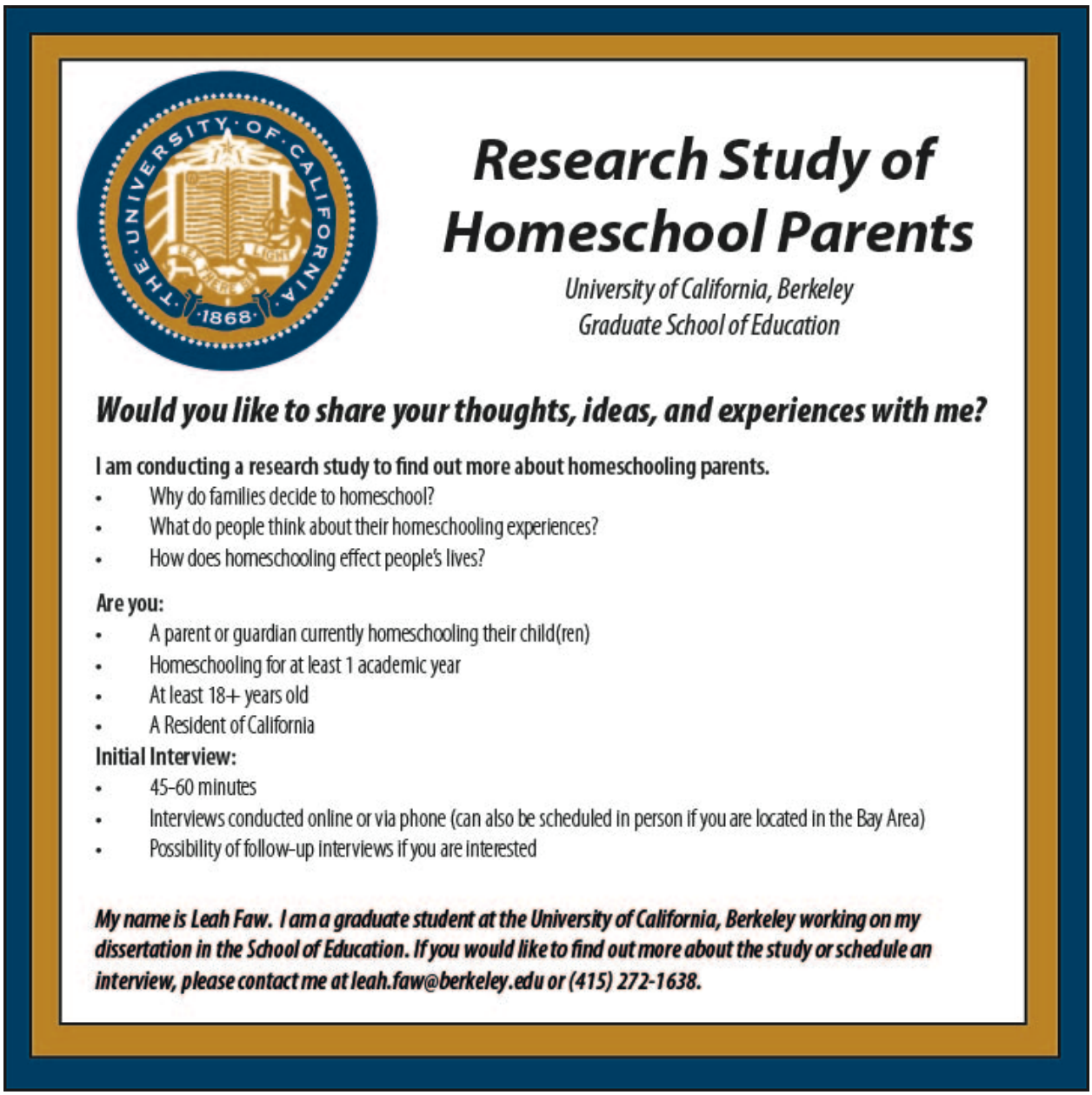

Figure 1. Call for Participants for homeschool parents study. Posted online and sent to homeschool parents' support groups and listservs.

Appendix 2

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Begin with a brief overview of my project and interests:

The purpose of this project is to find out more about how homeschooling works and why and how people decide to do it. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your thoughts, experiences, and feelings – though I might ask about other people you know – and so I want you to feel free to tell me about your own experiences without worrying that they might not be what all parents think or went through.

1. Can you take me on a little tour of the family – the people in it and anything else you think might be relevant.
    a. The adults in the family.
        i. Who is primarily responsible for homeschooling?
    b. What role does your spouse/partner play in homeschooling?
    c. The children in the family.
        i. Their ages and where they go to school?
        ii. Are they all/some homeschooled?
    d. Is there anyone else in the extended family or maybe among your friends who regularly helps out with things like childcare?
        i. Do you homeschool collectively with any friends, family, or community members?
2. Can you tell me about when you started homeschooling?
    a. How long have you been homeschooling?
    b. When/why did you decide to homeschool?
    c. Did you always plan to homeschool or was that a decision you came to over time?
    d. What was the deciding factor/reason?
    e. When you began–what was that like?
3. What is your job?
    a. i.e., if someone asked you what you do, what would you say?
    b. What is your work? Role?
    c. What role does your spouse/partner play in homeschooling?
4. In your opinion, what are the benefits of homeschooling over other schooling options?
    a. Prompt: public school, private, charters, etc.
    b. Why do you think other schools don't have these strengths?
    c. What do you think the most important value/virtue of an education should be?
5. Is faith a part of your homeschooling practice?
6. What are some of the difficulties of homeschooling?
7. When you think back over your time homeschooling your children, how do you think the experience has changed/shaped your relationships?
    a. With your children?
    b. Your relationship with your spouse?
    c. Your role/position in the family?
8. Do you think that homeschooling has changed/shaped your parenting?
9. What is the effect of homeschooling on **your** life?
    a. (Use provocations to get at issues of work/school/social life/etc.)

10. Were you ever an in-classroom/institutional teacher before or during homeschooling?
    a. How was that, compared to homeschooling? (Alternately, how is homeschooling, compared to that?)
    b. (How) did your training/preparation as a teacher prepare you for homeschooling?
    c. Do you teach the same way now as you did then?
    d. Would you ever go back to in-classroom teaching?
    e. If you were to go back to classroom teaching, what would you take with you from homeschooling?
11. What do you know about homeschooling laws or policies in California?
    a. What do you think about these?
    b. Should they be changed? If so, how? Why?
    c. Should homeschooling be more or less regulated?
12. Are there any circumstances under which you could imagine <u>not</u> homeschooling your child(ren)?
    a. Prompt: What would that look like?
    b. What would you say if someone told you you <u>had</u> to enroll your child(ren) in public school?
    c. Do you vaccinate your children?
13. Is there anything else I should know? What haven't I asked? What don't I know about homeschooling?
14. Is there anyone else you think I should talk to?

Appendix 3: Researcher Subjectivity & Experience

After all of my academic preparation and careful study, my dissertation really began–as do so many major activities when one presents to the world as a woman–with a shopping trip. As I contemplated the work of meeting with homeschooling mothers, I quickly realized the particular challenge of dressing for my planned interviews. I needed to strike exactly the right balance of put-together/professional (signaling respect), approachable (avoiding intimidation), pretty (read: feminine), and–for my own sake–comfortable. I knew that my clothing would be a way of virtue signaling my intentions and would be read as text about my gender, class, background, and affiliations. At the same time, I was entering a world of women with complicated and varying relationships to professional work, femininity, and the domestic home. Their own clothing choices would reflect the complexity of their social positions, identity performances, self-perceptions, and relationships with others. Clothing–theirs and mine–could thus form a shared language of context clues and information.

On any given day, I might be talking to mothers with very different political affiliations, religious backgrounds, and perceptions of me, especially in re my affiliation to UC Berkeley and research, positive or negative. Interview days regularly covered what would typically be recognized as the whole of the political spectrum. This meant that I had to strike the balance for a range of different interviewees, over the course of any given day. On one particularly memorable day, for example, I spent the morning in a Mormon household at a kitchen table overseen by a life-sized portrait of Jesus, and the afternoon in a vegan home where the white mom wore dreads and the three children had nature-inspired names. My work placed these two mothers (and their experiences), who might not otherwise have met, in close proximity, but their introduction was not a random accident of research. Brought together by shared values like autonomy and freedom from institutionalism, homeschooling is a practice that brings together seemingly unlikely individuals and opens up spaces of political organizing and action that cross typically rigid political party lines. They may have dressed differently, but these mothers would have "recognized" each other.

I texted pictures of "statement" necklaces to friends with the question, "cute interesting or distracting interesting?" A recent bout of chronic illness meant that none of my cache of business casual pants fit, so I found myself standing in a series of outlet mall stores, wondering if a particular item could possibly express my best research intentions. I was once again jealous of the simplicity of men's clothing choices, and conscious of the way women's bodies are presented, adorned, surveilled, critiqued. That I hoped so much could be communicated through a pair of black pants is a testament to the persuasive powers of the fashion industry's marketing campaigns.[62] It is also testament to the insidious trap of body standards and beauty culture to which female-bodied people are subjected and the way women's work–at home, at school, or in the mall, is always filtered first through the prism of beauty.

This was a mental exercise I had some experience with. As an undergraduate, I spent several months interviewing Conservative Christian grassroots volunteers and organizers (Faw, 2006). As a student at a locally-infamous progressive liberal arts college, I undertook that research with the knowledge that I was facing stereotypes about "hippie" Reed students and concerns that I was engaged in a smear campaign to make Christian activists or their political

[62] Thank you, Miranda Priestly.

organization look bad.[63] The way I dressed was part of the first–and immediate–effort I made to put my interview subjects in that study at ease, and convince them that I could be trusted as a researcher who would accurately represent their political organizing efforts. Consequently, I knew I had to get my "look" right, both as a matter of respect and as a validating technique. In order to succeed at this, I asked a WASP friend to take me shopping at Banana Republic and show me how the girls at her boarding school had styled themselves. Penelope taught me about dressing in neutrals and loaned me a pair of pearl stud earrings. The aesthetic was far from my own boho-hipster style, but as a white, well-educated woman of some means, I was able to occupy it with relative ease. I was conscious of my "interview uniform" as a kind of (gendered, classed, and racialized) performance[64], and recognized the privileges that it afforded me.

I knew that dressing and preparing for interviews with homeschooling mothers would require the same level of care and that, especially in my first weeks of interviewing, I would be vetted by the community, assessed for my authentic interest in a practice that is represented with ambivalence in both media and by educational academics. Indeed, many of my interviewees made comments to the effect that they had heard I was "ok" to speak with or relaxed considerably after our first half hour or so of questions when they decided that I wasn't out to make homeschoolers look bad or foolish. Indicative of this kind of comment, one mom said, "It's fun talking with you. I do get the sense like you kind of get it" (Melanie, May 6, 2019).

I settled into a new uniform: neutral-colored pants, a pretty patterned blouse, a solid corresponding-color sweater or cardigan, a not-too-busy necklace, flats, and simple hoop earrings. I took off my stack of silver bangles that made too much noise on my audio recordings and watched YouTube tutorials on "no make-up make-up" looks. The moms I spoke with told me about how they also recognized a homeschool "look" and the ways in which they both adhered to and consciously subverted norms of presentation and beauty, simultaneously reifying and defying norms of motherhood and femininity. In particular, homeschooling formed part of their identity as refusers and questioners, women who were willing to step outside constraints of expectations and institutionality. On the other hand, homeschooling firmly established their lives and identities as tied to the domestic home, strongly associating them with feminine gender roles and maternality. In our interview, Anna. put it this way,

> It is true that homeschoolers tend to be somewhat quirky…the fact that they're not participating in the very important American institution of public schooling, which has been endowed over the years with magical mystical powers, makes them a little odd… So you know, there is a certain amount of, like, quirkiness. And it is also true that homeschoolers tend to like, like, sometimes their hobbies are kind of comical, like, the bread baking and the stupid knitting circles and whatever. Like one of my friends told me, she pulled her kid out of school, and she went to her first homeschool park day and

[63] Homeschoolers were similarly either anxious to or wary of speaking with me, interested in clearing up outsider misconceptions about homeschooling or concerned about how they would be portrayed by an educational researcher.

[64] I am tempted–but hesitate–to call this performance a kind of drag. Drag queen RuPaul has said "You're born naked, and the rest is drag" (RuPaul, 1995, p. iii). The term "drag" has a long history in theater and female impersonation and is usually used in reference to cross-dressing or men embodying women's parts or characterizations–though verisimilitude or "passing" has never been the ultimate goal of these portrayals (D. Harris, 1995). At the same time, scholars like Judith Butler (Butler, 1988) argue that conscious and performative constructions of gender are characterizations enacted by people of all genders. Thus, "drag," need not cross gender lines in order to be present. As performance, my goal when interviewing conservative Christian activists and volunteers was to construct a gender presentation that would be read as mainstream, heteronormatively femme.

> came home and cried because she couldn't knit. And I was like, 'Oh, honey, knitting is like not the essence of homeschooling.' But you know…the one thing I have noticed over the years is that if you look at homeschool kids, like they're all amazing, wonderful kids, and they never brush their hair. Including me. I mean, I'm not saying I'm not part of it. So, yeah. So you know, and sometimes this quirkiness leads new issues in the homeschool community (Anna, April 29, 2019).

The image of messy hair–for both moms and homeschooled children–surfaced repeatedly in my interviews as a visual metaphor for the way homeschoolers felt free to deviate from norms of propriety. At the same time, the assumption that mothers will be good at and enjoy crafts traditionally coded as highly feminine, like baking and knitting, imposes on them a prescriptive and narrow ideal of womanhood. While Anna assures her friend that knitting isn't the essence of the practice, it is undeniable that homeschooling (re)enforces traditional domestic labor for mothers via proximity to the home, the assumption of care work, and a nostalgic idealization of progressive-schooling "real" activity. Like me preparing for interviews, homeschooling mothers assume an air of casualness while actually taking on more and more labor.

This is, of course, the endless catch-22 of performative femininity: working tirelessly to appear effortless. Mothers, in particular, are told that the work should be easy, either because nurturing should come naturally or because the love they have for their children should make the labor a joy. Homeschooling mothers are importantly critical of this narrative, explicit about the amount of work they perform and how difficult it can be. Simultaneously, they talk endlessly about the love they hold for their children and frame their choice to work as a home educator as a "calling" or a "true gift."

This "it's hard work but I wouldn't trade it for the world" framing is reminiscent of the larger conversation taking place in what cultural critics call the *momosphere* (Stepanyan, 2019) or the genre of first-person "mommy"[65] blogs, vlogs, and visual narratives that took off, with massive popularity and then commercial success, in the early 2000s. The momosphere is important both because it runs on the largely unpaid labor of women[66] (which might seem unethical if the labor were not made to seem effortless) and because it has provided mothers with vital spaces to self-reflect. Especially in the early era of the internet, the momosphere gave women a space to admit faults, air grievances, and come together in community (R. Powell, 2010). And in comparison to the generations of male experts doling out advice (Ehrenreich & English, 2013), these autobiographical takes felt raw, personal, and real (Morrison, 2010). At the same time, mommy blogging is part of the increased scrutiny on and surveillance of mothers, what Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, in their work *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it Undermines All Women*, identify as a new version of the popular construction of the "good mother" arising from postfeminist ideals, or "the new momism," which they define as intensive mothering: "with intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves and other mothers, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves" (S. Douglas & Michaels, 2005, p. 6). This isn't only happening to mothers online, and the online/digital space certainly isn't the only one watching mothers, yet in mommy blogging we can see both women's unpaid labor and the way that labor is being weaponized to regulate mothers, a vicious double sword of agency and surveillance.

[65] The term "mommy blogs" is one I and other commenters on this phenomenon despise, as it carries all the same belittling connotations of a term like "chick-lit" but it is useful in its descriptiveness.
[66] While the dream is to become an "influencer," most moms run their blogs and accounts for free.

As a researcher, I could slip into the world of homeschooling mothers, for a price. Yet after I'd assembled the right fashion choices, I faced another problem; about a month into interviewing my car was totaled in a midnight hit-and-run. I then found myself in the position of trying to logistically and aesthetically maintain my carefully-crafted, professional researcher, mom-approved presentation while roaming around the Bay Area in my partner's 20-year old, lifted, cracked-windshield Toyota Tacoma pickup truck that he'd outfitted with an antenna and solar panels on the roof for off-roading adventures. This was impossible. The truck made me egregiously conspicuous in rich suburban neighborhoods; I couldn't quietly drive up to an interviewee's house and it was so tall I couldn't get in and out of it gracefully.

Luckily, after only two weeks on public transit and in the truck, a friend swooped in with the merciful loan of an unused Ford Focus and I was brought back to the land of bland civility. Rachel's Focus, despite having expired tags, allowed me to blend seamlessly again into strip mall parking lots and cull-de-sac roads. I could go back to writing up field notes in front of houses with Teslas in the driveway without stares from the neighbors. Newly, gladly, mindfully aware of the luxury of having a car at my disposal, I embraced the freedoms it afforded me. I stocked the trunk with spare outfits, office supplies, and extra chargers for my electronics. I went to Costco and bought the kind of individually-packaged snacks and bottled water my environmentalist heart usually did everything to avoid.

Here was a new avenue of consumerism I'd neglected to consider, the middle class opportunity to buy in bulk. I spent my days bouncing between expensive coffee shops, feeling compelled to buy something for the privilege of using a table. I was reminded that the hyper-commodified space of suburbia requires you to engage in consumerism in order to exist at all.[67] Historically, women were invited to leave the safe environs of the domestic sphere primarily via consumerism, specifically department stores, which were styled to look like private homes and modeled to include "rest" rooms for ladies needing privacy (L. W. Rouleau, 2012). While seemingly outdated, this model has persisted in American housing, building, and infrastructure and the "Target mom"[68] is a well-established cultural cliché precisely because consumerism affords women both community and escape.

As a researcher, I was also held captive by the consumerist logics of femininity and suburbia. Spending more time in a car than I ever had before, and relying on it for food, clothing, shelter, and transportation, I began reflecting on how women constantly thread the needle between public and private, and how consumerism plays a role in this navigation.

Women have long been caught in the endless loop of oversight and control, but consumer culture, especially of the past 70 years (since the rise of post-WWII consumerism) has posited the buying of things as the answer to every problem. Particularly for women, problems were invented just so new products could be marketed and sold (see: everything from cellulite[69] to thigh gaps or hip dips). Yet inclusion in femininity and "true" womanhood have long been predicated on one's ability to buy one's way into objects that signify markers of class, education, and in-group knowledge.

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67 A fact that homeless people know all too well and racist incidents at Starbucks point out with some regularity (See Orso, April 12, 2019).

68 As Emily Brown writes in a 2017 Romper article, "Target Mom knows what she wants, and what she wants is to live her best life by sipping a latte while she browses seasonal welcome mats and tasteful throw pillows in the home-decor section. Target Mom is a viral meme, a cultural phenomenon, a capitalist spirit animal—you either are one, know one, or aspire to be one" (E. Brown, December 11, 2017).

69 (Nürnberger & Müller, 1978)

Homeschooling is framed by some practitioners a way out of materiality, part of an answer to the crushing expectations of American family life. Buzzing on my third mandatory cup of coffee of the day, I understood deeply when mothers told me that they'd decided to homeschool because it gave them a community, a connection, a way into other peoples' homes and lives. Yet homeschooling brings with it its own consumer culture, everything from specialized classes and curriculum to the crafts like knitting that G's friend noticed were ubiquitous. And homeschooling requires certain economic negotiations of various kinds. Homeschooling families must be able to survive (difficult though some find it) on one salary or have the kinds of high-status flexible careers that can accommodate homeschooling schedules. Of the 74 families I spoke with, only a handful had either single parents or 2 employed parents, and most of these were in families with children at either end of the age spectrum[70]. Thus while homeschooling is posited as an escape from consumerism, I find that it is simply a different manner of engagement with the same capitalist system.

As I effectively started living out of my borrowed Focus several days a week, I considered the modes and means by which women traverse the public and private and how consumerism and labor made intersections of these spheres possible. My car began to function as exactly the kind of liminal space Americans have always envisioned for their vehicles, neither quite private domestic sphere nor open public arena. This liminal possibility, coupled with the assumptive cultural values I was assigned when occupying this space, afforded me a great deal of real and symbolic privilege. I started posting Instagram photos from inside the car on my brief snack breaks with captions that read things like "Today's between-dissertation car meal brought to you by Sunnyvale, and granola bars. But, thanks to being a white lady in heart sunglasses, still not the neighborhood watch" (Faw, April 9, 2019).

When we think of car culture, it is often associated with masculinist notions of greasers and gearheads, but that picture is long outdated. Women spend just as much time, if not more[71], in cars as men, though the reason and meaning of that time can be quite different. Cars, as a construction of consumerism, popular culture, and the state, loom large in the American landscape. The complicated, semi-public, semi-private space of cars is created not just by consumer culture, but also by a matter of law, which distinguished them as private property for the purposes of liability and yet public for the purposes of search and seizure ("Carroll v. United States," 1925). This construction has allowed for cars to exist as a strange kind of neither-and-both physical and ideological space. Like all elements of consumer culture, our vehicles perform stratifying and atomizing functions, giving Americans freedom and feelings of exceptionalism. But cars are more than just freedom machines, they are also responsibility boxes (have you ever felt maddingly encumbered by your car when circling for parking?) and sites of drudgery (commuting, errands). The state uses vehicles as yet another regulating mechanism, and rules and regulations about vehicle use and conduct have been instrumental in shaping hierarchies of power and everyday interactions between citizens and the state, notably with regard to racial stratification and racist policing (Seo, 2019).

Research on transportation patterns shows that women are spending an increasing amount of time in cars running local, short-distance domestic errands like grocery shopping, school runs, and chauffeuring children's activities. Women are more likely to "chain" errands (run a series of errands in a row), make multiple stops on the way to and from work, and drive with passengers

70 Very young children who were still partially in daycare/pre-K or semi-autonomous high schoolers.

[71] If we take only non-commercial drivers into account. Professional drivers like truckers are still overwhelmingly men (85.7% in 2021, zippia.com)

(Surface Transportation Policy Project, 1998; Triplett, Santos, Rosenbloom, & Tefft, 2016). When a homeschooling mother told me "I used to have a bumper sticker that said, 'I don't know why they call it homeschooling, I'm always in my car,'" (Interview, April 19, 2019), I considered how the boundaries of what we call "home" (and what's public or private) are permeable, malleable, extended through physical means like our vehicles[72], and open for renegotiation. Indeed, the whole physical process of undertaking my dissertation research made me more aware of these acts and identities and moved me to consider new realms of women's spaces.

What was true of my experience as a researcher and car-user is also true of home and school and of homeschooling–it is a semi-public, semi-private space and set of activities created not just by culture but also by the state. As such, it is a phenomenon built of culture, social practice, history, and legal structures.

My first weeks of interviews went well and I frequently left those early meetings with a referral for two or three of her homeschool friends. Once I began looking for homeschooling mothers to speak with, the "snowball" of my snowball sampling method didn't take very long to start gaining speed. I started sending emails and announcements to homeschooling listservs and Facebook groups and, a few days later, the calls and emails began pouring in. The moms wanted to talk. A few women interrupted our conversation to text a friend: "oh, I know who you need to talk to!" One woman called a friend who lived a few blocks away; she came over on the spot with her kids and then the combined pack of children disappeared into the backyard. That interview morphed from a planned one hour into three. As I scheduled more and more interviews, I started trying to organize them geographically, stacking two or three in a suburb or exurb on a particular day, wedging phone interviews in the gaps between in-person interview appointments. I visited bedroom communities I'd only seen on transit maps and finally figured out how to use the voiced GPS on my iPhone to navigate myself to homes, parks, and a series of interchangeable Starbucks, Panera Breads, and Peet's Coffees

I spent a few busy months immersed in the world of homeschooling mothers. In that time, while I couldn't personally identify with being a home schooler, I found many moments of surprising resonance and compelling, galvanizing questions about gender, identity and purpose. I recognized intimately, for example, the commercialism of public spaces and the way we are all forced to engage with public spheres through a limited number of possible avenues. I heard mothers speak openly about the institutions of home, work, schooling, and family that shaped their lives. Doing so required me to consider how we all, but especially women, shape ourselves–our behaviors, identities, and subjectivities–into the available structures and strictures.

[72] In this way, women's vehicles function like a one-ton Eruv, or the physical marker–usually a string or wire–around an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood that symbolically extends the boundary of "home" so that women can do work within it like carrying children on the Sabbath.