A HEURISTIC INQUIRY INTO THE STRESS THAT HOME EDUCATORS EXPERIENCE

by
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Of the Requirements for the EDUC 990 Course

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The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the stress that families incur when they choose home education as their primary educational method. Extensive studies exist regarding stress that traditional education teacher’s experience. However, the research on stress experienced by parents who are the primary educators of their children is limited. This study endeavored to provide insight and add to the home-education body of research. Using a heuristic inquiry research design, nine home educators participated in four data collection methods: a homeschool questionnaire, The Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised (OSI-R), a focus group, and individual interviews. The data revealed five primary unique home education stressors: (a) overwhelming responsibility, (b) dealing with behavior and discipline, (c) choosing curriculum, (d) stereotypes and stigmas, and (e) distractions and extracurricular activities. Additionally, the research revealed five primary flourishers in the home education experience. These included: (a) control and freedom, (b) poignant moments, (c) the right curriculum, (d) supportive spouses, and (e) the greater homeschooling community.

Descriptors: Homeschool, home education, stress.
DEDICATION

This accomplishment is largely the result of the two most significant men in my life. My father, a gifted writer and educator, passed on both the joy of learning and writing to me. These gifts provided the fertile soil in which this pursuit was grown. Additionally, the twinkle in his eye when he looks at me gave me the courage and confidence to complete this task. Dad, thank you!

My father once told me that I “married a great man.” He could not be more accurate in the assessment of my soul mate and best friend. My husband has borne the weight of this degree in immeasurable ways and has yet to complain. The costs, literally and figuratively, were carried with unrivaled godliness and patience. Buddy, your love and joy at seeing me flourish are the strength of my heart and my love for you is stronger than ever. I love being your wife and cannot thank you enough for all that you have done throughout this process. I love you…always and forever.

My children have also endured a distracted mother, despite my best efforts…Adrianne, Jack, and Megan – this degree rests in the shadow of my love for you…you are my joy and crown and I love being your Mom. No other title is more precious to me.

Speaking of Moms, this degree arrives during the 7th year of mine walking the streets of gold. Without her “Iowa farm girl” strength and rigorous trust in the Lord, these days would have been impossible. Mom, while I cannot take this degree with me, the moments I feebly trusted the Lord in this process have provided a treasure that will not rust or decay – and we will share those together someday.

Above all else, Soli Deo Gloria.
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To Dr. Cox and Dr. Lancaster: Thank you for rounding out my committee with words of encouragement along with a very patient tutelage of the difference between active and passive voice! I thank you both.

To my co-researchers: Thank you for being vulnerable and willing to share your experiences with, well, the world…may God take your heart of help and multiply it to encourage and strengthen home educators around the globe.

And lastly, to my educational heroes, my Aunt Buzzy and Aunt Barb…you both have shown me how education can change people from the inside out. You have wielded this holy honor with joy and trembling, while simultaneously making it look easy. If I have the joy of impacting as many people as you have for the Kingdom of God, I will consider my life absolutely full to overflowing.
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Ginger

Anna

Melinda

Cindy

Elizabeth

Belle

Emily

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LIST OF TERMS

1. Home Educator: A term used throughout this study to refer to a parent who has chosen to be the primary educator of their children.

2. Home Schooler: A term used to describe a child who is educated at home.

3. OSI-R: Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised.

4. Traditional Educator: A term used to describe an educator who works in either the public or private school sector.

5. Sonlight: A term used to denote a popular “boxed” homeschool curriculum, referenced in discussions regarding homeschool programs.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As America continues into the 21st Century, at the forefront of parents’ minds is a quality education for their children (Hungerford & Wassmer, 2004). In 1925, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that a “child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations” (Kafer, 2009, p. 416). In other words, families have a right to guide their children’s education—a core value in the discussion of school choice. This landmark decision is foundational to the homeschooling movement in the U.S. today (Ray, 2010). As homeschooling increasingly becomes both a viable and desirable option for many American families, this phenomenon and its impact on families warrants additional insight.

Background

While homeschooling in America has gained traction in the 21st century, its origin traces back to the colonial years (Aasen, 2010). After the common school movement began in the United States of America, families began systematically ensuring that teachers educated their children outside the home (Gaither, 2008). During this common school movement in the United States, Stevens (2003) noted that the rules were clear: “send your children to school, or face legal sanctions and skeptical in-laws” (p. 91). It was not until the 1960s that parents in America would consider the idea of bringing education back into the family (Yuracko, 2008).

During this time, John Holt (1964), along with other education critics encouraged parents to educate their children at home and take a stand against the bureaucratization and professionalization of the public schools. Those opposing public schools asserted that
education should be decentralized and personal, as opposed to unionized and autocratic (Yuracko, 2008). Labeled as “pedagogues,” this politically left-leaning group of people marked the reemergence of homeschooling in America (Van Galen, 1991).

The 1980s ushered in the “ideologues,” a group of people concerned about the public schools’ secular influence (Van Galen, 1991). The United States Supreme Court’s decision to remove school prayer in 1963, along with its decision in the Roe vs. Wade case in 1973, provided Christians with the impetus to withdraw from an increasingly secularized world (Kreager, 2010). During this time, Christian schools provided an educational option that appealed to evangelical believers. Many parents seeking to combine a Christian worldview with a quality education found solace in Christian education around America (Gaither, 2008).

However, the expense of Christian schools forced some parents to consider additional educational alternatives (Collom, 2005). Consequently, a novel and eclectic option emerged: the homeschool movement. Seen as fringe educators, parents began to teach their children at home. This decision avoided both the private schools’ cost and secular schools’ worldview (Aasen, 2010). Over time, homeschooling has become a more diverse educational choice. While middle-class, evangelical, white Americans make up the majority of homeschooling families, people of every color, race, and religion, including atheist groups; have joined the home education movement (Ray, 2011).

As homeschooling becomes a more viable educational choice, opportunities for further research are available. Homeschool parents, often perceived as angry, rebellious, and over-protective, joined John Holt (1964) in his protest against common school (Gaither, 2009). Further criticisms leveled against homeschooling included claims that
students would become social misfits and receive an inadequate education (Lebeda, 2007). While home education research has provided a more balanced and positive perspective of homeschooling, further research is needed (Johnson, 1991; Shyers, 1992; McDonnell, 2000; Ray, 2011).

For example, home education exacts a significant cost to family dynamic, structure and economic status (Bentley, 2008). While less expensive than private school, a common stressor in homeschooling is the economic cost that a homeschooling family incurs. A family’s decision to homeschool has financial implications greater than the costs associated with curriculum and materials. Bentley (2008) found homeschooling often results in a one-income family. Frank (2005) estimated that the loss of additional income, in conjunction with fees associated with homeschooling, could cost a homeschooling family up to $60,000 a year. Concerns such as financial burdens are easier to quantify than more complex homeschooling stressors. This research sought to comprehensively identify unique stressors, like financial concerns, in the homeschooling experience.

Research concerning stress that traditional educators experience is vast and varied throughout literature (Ozdemir, 2007; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt, 2010). The lack of research regarding stress that homeschool families experience provides an opportunity for this study to add the body of literature concerning home education.

**Situation to Self**

Practically, I conducted this research because of my strong interest in the area of home education. Three years ago, while living and ministering to U. S. military personnel
in Okinawa, Japan, our family decided to home educate our three children. While I had interacted with home educators before, becoming one profoundly affected my desire to encourage and support those who homeschool. Because I have experienced both the highs and the lows of home education, this subject of stress and how it affects a home educator became intensely personal.

My motivation for this study began as an empathetic response toward other homeschooling mothers. While ministering in Okinawa, I became acquainted with many American families who chose to homeschool for various reasons. Several of these families had homeschooled previously in the United States, and others began their journey will living and working in Okinawa. Because of my vocational setting and ministry to U.S. military personnel, it was appropriate and poignant to utilize these families in my research.

Additionally, I have counseled home educators formally and informally throughout their homeschooling journey. Having the privilege of home educating my children for two years helped me understand first-hand many of the stressors that accompany homeschool. Those years were instrumental in my comprehension of this phenomenon, as well as my desire to contribute to a larger discussion regarding techniques that assist home educators as they teach their children.

Theoretically, the humanistic philosophy that embodies heuristic inquiry should be addressed. Humanism, the belief system that focuses on human values and concerns isolated from all divine or spiritual matters, serves as the foundation for heuristic inquiry (Novak, 2007). Husserl (1927) believed that the starting point for phenomenological studies included self-experience, sensations, perceptions, and ideations that develop when
one focuses attention on a subject. Moustakas (1990) believed that a heuristic researcher seeks to understand wholeness and patterns of experience in a scientifically organized and disciplined way. This understanding moves from the individual (self), integrates the experiences of others, and returns to the self. In heuristic inquiry, the researcher must have experiential knowledge of the phenomenon under consideration (Moustakas, 1990).

As a Bible believer, I cannot completely endorse this humanistic philosophical framework. A philosophy emphasizing the glory of man outside of a Biblical understanding is antithetical to my belief system. From a Christian worldview, every person has value because God has given him or her that value. I believe people are created in the image of the triune God - a unique belief of Christianity. For this reason alone, people are invaluable in both God and man’s sight.

Consequently, a person made in the form of deity allows even the nonreligious unbeliever to bear the glory of God. As a Biblical counselor, I agree with Moustakas’ (1990) principles of empathy, compassion, understanding, and sympathy regarding the human condition. However, these characteristics flow from the Biblical truth that we “belong to each other”, making each Christian obligated to one another in love (Rom 12:5). This mirrors Moustakas’s (and other humanists) postulate of interconnectedness that humans feel towards each other. Proverbs 20:5 states, “A man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.” While humanism attempts to understand complex phenomenon through human nature, I wholly rest on God-given abilities and spiritual insight concerning these matters.
Problem Statement

A Hoover Institution (2010) opinion poll revealed that public assessment of the nation’s schools had fallen to the lowest point since 1981 (Howell, Peterson & West). Among those surveyed, only 18% gave public schools a grade of A or B, down from 24% in 2005. Howell et al. concluded in a country that prides itself on being “exceptional,” 79% of Americans gave the nation’s schools a grade of C or below, up from 63% who felt the same way just five years before. In light of these findings, Bushaw & Lopez (2010) asked the question, “Is America losing its heart for excellence and exchanging it for average?” Dissatisfaction with public education is the most frequently cited reason for choosing homeschooling as a school alternative (Collom, 2005; Lebeda, 2007; Ray, 2010).

Increasing discontentment regarding public education increases the need for a more thorough understanding of alternative educational options. In particular, as homeschooling become a more popular choice, its impact on the family mandates further research (Lines, 1999; Princiotta, Bielick & Chapman, 2004; Ray, 2010). McDowell (2000) found that home educators experience stress when the choice to homeschool is not an intrinsic decision. The problem is that current research does not provide a comprehensive understanding of how stress influences home educators. This research sought to add to the literature concerning this issue.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this heuristic inquiry was to identify unique stressors that home educators experience. As schooling in America becomes more eclectic, parents need a comprehensive understanding of educational options (Belfield, 2004). Greenglass,
Fiksenbaum, and Burke (1996) defined stress as an internal response to an unpleasant event. With this in mind, this research purposed to increase a more comprehensive understanding of what of stressors might be exclusive to the home educator.

**Significance of the Study**

As school options continue to vary from traditional education, parents require a better understanding of the complexities of homeschooling. This information will prove useful to parents, teachers, and the homeschooling community at large. Klassen (2010) believed that as research identifies the areas of stress that occur during home education experiences, the focus can then shift to implementing strategies to alleviate stress and its associated negative impact. While some forms of stress have proven to be productive and resiliency building, other forms of stress can quickly become detrimental (Cooper, Dewe, & O’Driscoll, 2001). A further investigation and better understanding of this phenomenon in home education is imperative.

Ray (2010) indicated that evangelical homeschool families represent between 50% and 70% of the greater homeschooling population. While the larger homeschool community is becoming more diverse, evangelical Christians have spearheaded legal and social homeschooling reforms (Waddell, 2010). Adding a “Christian” component to education creates a unique dynamic that delimits this study of stress. A desire to provide a superior educational experience academically guides many parents, as well as a desire to incorporate a Biblical worldview in their children’s instruction. This study sought to increase the current understanding of stress for those who have chosen to home educate their children.
Research Questions

This heuristic inquiry answered two research questions. In an effort to understand the stressors that homeschool families incur, these questions guided the data collection.

1. What are the unique stressors that a home educator experiences?
2. What are some ways that a home educator can flourish in light of these unique stressors?

Research Plan

Heuristic inquiry is a phenomenological research method that searches for underlying meanings in human experience (Moustakas, 1990). Beginning with a personal challenge or puzzlement, the researcher internally examines the problem through self-dialogue, focus, indwelling and self-searching. This method then incorporates others perceptions and feelings to enhance the understanding of a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990).

In particular, this heuristic inquiry sought to understand stress as it relates to home education through four data collection methods. To provide information for the semi-structured focus group and individual interviews, participants completed a homeschool questionnaire and the Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised (OSI-R). Each of the nine home educators then took part in a focus group and individual interview with me to complete the data collection.

Moustakas (1990) provided the foundation for this study’s research plan. Specifically, this study utilized his six-phase delineation of heuristic inquiry: (a) initial engagement, (b) immersion, (c) incubation, (d) illumination, (e) explication and (f)
culmination of research in a creative synthesis (“The Phases of Heuristic Research, para. 1). These phases guided the heuristic inquiry process.

**Initial Engagement**

Moustakas (1990) believed the foundation of a heuristic inquiry is a personal and passionate concern for the topic. He stated that this initial engagement invites self-dialogue and an inner search to a haunting question. My initial engagement of this topic began during a prior research project I participated in considering homeschool burnout. During that time, I discovered a passion to investigate the stress that homeschooling family’s experience.

**Immersion into the Topic**

After understanding the topic that the researcher wants to consider, Moustakas (1990) suggested that a period of immersion into the topic naturally flows in the research plan. In particular, the focus group and in-depth interviewing of the nine home educators provided the immersion portion of this research study. The immersion process allows the researcher to become intimately acquainted with the phenomenon and “to live and grow in the knowledge and understanding of it” (“Immersion”, para 1). As a former home educator, I have “lived” the homeschooling life and my immersion with home educators participating in this study fulfilled this aspect of the research phase.

**Incubation**

Moustakas (1990) referred to incubation as “the process in which the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question” (“Incubation”, para.1). He believed that once he or she removed himself or herself from the data immersion process, the researcher could adapt a holistic approach concerning the data, allowing it to “settle”
in the researcher’s mind. This process provides “silent nourishment, support, and care that produces creative awareness” in the researcher (“Incubation”, para. 3). During this study, I spent two weeks completely removed from the data I collected. Moustakas’ belief that the “period of incubation allows the inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness” proved to be true in my research (“Incubation”, para. 2).

**Illumination**

Toward the end of the incubation phase, Moustakas (1990) believed that a time of illumination occurs. At this point, themes connect with each other and fill in the whole picture. In this particular research, I believed that Moustakas’ phases of Incubation and Illumination culminated in the coding efforts and peer review of the data. After collecting data from the participants, a time of incubation and illumination took place, during which I utilized coding and memoing techniques to discover broad themes of stress within the context of homeschooling. Additionally, interactions with my colleague performing peer review led to additional insights beyond those I had uncovered in the data.

**Explication**

During this phase of research, a comprehensive depiction of the core and dominant themes was developed. In the explication process, Moustakas (1990) implored the heuristic researcher to utilize focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, as interpretation techniques. A core belief of heuristic inquiry is that meanings remain unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference. In this portion of the research, I focused on both the co-researchers and personal depictions
of stressors in homeschooling to create and synthesize a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Chapter four of this document considers these findings.

**Culmination of the Research in a Creative Synthesis**

In the last phase of research, the researcher becomes familiar with every aspect of the data and begins to use intuitive and tacit strengths to complete the final synthesis of all that they have learned (Moustakas, 1990). Saturating myself in the research findings, the last chapter of this paper presents a final outworking of how stress affects homeschooling families.

This research plan involved a questionnaire and the Occupational Stress Inventory-Revised to quantitate the participants initial stress level. Moustakas (1990) believed that the conversational interview or dialogue is “most clearly consistent with the rhythm and flow of heuristic exploration and search for meaning and that dialogue is the preferred approach in that it aims toward encouraging expression, elucidation, and disclosure of the experience being investigated” (“Methods of Collecting Data, para. 3). The focus group and in-depth interviews of nine home educators provided this “conversational” approach and led to a saturation of the subject of stress in homeschooling.

I utilized a purposeful, stratified sample to select this phenomenological study’s nine home educators. This sampling procedure allows the researcher to not only choose participants who meet this study’s requirements, but it also provides a broad representation of those who homeschool. Unlike quantitative studies where a large sample represents an overall population, qualitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon through purposeful sampling (Gall et al., 2007). This study utilized
purposeful sampling and required each participant to have home education experience. In planning this research study, I carefully considered which homeschool families would present a good overview of the home education process. This enabled each participant to provide a distinct and significant perspective on this topic. Some unique characteristics of each family included the following: teaching styles, family dynamics, and parents’ educational backgrounds. This variety of participants helped give this study a snapshot of the homeschooling “normal.”

**Delimitations**

Delimitations of a study are not considered failings or weaknesses throughout a study. Rather, delimitations are boundaries that the researcher considers to limit the study in a manageable fashion (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). The two primary delimiters for this study were that all participating home educators are U.S. citizens and presently homeschooling. Another delimiting factor in this heuristic inquiry was the number of home educators participating (nine). Moustakas (1990) stated that heuristic inquiry demands that each theme discovered in the data be saturated, yet does not adhere to a strict guideline regarding the number of participants. Creswell (2007) suggested that phenomenological studies would meet saturation of data with the number of participants ranging from 5 to twenty-five.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is an internal response to an unpleasant situation (Greenglass et al., 1996). The effect of stress on teachers is a noteworthy consideration in traditional education (Kyriacou, 2001). While studies have examined stress in traditional educational settings, research investigating the impact of stress in homeschooling families is limited (Betoret, 2006; Bramby, 2006; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Friedman, 2006; McDowell, 2000). In an effort to understand homeschooling and stress in education, this review begins with the history and hallmarks of homeschooling, followed by a look at current literature involving stress in traditional and home education.

Theoretical Framework

This research study considers three major philosophical and theoretical influences: (a) Lev Vygotsky, psychologist and author of sociocultural theory; (b) Albert Bandura, creator of social cognitive theory; and (c) Richard Lazarus’ theory of cognitive relational stress. Each of these theories framed essential elements regarding this research study.

Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky (1978), a Russian psychologist and author, proposed many new ideas in the early 20th century concerning education and specifically, cognitive growth. In particular, Vygotsky proposed two major tenets in his theory: (a) cognitive development and social context are inter-related and (b) learning leads to the development of a child.

Social cognitive development. In his theory, Vygotsky believed that “development, a social process from birth onwards, is assisted by others more competent in skills and technologies” (as cited in Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). This idea led to a
deeper understanding of Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, which suggested that children have a “zone” of learning that is awaiting maturation, and is more readily achieved with an adult’s assistance. He stated, “the zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state” (p. 86).

This zone of learning begins at the end of a child’s ability to learn independently and new educational opportunities emerge in conjunction with a more skilled adult. Vygotsky (1978) further asserted that adult interaction results in exponential growth in the life of a learner, as compared to unaided learning that would take place outside of a strategic social context. Central to sociocultural theory, Vygotsky valued the process of learning more highly than the information itself.

Another component of Vygotsky’s theory regarding social cognitive development was his belief that all mental functions are social in origin (Vygotsky, 1966). In making this claim, critics confronted Vygotsky with the reality that newborn infants (separated from social context) are clearly born with mental functioning. Vygotsky answered this criticism by introducing the concept of higher and lower mental functioning.

Vygotsky believed lower mental functioning was comprised of elementary perception, memory, attention, and dynamic characteristics of the nervous system. These functions occur innately and naturally for each person. However, higher mental functioning develops in a cultural context. This functioning ability includes abstract reasoning, logical memory, language, voluntary attention, planning, and decision making (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky asserted his belief that lower mental function can transition
to higher mental function within a social context in his statement that “All higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals” (p. 57).

**Child development.** Another major tenet of Vygotsky’s theory is his belief that learning actually *leads* the way of child development. In contrast, theorists such as Piaget (1950) and Dewey (1902) believed that learning is a by-product of growth and development. Both Vygotsky and Bandura (1986) rejected the notion of stimulus-response models that derived from behaviorism and mechanistic materialism (as cited in Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). Instead, Vygotsky believed that “learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specific human psychological functions” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

According to Vygotsky (1978), teaching and learning are the pathways through which cognitive, social, and affective development takes place. Sociocultural theory theorizes that children's minds develop because of constant interactions with the social world. Experiences with people develop into “cultural tools” which enable children to become competent members of society. Vygotsky believed that children are an integral part of society.

Recognizing that cognitive development is stimulated from purposeful involvement and that such learning leads the way to greater development is a compelling call to action. Clements (2004) stated that Vygotsky’s foundational tenets underpin homeschooling’s central premise: parent involvement. Parents who homeschool understand the impact of strategic involvement in learning to the degree that they choose to be the primary educator and mediating force in their children’s lives. Similar to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, Bandura’s (1986) theory of social learning contributes
to the theoretical underpinnings of homeschooling and a parent’s decision to exercise diligence in the social factors of a child’s educational experience (as cited in Falk & Dierking, 2002).

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Bandura’s 1977 book, *Social Learning Theory*, pioneered a new learning approach that differed from the widely popular behaviorism theory that Skinner (1965) espoused. Bandura (1986) emphasized modeling as the chief conduit for learning. He concluded that people learn new information and behaviors simply by watching other people. Bandura moved away from behaviorism by introducing three major tenets of social learning:

1. When an observer wants to be like a model, learning will occur simply by observing.
2. Observers are selective in choosing their model, which indicates rational processes on behalf of the observer.
3. The environment and person have a reciprocal relationship, each having the ability to influence the other.

Vygotsky (1978) agreed that modeling influences learning when he stated, “imitation is the source of instruction’s influence on development. Instruction is possible only where there is potential for imitation” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 210-211). While Bandura believed that children learn primarily through imitation of models in their social environment and felt that the modeling should not simply be passive, but cognitive as well. Active and predominant models in children’s lives are “indispensable sources of
knowledge that contribute to what and how children think about different matters” (Bandura, 1986, p. 486).

In their emphasis of modeling, both Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (1986) believed that adult modeling is more effective than peer modeling. Adult models most often exhibit greater competency and perceived qualities (as cited in Tudge, & Winterhoff, 1993). In choosing effective models, Bandura (1986) considered three important characteristics: (a) the attitude of the model, (b) the way the model treats the observer, and (c) the personal attributes of the model.

Bandura’s social cognitive theory is rooted in symbolization, which provides people with tools for comprehending, creating, and managing their environment (Bandura, 2003). In considering spiritual matters, Bandura stated that “social learning operates within a larger set of distinctly human attributes that provide the capacity for becoming a spiritual being” (p. 167). Bandura distinguished among three modes of human agency. *Personal agency* reflects people who are able to bring their influence to interact on their functioning and environment. *Proxy agency* refers to people who must influence others who have access to resources they do not have (i.e., children turn to parents, voter turn to elected officials, etc.). Lastly, *collective agency* occurs when people pool their knowledge, skills and resources to shape their future together.

Bandura (2003) reflected that religious people often turn to proxy agency, especially in times of trouble or distress. Divine proxy agency can strengthen positive personal efficacy when used to in partnership with a person’s abilities and influence. Bandura wrote, “partnered proxy agency can serve as an enabling belief that strengthens a sense of personal efficacy, buffers stress and despondency in times of difficulty, and
buttresses resiliency to adversity” (p. 172). Many home educators exhibit divine proxy agency when they homeschool because they believe it is a spiritual calling. Understanding that such a task is likely beyond their resources, they “partner” with a God who they believe will supply whatever else they need.

In light of Ray’s (2011) finding that the two most common reasons for homeschooling is a better learning environment for children, as well a desire for spiritual influence in education, Bandura’s social cognitive theory presents an understanding for the homeschool environment. A parent’s concern of inappropriate peer interaction and modeling creates an impetus for home education. Indeed, research showed that modeling is key component in a child’s development and learning. By taking active roles, parents determine who will be their children’s models (Kahn & Cangemi, 1979; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Bandura (1986) stated, “by observing others, one forms rules of behavior that can serve as a guide for future action” (p. 47). Many home educators parallel Bandura’s theory of social learning and choose to be their children’s primary model and guide.

In particular, home educators who follow Biblical principles in raising and educating their children are likely to agree that modeling is a crucial aspect of learning. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (New International Version) implores Hebrew parents to teach their children the ways of the LORD for the sake of God’s people and subsequent Jewish generations. Christians today understand their responsibility to model and teach their children ways to think, feel, and behave in congruence with a Biblical worldview. A parent’s decision over appropriate modeling environments in education provides a theoretical framework for homeschooling.
Both Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (1986) felt that the social world of children plays a major role in cognitive growth. Seen in a complementary light, both theorists recognized the crucial impact of mediating factors and social modeling in the life of a learner. It is plausible that many homeschool families see the value of these ideas as well. However, because many parents who homeschool are not formally trained nor possess a natural proclivity toward education; they find themselves in a stressful situation (McDowell, 2000; Rumsley, 2009). Lazarus’ (1966) cognitive-relational theory provides a paradigm to understand stress and its effects.

**Cognitive Relational Theory of Stress**

Lazarus’ (1966) theory addressed stress and how it relates to emotions and coping processes. His theory emphasized the reciprocal nature between the interaction of the person and the environment. Schwarzer (2001) stated that Lazarus (1991) refined his definition of stress as “a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (p. 401). Lazarus (1991) contended that the experience of stress could bring immediate effects such as emotional and physiological change, as well as long-term effects, which concern a person’s well-being, health, and social functioning. Lazarus’ theory creates a better understanding of various ways stress can affect the home education process.

**Appraisal theory.** Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed the appraisal theory to underscore the idea that emotions, such as stress, derived from an evaluation of an event, which in turn, can trigger an emotive response. The act of appraising a situation is further broken down into primary and secondary components. Primary appraisal considers a
person's evaluation of a situation’s significance to his or her well being, while secondary appraisal incorporates a person’s assessment of their ability to deal with the situation. Lazarus (1991) believed that the appraisal of a situation, and its subsequent emotions, influence the quality of the person-environment state.

Lazarus’ cognitive-relational stress theory creates a framework to understand the role cognition and emotion play in the stress that people experience. Additionally, the role of appraisal, along with how people perceive contrasting values and personal coping strategies, provides additional insight into cognitive stress in personal relationships (Lazarus, 1991). These specific components of Lazarus’ stress theory, as well as Vygotsky and Bandura’s theories on learning, comprised the theoretical framework for this study.

**Review of Literature**

Throughout history, the government’s role in America’s educational system has elicited contrasting viewpoints and reactions (Friedman, 1955; Goertz, 2001; Noguera, 2009). Lubienski (2003) stated that many homeschool families view institutionalized, state-run school systems as the “essence of the incapacity of state-funded education systems to educate their children” (p. 9). Dissatisfied with traditional education’s mass production mode, some families choose to home educate (Gaither, 2008). Additionally, Ray (2010) found that parents, due to their deeply held moral convictions, and desire for a better learning environment, elect to home educate. As the homeschool movement continues to grow, the above stated reasons support its viability as an educational alternative (Aasen, 2010).
History of Homeschooling

Stevens (2003) stated that home education, regarded as a deviant practice in America in the late 1960s, has increasingly become an acceptable alternative to traditional schooling. Beginning in the 1960s, both U.S. political parties reacted against mandated public education (Gaither, 2008). Continuing into the later 1970s and early 1980s, a movement arose to reject public compulsory school and return to an approach where parents were responsible for their children's education (Aasen, 2010). Those rejecting traditional school believed that a “community” was the most preferable environment for the education of young minds. Homeschooling, seen as a rejection of status quo, found its place among the perceived left in politics (Miller, 2000).

Like the reactionary stance of the hippies, the religious right found homeschooling to be a welcome solace after the 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court decisions to outlaw school prayer and school-sponsored Bible reading. Ten years later, Roe v. Wade would further distance Bible-believers from public school and provide the thrust for the growth of private Christian schools. As the homeschool predecessor for the preservation of Christianity and education, the number of Christian schools endorsed by the Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI) grew from 308 in 1973 to over 4000 in 2005 (Gaither, 2005).

Initially viewed as a reaction against institutionalized, government-run education, homeschooling became a preferred option for many Americans (Gaither, 2008; Goldring & Phillips, 2008). Gaither believed that conservative Protestants were beginning a large-scale shift in their thinking and practice of education. While the number of Christian schools was increasing, Gaither noted that this alternative was problematic for various
reasons: (a) high cost of tuition, (b) disagreement with theology endorsed by the school, (c) personality conflicts with staff and teachers, and (d) a perception that private schools could not meet the demands of special-needs children (p. 7).

In light of these issues, many Protestant Christians began homeschooling (Gaither, 2008). The pioneers of homeschooling were often ridiculed by their own families, looked down upon by their church family, and subjected to laws made in reaction to their efforts. In the early 1960s, homeschooling families confronted three major challenges from society: legal impediments, skepticism, and institutional resistance from public schools (Stevens, 2003). The organization of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) in 1983 catapulted homeschooling into viability. HSLDA has played a large role in maintaining a favorable legal climate for home education in the United States. By the mid-1990s, Stevens (2003) noted that HSLDA was the largest home education policy advocate in Washington, D. C., and claimed many judicial and legislative victories on behalf of homeschoolers. Today, home educators enjoy an increasing amount of legal protection and co-operation with both public and private schools (Yuracko, 2008).

Demographics

Today, homeschooling continues to gain momentum in winning over not only conservative Christians, but also the general public at large (Aasen, 2010). Dr. Brian Ray, founder of the National Home Education Research Institute, completed a study that identified the following characteristics of most homeschool families:

- The median income of homeschooling families is between $75,000 and $79,000.
• Parents of homeschool families are more educated than the general population.

• Most homeschool families are generally larger than the general population.

• Over 81% of homeschooling mothers do not work, while almost all fathers (97.6%) do work for pay (Ray, 2010).

Over an eight-year period, The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) charted the ethnic populations of homeschooling families. Table 1 shows the percentage of different racial groups involved in homeschooling over the past decade.

Table 1

Reported Ethnic Population of Homeschool Families

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>640,000</td>
<td>843,000</td>
<td>1,159,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>84,000</td>
<td>103,000</td>
<td>61,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>77,000</td>
<td>59,000</td>
<td>147,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>49,000</td>
<td>91,000</td>
<td>141,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These statistics (NCES, 2010) found that homeschooling families are predominantly White, but as homeschooling has increased, minorities account for one-third of the documented families participating in home education. Clearly, the two-fold increase in the homeschooling population has resulted in minorities having a stronger representation of families who choose to home educate their children (Gaither, 2009).

**Academic Achievement**

Rudner’s 1999 study was the first to track homeschooled students’ academic achievement. In comparing 20,000 homeschoolers’ standardized test scores to the
national average, the study revealed that the home-educated students’ scores were 30 percentile points higher than the national average. Rudner’s research provided the foundation for additional studies investigating academic achievement of homeschooled students.

As part of a continuing effort, the Homeschool Legal Defense Association commissioned Ray (2010) to conduct a more recent study investigating academic achievement of home-educated students. Ray’s study included 11,739 students from 50 states, and compared students’ scores on three common standardized tests: The California Achievement Test, The Iowa Basic Skills Test, and The Stanford Achievement Test. The “Progress Report” found that home educated students continued to score between 34 and 39 percentile points higher than the national average on language, reading, math, social studies, and reading scores (Ray, 2010). In the highly competitive American education culture that schools are in today, it is no wonder that statistics like these attract those seeking educational alternatives. Homeschooling advocates consider these types of academic markers as continued credibility of the home education movement.

While Rudner’s 1999 study and Ray’s 2010 study found that homeschooled standardized test scores exceeded the national average, a cause and effect relationship between homeschooling and academic achievement remains unclear. In a critical review of homeschooling academic statistics, Lubienski (2003) stated “a central tenet of empirical analysis holds that the mere presence of correlation does not imply cause” (p. 5). Critics assert that many of the characteristics of homeschooled students mimic students who score high on standardized tests in traditional education (Fineman, 2009; West, 2009). For instance, characteristics associated with academic success such as
higher family income, parental involvement, parental educational attainment, and employment of fathers are significant contributors for all students’ scholastic achievement (Belfield, 2004; Ogunkola & Olatoye, 2010; Schlee, Mullis, & Shriner, 2009). Factors that may also contribute to homeschooling students’ academic success are: low student-teacher ratio, flexibility, and individualized attention (Romanowski, 2006).

Lubienski (2003) contended that a homeschooling family’s decision not to pursue a formal education cannot be controlled, thus making it difficult for comparison studies. He stated that even if the demographic characteristics of both a traditionally educated student and a homeschool student were the same, a family choosing home education usually indicates high parent involvement. Two predominant ways underlie this assertion: (a) the family reflects a serious interest in the education of their children and (b) the family has both the resources of time and means to make such a choice (Lubienski, 2003). The author concluded that these characteristics positively influence a student toward higher academic achievement.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages. Shaw (2009) reported many of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of homeschooling. Advantages included education, physical, emotional, religious, relational, and familial advantages. Moitozo (2003) also found that homeschooling has the four following advantages:

- the ability to integrate religious and philosophical convictions with education;
- the ability to develop appropriate social skills;
- opportunities for academic excellence due to a custom curriculum, appropriate pace, and individual attention; and
• additional time spent together as a family.

Furthermore, when considering the best educational environment for their children, parents consider time and control as advantages to homeschooling (Van Galen, 1991).

**Disadvantages.** Early home education critics asserted that homeschooling would negatively affect a homeschooled student’s socialization (Mayberry & Knowles, 1989; Murray, 1996). Murray (1996) warned that homeschooled students might struggle in “main stream” life due to their parents’ efforts to shelter them from society. Educators believe traditional school offers “essential socialization”, which home educated students do not experience (Medlin, 2000, p. 108).

However, later research concluded that students who are home educated exhibit high socialization skills (Montgomery, 1989; Shyers, 1992; Osborne, 2005). Montgomery’s (1989) study was one of the first to consider social skills of home-educated students. She found that these students were involved in numerous social activities, and many of them included a leadership role. Johnson (1991) stated that parents choose home education because it allows them to influence their children’s socialization. Shyers’ (1992) study compared 70 home schooled and traditionally schooled students and found the only statistically significant social interaction difference was that traditionally schooled children had higher problem behavior scores. Shyers’ based his research on the belief that children learn better socialization habits from older adults as opposed to their non-school aged peers (Lebeda, 2007). Based on the growing information regarding socialization, Romanowski (2006) concluded, “most homeschool parents are aware of the issue of socialization and are strongly committed to providing positive socialization opportunities for their children” (p. 126).
Shaw’s 2009 study regarding other perceived disadvantages of homeschooling included: financial pressure, continuous parent-child interaction, limited extracurricular activities, and living outside of the “norm”. The author found that home educators are defensive about their choice to homeschool their child. While it is true that homeschooling offers benefits, it would be inaccurate to assume that such an educational choice is trouble-free.

Despite the many differences in traditionally schooled and home-educated children, there is hope for increased cooperation between home educators and traditional educators. Anderson (2006) stated that public school teachers and home educators share the same basic motive: to provide the best possible education for each student. Their collective desire to help students become adults who are lifelong learners capable of critical thinking can help unify traditional and home educators.

Motivations to Homeschool

The National Household Education Survey of 2007 asked parents whom homeschool to choose three reasons for their decision to home educate. Table 2 shows the results of this survey and compares it to the data received in 2003.
Table 2

*Self-Reported Reasons for Homeschooling*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2007</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concern of school environment</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to provide religious/moral instruction</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with other academic institutions</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Non-Traditional Approach</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Includes Family time, Finances, Travel)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A child with Special Needs</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Or Mental Health problem of Child</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The National Household Education’s 2007 survey found that as homeschooling families increase and their religious and moral values remain high, there is also high parental concern about a child’s learning environment. Interestingly, Goldring and Phillips (2008) showed that a better learning environment was not a predictor choosing private school over public school. The authors found the time parents communicate with their children about education is the most significant predictor for choosing a private school. Goldring and Phillips described it as less of a “push away” from public school and more of a “pull toward” private education. Bainbridge and Sundre (1991) concluded that the overriding desire for parents regarding their child is a learning environment that allows their children to excel and develop confidence in their abilities, whatever type of school their child attends.

However, there is some evidence that the poor academic quality of public schools and decreased choice in private schools are contributing to the increase in homeschooling.
(Isenberg, 2007). Isenberg’s study indicated, “a decrease in math test scores in a school district increases the likelihood of homeschooling” (p. 404). The author’s 2006 study suggested that reduced private school options may increase the probability of a family’s choice to home educate.

In recent years, perceived inability of parents to homeschool their children well has evaporated with the assistance of technology and seeing other parents who have successfully educated their children. Lips and Feinberg (2008) suggested that the number of homeschooling families will likely increase. The authors believed that parental motivation to homeschool is bolstered by the availability of three growing trends in America: (a) access to “in the box” curriculum, which provides everything necessary for each school year; (b) the availability of online learning services; and (c) national tutoring services throughout America, such as Kumon and Sylvan Learning Systems.

Regardless of the motivation behind homeschooling, there is one theme that is common to all home educators: control. While this aspect of life has many negative connotations, in a context as important as education, parents feel that they must exercise prudent control over their child’s educational endeavors (McDowell, 2000). Home education offers a different choice than compulsory education that parents may find lacking, yet feel powerless to change. As opportunities increase to successfully navigate educational issues such as curriculum, testing, and tutoring, homeschool parents can capitalize on the control and freedom that home education offers (Lips & Feinberg, 2008).
**Stress in Traditional Education**

A compilation study comparing occupational stress in various professions revealed that 40% of educators believe they are highly stressed, twice the amount found in other professions (Smith, Brice, Collins, Matthews, & McNamara, 2000). Unabated stress over time can lead to burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Schwab, Jackson & Schuler (1986) described burnout as a state of “depersonalization, exhaustion, and diminished sense of accomplishment” (p. 31). Kyriacou (2001) developed a model of stress as it relates to burnout in educators. He felt that burnout occurs because of a teacher’s inability to protect themselves from threats to self-esteem and well-being. Haberman (2004) concluded that when coping mechanisms are ineffective, teachers’ mental and physical well-being becomes diminished and ultimately leads to educators quitting or burning out. Howard and Johnson (2004) agreed that burnout often results from long-term occupational stress, particularly among human service fields.

**Stress in the accountability era.** The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 aimed to hold educational agencies and states accountable for improving the quality of education for all students (Maleyko & Gawlik, 2011). While earlier literature showed that educators experienced stress and burnout before this educational reform, studies regarding increased stress levels in educators due to regulations of NCLB have since been conducted (Greenglass et al., 1996; Chen & Miller, 1997; Smith et al., 2000). Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) stated that the constant and increasing pressure on educators has made testing and accountability a primary cause of teacher stress. Additionally, Barrett (2009) studied a small sample (n=13) of veteran and new educators in relation to a “shift in official pedagogic discourse towards a performance model” due to
the requirements of NCLB” (p. 1024). He found that many teachers felt the accountability demands created an internal struggle of either denying their natural teaching strategies or simply “teaching to the test”. In choosing the latter, teachers often experienced burnout due to the stress of going against deeply held beliefs and commitments (Barrett, 2009).

An examination of the phenomenon of stress in traditional education provides a backdrop to stress that may occur in homeschooling families. Since there is little research related to stress in homeschooling families, this review of literature also provides an overall understanding of current research regarding internal and external stress in traditional education (McDowell, 2000). Parker (2009) found there are three major aspects of internal stress in traditional education: (a) efficacy, (b) coping strategies, and (c) emotional dissonance. Conversely, external stressors in education include: (a) work and role overload, (b) classroom management and discipline, and (c) interpersonal relationships (Phillips, Sen & McNamee, 2007; Parker, 2009). The following section considers internally stressful areas in education.

**Internal Stress Issues in Traditional Education**

Research regarding teacher stress and burnout is largely external; consisting of interpersonal and environmental factors (Zellarsi, Hochwarter, Perrewe, Hoffman, & Ford, 2004). Yet, Zellarsi et al. found that teachers’ individual differences, internal strategies, and resiliency were regularly overlooked. Later research focused on many internal aspects of educator including coping strategies, locus of control, efficacy and emotional dissonance (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Crothers, Kanyango, Kolbert, Lipinski, Kachmar & Koch, 2010; Lewis, Roach & Romi, 2011).
**Efficacy.** Ross & Bruce (2007) described teacher efficacy as “a teacher’s expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning” (p.50). Studies regarding efficacy in the education world have largely revolved around a teacher’s self-efficacy, but recent studies have examined the effect of collective efficacy as well (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Klassen, 2010). Bandura (1986) created the construct of collective efficacy, which refers to an individual’s belief in the group’s capabilities. Like other stress factors, the link between efficacy and stress is complex. Several studies have shown self-efficacy to be a factor that protects against burnout by increasing resilience and helping teachers to grow in their knowledge and depth of the field (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Jennet, Harris & Mesibov, 2003; Betoret, 2006).

Schwarzer and Hallum (2008) found that strong self-efficacy safeguard educators from experiencing burnout. Their two-part study suggested that strengthening teachers’ optimistic self-beliefs, along with improved teaching skills, protect against job strain and dissatisfaction. In an effort to increase teacher efficacy, Ross and Bruce (2007) conducted a study utilizing strategic professional development. Ross and Bruce’s goal was to improve the following three areas of teacher efficacy: engagement, instructional strategies and classroom management. The study revealed that professional development program had a positive effect on teachers’ expectations of their ability to handle classroom management issues. Ross and Bruce (2007) suspected that increased confidence in teachers’ ability to engage students with new instructional strategies allows for greater teacher efficacy.

In addition to self-efficacy, studies show teachers’ collective efficacy influences stress in educators (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Klassen, 2010). Bandura (1997) noted
that collective efficacy requires group judgment and effort, along with persistence and willingness for the group to remain together. Collective efficacy beliefs often reflect teachers’ perceptions and judgments of the capabilities of the staff and school to which they belong (Klassen, 2010). Slaavik and Slaavik’s (2007) study regarding collective efficacy found that school support to implement effective discipline alleviated teacher stress and burnout. Ross and Bruce (2007) also showed that individual and collective efficacy correlates to teacher competency, both cognitively and functionally, as well as to positive student outcomes. Parker (2009) suggested that self-efficacy, along with optimism, and a teacher’s feeling of control “could represent a super-moderator that is the key to buffering teachers against the negative effects of strain” (p.7).

**Coping strategies.** In the context of stress and education, coping strategies describe behaviors used to manage a perceived stressor (McCarthey et al., 2009). Effective coping strategies have shown to moderate stress and its negative impact (Cooper et al., 2001). Unfortunately, coping strategies may have contrasting effects. Parker (2009) found when incorporated correctly, these strategies contribute to greater resilience and relief from stressful situations. On the other hand, coping strategies described as “palliative” and simply applied as a Band-Aid on a gushing wound, can actually lead to greater stress over time.

Research concerning coping strategies makes distinctions between effective coping strategies and ineffective coping strategies (Parker, 2009; Sharplin, O’Neill & Chapman, 2011). These include emotional versus active coping, adaptive versus maladaptive coping, positive versus negative coping and palliative versus direct coping. These distinctions suggest that coping strategies contribute to greater resilience and are thus
effective coping behaviors and cognitions (Parker, 2009).

Carmona, Buunk, Peiro, Rodriguez and Bravo (2006) examined 558 teachers to understand the effects of each type of coping strategy they employed and whether they were predictors of burnout. Their research showed that those who reported using a direct coping style had lower levels of burnout. Conversely, those who used a palliative (Band-Aid) approach exhibited a higher level of burnout. The use of effective and ineffective coping strategies contributes to a greater understanding of stress that educators experience (Kyraciou, 2001).

**Emotional dissonance.** Hochschild (1983) explained emotional dissonance as feeling internal negative emotions, while feeling forced to appear positive, even happy, on the outside. He expanded this concept to include displaying an external appearance (usually happy) that does not align with one’s inner feelings (usually neutral or negative). Dollard, Dormann, Boyd, Winefield & Winefield (2003) suggested that teachers are at an increased risk of emotional dissonance because of the emotional investment that they make in their students. For instance, a struggling or disruptive student can be a source of irritation, but because a teacher is committed to growth in that student, he or she must rise above their frustration and anger to meet the educational needs of that student.

Blasé and Blasé (2003) concluded that latent agitation is a catalyst for physiological, emotional, and relational difficulties. Dormann & Kaiser (2002) found a link between emotional dissonance and stress, burnout, and a poor perception of teacher’s effectiveness by parents. In their 2010 research, Cheung & Tang examined how emotional dissonance and work characteristics relate to an employee’s subjective health and job outcomes. Their study revealed “detrimental effects of emotional dissonance on
psychological well-being persist to influence well-being at a later time” (p. 3208). Hopp, Rohrmann, Zapf & Hodapp (2010) found that employment which includes frequent exposition to emotional dissonance have a greater risk for work stress and illness.

**External Stress Issues in Traditional Education**

In addition to the many internal stressors that accompany the profession of education, there are many outside pressures that impact educators. Hughes (2001) suggested that a large percentage of teachers who experience burnout remain in their teaching positions simply because of a lack of alternative employment, which “corners” an educator into a chronic state of stress. Studies showed educators experience three predominant types of external stress: (a) work and role overload, (b) classroom management and discipline, and (c) interpersonal relationships (Chen & Miller, 1997; Forlin, 2001; Parker 2009)

**Work and role overload.** Workload and role overload are a major contributing factor to stress and burnout (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kyriacou, 2001). A 2010 study regarding the effects of role and work overload identified a significant strain on the health of teachers (Shultz, Wang & Olson, 2010). Similarly, Howard & Johnson (2004) stated that teachers who are unable to meet their workload demands are susceptible to experiencing high stress and physical illness. Bramby (2006) identified workload as one of three reasons that educators are leaving the teaching profession.

A government commissioned report by Skilbeck & Connell (2004) identified 13 roles that teachers hold in addition to their primary teaching responsibilities. These include: (a) classroom organizer of students’ learning and assessor of learning, (b) curriculum planner/adapter, (c) behavior manager, (d) image or role model, (e) values
educator, (f) religious educator, (g) social worker, (h) health worker, (i) emotional support person, (j) school-home liaison, and (k) risk-manager (p. 34). Friedman (2006) found that work and role overload often means that teachers are required to divide their time amongst multiple tasks making them unable to meet the requirements of any of them effectively. This feeling of being “spread too thin” creates a significant amount of stress on educators.

Mayer (2003) interviewed teachers to assess how multiple roles influence their stress level. The teachers identified three burdensome areas of responsibility outside of the actual teaching process: (a) the growing challenge of learning dictated by federal initiatives, (b) the management of diverse learning groups, and (c) the social and emotional support role for student experiencing difficult situations, including problematic home situations.

**Classroom management & discipline.** Gordon (2002) reported discipline, student apathy, and lack of student motivation as prominent stressors to educators in America. Betoret (2006) found a link between student discipline and emotional exhaustion or distress in the teacher. He also stated that emotional exhaustion increases stress in educators. Kokkinos (2007) found that one reason burnout is associated with student misbehavior is because of the emotional energy, combined with time and effort that is needed to handle student misbehaviors.

When students misbehave in a classroom, rarely is it an isolated event. The act of misbehaving often includes distractibility, hyperactivity, social rejection, and hostile aggression (Almog & Shechtman, 2007). Ratcliff et al. (2010) compared instructional and non-instructional interactions in classrooms with low versus high amounts of classroom
discipline. The study revealed a stark difference in teaching and learning environments. Classrooms with low instances of classroom misbehavior and disciplinary problems were described as engaging, interactive, periods of question and answer, productive, and a place where instruction remained the primary focus. Conversely, classrooms with high incidents of disciplinary issues, revealed students busy sharpening pencils, talking, roaming, playing with desk materials, and arguing with the teacher instead of learning. This study revealed a hopeless sense of teacher control with cycles of commands, failure to comply, begging and pleading, continued disobedience, and ultimately, coercion and threats.

Ozdemir’s (2007) study showed that classroom management efficacy is one of the biggest predictors of teacher burnout. In this study, Ozdemir examined 700 educators’ response to the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Teacher Efficacy in Classroom Management and Discipline Inventory. He found that perceived efficacy in classroom management predicted all three sub-scales of the MBI: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. His study implied that greater classroom management skills can reduce burnout in educators. An educator’s inability to exercise classroom management continues to be a major stressor in American schools today (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009).

**Interpersonal relationships.** Potter, Smith, Strobel & Zutra (2002) concluded that interpersonal strain strongly influences educators. As the role of teachers becomes more complex, an educator finds his or herself responsible to more people. Parker (2009) stated that “one of the key areas in which teachers experience large amounts of stress is
learning to balance the competing demands of students, parents, co-workers and administration” (p. 5).

Nayak (2008) surveyed 200 educators using the Employment Organization Sources of Stress Scale (EOSS). A portion of this assessment measures interpersonal stress among colleagues. The author found educators experience three areas of interpersonal stress in their profession: (a) lack of congeniality between colleagues, (b) getting work from subordinates, and (c) receiving help from supervisors. Maslach et al. (2008) agreed that chronic interpersonal stress is a significant cause of burnout in educators.

Parents present a complex “problem” to teachers and education. Research demonstrated that reasonable parental involvement in children’s education results in higher achievement (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; Waanders, Mendez & Downer, 2007). Yet, a distinction should be made between parental involvement and parental interference. Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren (2009) reported that educators regarded the least favored school environment to work in as one where parents are more empowered than teachers. Their study suggested that such over-involvement creates an imbalance of power, inherently undermining the work of the teacher. Interaction with parents can provide situations that can empower and encourage the teacher, while others can belittle and thwarts the efforts of an educator.

The work-family conflict is another common external stressor for educators (Parker, 2009). Work-family conflict is a “form of inter-role conflict comprising incompatible pressures from work and family roles” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 79). Cinamon, Rich & Westman (2009) explored the impact of work and family conflict in the
context of educators because of the extraordinary amount of work that teachers bring home and internalize. Their findings demonstrated that educators’ increased effort toward work and away from home escalated the work-family conflict. This seems significant in light of the fact that the United States Department of Labor (2009) names elementary and middle school professions to be the third highest for women. Feelings of stress often exacerbate if a woman is experiencing emotional dissonance and stress at home and work (Cinamon, et al., 2007). Additionally, research suggested that certain types of social support communication, particularly those that focus on the negative aspects of teacher work are linked with higher levels of teacher burnout (Kahn, Schneider, Jenkins-Henkelman & Moyle, 2006).

The news is not all negative, however. Like many of the other mitigating stress factors, research shows that interpersonal relationships can also reduce stress (Greenglass et al., 1996; Jennet et al., 2003). By using active problem solving, reorganizing teaching situations, cooperating with parents, and receiving social/emotional support from colleagues, teachers can successfully avoid or alleviate chronic stress. While some interpersonal interactions can be stressful, social support from family, co-workers and others has shown to increase resiliency in teachers, especially when support comes from school colleagues (Greenglass et al., 1996; Brunetti, 2006).

Summary

Perhaps the missing element in the discussion of the internal and external stresses is wisdom. Each aspect relating to the stress of a traditional educator shows itself to be Janus-faced, offering polarities of both help and harm. King Solomon’s words in
Proverbs 13:20 that “he who walks with the wise, grows wise” seems applicable for teachers as they discern the interpersonal relationships in their occupation.

While research concerning stress in traditional education is plentiful, research regarding stress that homeschool families experience is sparse and largely anecdotal in nature (Kahn et al., 2006; Nayak, 2008; Parker, 2009; McDowell, 2000). If homes, coffee shops, and parks could speak, they would likely echo similar stressors to those described in the research concerning traditional educators. The known stressors of traditional education provide a backdrop in considering unique stressors incurred in the home education environment.

**Stress in Home Education**

Stress is a normal part of the family experience. Ideally, stress can cause increased unity among the family unit as it revels in the strength derived from enduring difficult situations (Patterson, 2002). However, stress at other times causes a family to fragment and splint, leaving behind a weaker relational unit. Raphael, Zhang, Liu and Giardino’s (2010) study evaluated stress in American families and found that 10-15% of parents exhibit high stress during a child’s lifetime (ages 0-18). When comparing parents’ coping skills, the study found parents with low coping skills experience high stress 46% of the time while parents with high coping skills experience stress only 8.9% of the time. In addition, the authors concluded that parents with little or no emotional support exhibit stress 28.3%, but parents with high emotional support experience high stress 10.2% of the time. Finally, a parent who demonstrates excellent mental health status experiences high stress just 6.9% of the time; in contrast, a parent who demonstrates fair/poor mental health status experience high stress 34.3% of time.
As parents begin the task of homeschooling, new aspects of stress often arise in their family context, just as when events like moving, a new job, or financial strain might occur (Nurullah, 2010). Some difficulties arise in trying to understand how the stress of homeschooling, in particular, affects families. For instance, as opposed to stressors that tend to “happen” to people such as a job or location change, financial problems or health issues, home educators make a calculated choice to instruct their children differently than mainstream parents. In this way, new stressors may even be characterized as invited and expected, along with a strong desire to overcome obstacles that might present themselves in the process. Additionally, Isenberg (2007) stated that the complexities associated with the homeschooling process make it difficult to regulate and observe. Even more, underlying phenomenon such as stress within the home education context, pose further obstacles for credible research.

Rumsley’s (2009) book, Christian Homeschooling Minus the Stress outlined 12 major stressors identified and consequently addressed in a light of a Biblical response. The stressors examined were:

1. Uncooperative Children
2. Commitments outside the home
3. Housework Stress
4. Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers
5. Bookwork Overload
6. Curriculum Stressors
7. Academic Stress and Pressure to Perform
8. Harassment from others
9. Fear of Educational Authorities
10. Financial Stress
11. Lack of Practical Help
12. Depression

From this list, one sees that homeschool stress can be as simple as “too many kids running around the house” to something as serious as clinical depression (Rumsley, 2009). Rumsley believed that stress in homeschooling originates in what she calls the “Supermom Syndrome”, a plaguing desire to be as put-together as the perfect families that homeschooling literature often portrays. This stress often leads home educators to feel insecure regarding their choice of schooling.

**Internal Stress in Homeschooling**

Rumsley’s list of stressors includes two primary internal struggles that home educators face: (a) stress and pressure to perform, and (b) depression. Mellot’s (2011) recent book containing devotionals for mothers addresses three internal stressors with which most homeschooling families struggle. Mellot (2011) stated that three issues that home educators most often face are: (a) comparison with others, (b) perfectionism, and (c) the fear of being the sole person responsible for their child’s education.

Agreeing with Rumsley (2009), Mellot (2011) felt that these inner feelings of inadequacy, fear, and perfectionism are “tailor made for homeschooling” (p. 4). Indeed, homeschooling can become a private struggle for many individuals. Mellot believed that many home educators are reluctant to admit their struggles concerning home education. Without the proper ability to cope and deal effectively with these internal struggles of
perfectionism and inadequacy, stress can grow into a significant burden for the homeschooling family.

**External Stress in Homeschooling**

Many of the identified stressors in homeschooling are external in nature. Of the 12 identified stresses that Rumsley (2009) found, all but three are outside pressures that home educators often experience. Ranging from unruly children to housework, it is often not the actual process of homeschooling that exacts stress on an individual. Rumsley’s (2009) aforementioned list of stressors occurring in the homeschooling environment included many external pressures that impact home educators. These included: housework, commitments outside the home, harassment, finances, and non-school aged children.

Another external stress in homeschooling often includes uncooperative children, ranging from a “non-starter” to a “discontented veteran” (Rumsley, 2009, p. 15.). Unlike traditional educators, parents are more likely to take an uncooperative student personally. As a child’s parent, a home educator must approach unwilling students with grace and dignity without the emotional distance that most traditional educators experience.

Another external homeschool stress is the commitment level to activities outside the home. In a high-mobility American society, it is easy to justify a myriad of involvement, even at the cost of both family and educational health. These types of stress are common in the homeschooling arena and while some mimic those in traditional education, others do not.
Research Regarding Stress in Homeschool

McDowell (2000) initiated formal research on the issue of stress and homeschooling with a mixed methods study that specifically looked at the mother-teacher relationship. In the quantitative research portion of her work, McDowell asked 107 participants to evaluate the effect of homeschooling in family, mother-teacher, wife and individual roles. In each area, the participants responded positively to the effect that homeschooling plays on each role. In the second portion of this type of research, participants ranked a list of stressors from “most stressful” to “least stressful”. The results of this Likert scale survey were (in order of most stressful to least stressful):

1. Lack of organization
2. Housework
3. Children learning what they need to be learning
4. Financial worries
5. Curriculum and correct teaching methods
6. Outside volunteer responsibilities

McDowell (2000) continued her research looking into the mother-teacher relationship by employing a qualitative study that used observations, interviews and document analysis. The guiding research question in this study was “What effect does home schooling, as perceived by the mothers–teachers engaged in it, have on the family in general and the home schooling mother in particular” (p. 6). In the analysis, McDowell (2000) found eleven themes that consistently appeared throughout the data: (a) flexibility, (b) home schooling as a stress reducer, (c) socialization, (d) children actually teach
themselves, (e) other homeschoolers, (f) the public and/or private schools, (g) housework, (h) concerns regarding personal shortcomings as a teacher, (i) testing homeschoolers, (j) Attention Deficit Disorder, and (k) racial tensions in the public schools (p. 9). Each of these aspects impacts the homeschooling family. However, it is noteworthy that the impact on the family could result in either less or more stress.

In the final analysis of her study, McDowell (2000) concluded that homeschooling proved to be a stress reducer for seven out of the nine families she investigated. When homeschooling proved to have a negative effect on families, McDowell found that in each case, that homeschooling was the educational choice because of reasons other than ideological and philosophical beliefs that home education was the best decision for their children. For instance, the two families interviewed that found homeschooling to be deleterious to their family both had felt “cornered” into the decision by outside circumstances. McDowell’s research showed that motivation and desire to home educate plays a large role in the degree that stress impacts a homeschooling family.

**Online Resources**

The World Wide Web provides various avenues for information regarding homeschooling. These include forums, blogs and helpful websites. The Internet creates an avenue for instant information pertaining to novice and expert home education families. Among the information available is connection with homeschool encouragement groups, blogs, teaching-tip forums and articles on major home education websites.
In particular, the Internet includes blogs, support networks and e-zine articles that discuss the kinds of stress that homeschooling family’s experience. Advice ranges from an empathetic mother to curriculum gurus to one dedicated professional research journal. *The Homeschool Researcher* is a professional journal published by the National Home Education Research Institute specializes in homeschool research. The World Wide Web provides a global platform to better understand the complexities regarding home education.

**Blogs.** Web logs, or “blogs”, typically resemble an electronic diary of consistent personal thoughts for everyone to read. Information found on blogs range from keeping family up-to-date on growing children to activism for a particular cause. Many homeschooling blogs find a unique niche and seek to inspire and encourage an online community that shares their same interest. An example would be “An Unschooling Life”, a blog that speaks about one type of homeschooling ("unschooling") where school is unstructured and is directed by life’s situations and experiences. This blog spends a great deal of space defining this unconventional way of education, and lists resources and web articles that will assist other unschoolers (www.anunschoolinglife.com).

Another homeschooling blog called “The Thinking Mother” tackles intellectual issues of homeschooling and speaks to curriculum choices, social issues and cooperative learning opportunities for home-educated children (www.thethinkingmother.blogspot.com). These electronic blogs have become places where parents can go for new ideas, strategies and encouragement throughout their home education experience.
**Web articles.** Articles that circulate through the World Wide Web pertaining to homeschooling are helpful to a better understanding of various issues. Many people choose to link to poignant articles through a blog or website and the article will find its way to a large audience without the auspices of a peer-reviewed journal. A recent online article by Shaw (2011) suggested ways to avoid homeschool burnout. The article cites homeschooling mothers who deal with illness, babies, responsibilities, jobs, and changes in routine are particularly susceptible to stress and burnout in homeschooling. While not peer-reviewed research, Shaw’s (2011) ideas to assist in coping include: (a) lowering expectations, (b) flexibility, (c) rotating teaching styles, (d) limiting activities, and (e) finding support are helpful to homeschooling families.

**E-zines.** An e-zine is an electronic magazine delivered to a person via a website or in email newsletter form. One homeschooling e-zine called “The Homeschool Zoo” specifically targets issues that cause stress because of the frenzy of the homeschool experience. Their stated desire is to “whisper words of hope that will help get home educators out of the grinder and put the pieces back together (www.homeschooling-family.com).

Other e-zines have more practical and decidedly Christian overtones, such as the “Homeschooling the Easy Way” e-zine, distributed weekly to its list of subscribers. This e-zine’s purpose is to “encourage a return back to God’s design for the godly home and homeschool” (www.cindyrushton.com/our-ministries/homeschooling-the-easy-way-ezine/). Its content seeks to encourage home educators as they seek balance between homeschooling and day-to-day activities, through the lens of a Biblical design for families.
Summary

Home education provides both stressful and flourishing opportunities for the homeschooling family. On one hand, the responsibility of a child’s education can be overwhelming, all consuming, and stress invoking. One homeschool mother’s statement that “everyone needs to get out of this house right now!” revealed the culminated frustration that can occur in home education (Shaw, 2011). Conversely, the opportunity to homeschool has shown to be a healthy “framework” for many families who passionately believe that this type of education is best for them. McDowell’s (2000) study found that home education could unify and strengthen the family structure. Additional insights into both stressor and flourishing aspects of stress within the homeschooling experience will provide further insight for families considering this educational choice.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study utilized a form of phenomenological research, heuristic inquiry, to identify unique stressors that occur in the homeschooling context. This inquiry was comprised of nine active home educators. This chapter discusses the research design and methods used for data collection and analysis. Williams and Morrow (2009) stated that “trustworthiness” is a distinguishing aspect of qualitative research. The chapter concludes by discussing trustworthiness and ethical issues regarding this heuristic inquiry.

Research Design and Overall Approach

Many quantitative studies addressing homeschool academic achievement, demographics, and civic involvement have been completed (Rudner, 1999; HSLDA, 2008; Ray, 2002; Ray, 2004; Ray, 2009). Such studies lend credibility to the homeschool movement. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies involving home education are limited in the current literature. Gall, Gall & Borg (2007) stated that qualitative research goes beyond mere facts and investigates a particular phenomenon from the research participant’s perspective. This qualitative study sought to add greater understanding to the phenomenon of stress experienced by a home educator.

Edmund Husserl’s (1927) philosophical movement provided the foundation for phenomenological studies. Husserl believed that the beginning of understanding originated with self-experience of a phenomenon. Gall et al. (2007) concluded that an essential tenet of phenomenological studies requires the researcher to intimately connect with the study and maintain a posture of self-learning throughout the process. The authors
outlined the steps used to conduct a phenomenological investigation.

1. The topic investigated should be of personal and social significance.
2. Participants must have experienced this phenomena and share the researcher’s interest in understanding more.
3. Interviews of each participant should seek to examine the phenomenon from the participants’ perspective and should focus on eliciting as many aspects from the experience (in this case, homeschooling) as possible.
4. Analyze interview data by looking for meaning units and themes.

Synthesizing the research and communicating it back to the participant is integral to a phenomenological study (p. 495).

**Heuristic Inquiry**

Building on phenomenological researcher Husserl’s 1927 pioneering work, Moustakas (1990) contributed to a greater understanding of heuristic inquiry within the context of phenomenological research. Moustakas (1990) described heuristics as a way of “engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences” (Heuristic Concepts, Processes and Validation section, para. 2). This phenomenological study fully utilized Moustakas’ six phases of heuristic inquiry: (a) initial engagement, (b) immersion, (c) incubation, (d) illumination, (e) explication, and (f) creative synthesis.

**Research Questions**

Moustakas (1990) stated that a heuristic research question should “reveal itself immediately and evidently, in a way that one knows what one is seeking. The question
itself provides the crucial beginning of meaning, the nature of the searcher's quest” (Formulating the Question section, para. 6). Two research questions guided this study’s data collection procedures:

1. What are the unique stressors that a home educator experiences?
2. What are some ways that a home educator can flourish in light of these unique stressors?

Participants

Fraelich (1989) introduced the concept of “co-researcher” regarding research participants. He encouraged research participants to join the primary researcher as a “truthful seeker of knowledge and understanding with regard to the phenomenon” (p. 68). Consequently, this research study referred to all research participants as co-researchers. My rationale for this decision was two-fold. First, I believed that it added value to the person and role of the co-researcher. My desire was to communicate the trust, belief, and value that each co-researcher brought to this study. Secondly, I believed that it added value to the data and information from each co-researcher. I informed each co-researcher of this contributory ethos in their invitation and agreement to participate. (See Appendix B)

This study consisted of nine women who are currently educating their children at home. Studies show that the majority of home educators are mothers (Mayberry & Knowles, 1989; Lines 1999). Those participating in the study were part of a purposeful and criterion sample (Gall et al., 2007). I selected six of the co-researchers from a personal network, and three co-researchers from within my professional ministry network. It was important for each co-researcher to meet three criteria:
• Each participant must currently be involved in homeschooling their children.

• Each participant must eagerly agree to the contributory ethos regarding this study.

• Each participant must be willing and able to articulate both the stressors and flourishers of home education as they experience them.

Each co-researcher, chosen from a homeschool population that was familiar to me, completed an informed consent and agreed to be involved in this research study (See Appendix C).

A unique aspect of this study is that each co-researcher is a U. S. citizen, yet resides outside of the United States of America. Six co-researchers are a part of a military family stationed overseas. Each of these co-researchers has homeschooled both inside and outside of the United States. They also have access to both public school on base, as well as numerous English-speaking, American-based Christian schools off base. They choose to forego these options in favor of home education.

The remaining three co-researchers are involved in ministry to the U. S. military and have access to Christian schools off base. Each of these families has utilized a Christian school in the past, or is utilizing it currently with one or their children. These three families do not qualify for the public schools on base, because they are not officially affiliated with the U. S. military. Table 3 summarizes the demographics of the participants below.
Table 3

Demographic information of co-researchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years Homeschooling</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Home State</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rosey</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>H.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>B. S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>B. S.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>M. S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melinda</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>CO</td>
<td>B. S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belle</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>H.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>B. S.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>M. S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>B. S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes Teacher Education degree

Setting

As noted earlier, all co-researchers live in Okinawa, Japan and are U.S. citizens.

I chose this site because of my familiarity with the setting and population there.

Ironically, while located in Japan, the U.S. military population provides a cross-section of Americans living throughout the United States. This study included both high-ranking officer families, as well as low-ranking enlisted families. As well, these families hail from various geographical locations, and maintain different cultural traditions (i.e., perceived “southern” values, proud “Texan” roots, and northeast “forthrightness”). There are three large homeschooling co-op’s in Okinawa that families may participate together.
in. While some co-researchers were acquainted with each other, most did not know each other well. During the course of the research, the co-researchers met together for the focus group that I facilitated via Skype. In addition, Skype provided the modality for all individual interviews.

**Procedures**

Upon proposal approval, I began the process of obtaining IRB authorization to conduct research. Because this study included recorded personal information, I filed an Expedited/Full Review form with the Institutional Review Board. Once I received official IRB approval (see Appendix A), a formal letter of invitation (Appendix B) as well as a letter of consent (Appendix C) was sent as an e-mail attachment to each co-researcher. When the invited individuals received and agreed to participate, they signed the document, scanned and e-mailed it back to the primary researcher. From this point forward, the invited individual was considered a “co-researcher”.

After receiving the letter of consent, the homeschool questionnaire was sent to the co-researcher. At their convenience, each co-researcher completed the questionnaire by responding into the Microsoft Word document. After completion, the co-researcher returned the document to the primary researcher, who stored it in a password-protected file on her computer. Additionally, the document was printed and put in a locked safe to protect against computer failure.

After completion of the questionnaire, each co-researcher was provided a link with a testing code for the website, www.sigmatesting.com. This enabled them to access the Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised online. They completed the assessment at their convenience. The results remain in my personal profile (at www.sigmatesting.com)
and are available only to me. If the co-researcher was interested in her results, I was able to forward them to her through the secure testing site. All downloaded results are in a password-protected folder on my computer. Printed results of the test are stored inside a locked safe in my home.

After the questionnaires and OSI-R were completed, I led a focus group with all co-researchers in a ministry center affiliated with my mission organization, Cadence International, located in Okinawa, Japan. Because I reside in Thailand, the group met together and I joined the conversation via SKYPE. This allowed the co-researchers to participate in a “group” dynamic and also enabled the primary researcher to participate, even while at a distance. The facility provided the necessary technological equipment to record the audio portion of this focus group.

A colleague (also my peer reviewer) assisted by taking notes and following conversations to insure transcript accuracy. This was a safeguard against technological malfunction. The notes, taken by my colleague, are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the primary researcher’s home. After transcription, the audio file of the focus group remains saved in a password-protected file on my computer. The printed transcription is stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home.

In the weeks following the focus group (after analyzing data from the previous data collection tools), I completed an in-depth interview with each co-researcher in an effort to obtain what Moustakas (1990) calls “saturation of the data.” Interviews took place over Skype and I utilized the recording device, “Call Recorder” to record all interviews (http://www.ecamm.com/mac/callrecorder). I downloaded this software on my computer to convert phone calls into MP3 files, which are stored in a password-protected
file. After transcription, the audio file of the individual interview remains saved in a password-protected file on my computer. The printed transcription is stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home.

**Researcher’s Role**

Moustakas (1990) stated that the heuristic process involves active and direct participation from the primary researcher. Such involvement seeks to understand the “nature and essence of the problem that permeates the other person’s world” (Heuristic Methodology, para. 1). As the primary researcher, I educated my three children at home for two years, though currently, my children attend school at a local private school. I believe that my experience as a home educator provided intimate access to homeschooling families that enabled the co-researchers in this study to share openly and honestly. Jourard (1968) has shown that self-disclosure elicits disclosure. During the focus group and individual interviews, in accordance with the heuristic inquiry process, it was necessary for me to engage and participate in the data collection. Moustakas stated “one must create an atmosphere of openness and trust, and a connection with the other that will inspire that person to share his or her experience in unqualified, free, and unrestrained disclosures” (“The Internal Frame of Reference”, para. 2).

Other salient aspects of my background include an undergraduate and graduate degree in Biblical counseling, an area of study that blends my interest in both education and the stresses regarding school choice. My background and specialized training in counseling skills was conducive and helpful to this study.
Data Collection

I utilized the following types of data collection: A homeschool questionnaire, the Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised (Osipow, 1998), a focus group, and in-depth interviews. I recorded all of the data involved in this research study to provide for accurate coding at a later time. The data was stored in both printed and electronic form.

The data collection process began with each co-researcher completing the Homeschool Questionnaire and Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised (OSI-R). These data collection tools provided insight into the stressors of homeschooling and allowed me to build a framework for further insight into topic. This information stimulated additional ideas and themes in the subsequent focus group and individual interviews. After completion of the questionnaire and stress assessment, the primary researcher conducted a focus group and individual interviews with each co-researcher.

Home School Information Questionnaire

After receiving IRB Approval (see Appendix A) the co-researchers completed a researcher-designed informational questionnaire during the first week of research. This questionnaire provides basic demographic information regarding each homeschool family, such as number of children, number of years the family has homeschooled, extracurricular activities, etc. Prior to beginning this research study, an expert in the field of educational psychology reviewed this questionnaire and found it to be reliable and unbiased. In addition, two non-participating home educators pilot-tested this questionnaire. This data collection tool proved to be a valid instrument for this research study.

Table 4 lists the questions used for demographic details below.
Table 4

Demographic information in the Homeschool Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Demographic Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Please list your children by sex and age</td>
<td>Age range and gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How long have you homeschooled your children?</td>
<td>Experience in home education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you homeschooled all your children?</td>
<td>Raises the question of whether the parents have utilized other educational methods based on mitigating circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How were you introduced to homeschooling?</td>
<td>Provides background information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Have your children ever attended another form of schooling?</td>
<td>Provides background information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Are there other families that you homeschool with?</td>
<td>Provides setting information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Where do you homeschool your children?</td>
<td>Provides setting information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Is there a time period specifically set apart for school?</td>
<td>Provides setting information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Is there a time limit for schooling?</td>
<td>Provides setting information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Is there a daily schedule?</td>
<td>Provides setting information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Do you teach all subjects to your children?</td>
<td>Provides setting information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Are you presently linked with some other form of schooling in addition to homeschooling?</td>
<td>Provides setting information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised**

After of the questionnaire and before the focus group and individual interviews, each co-researcher completed the Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised (OSI-R). Each co-researcher accessed the OSI-R via the SigmaTesting.com website after receiving a personal, secure website link delivered to their e-mail.

The Occupational Stress Inventory- Revised is a psychometrically validated stress questionnaire built on a broad theoretical base and with normative data enabling comparisons with other professional groups (Hicks, Fujiwara, & Bahr, 2006). The Occupational Stress Inventory-Revised (OSI-R) (Osipow, 1998) measurement seeks to understand the major variables of stress and the outcomes of stressful situations (Hicks, Fujiwara, & Bahr, 2009). This assessment tool concisely measures three areas of occupational adjustment: occupational roles, psychological strain and coping resources. Table 5 (below) shows the three dimensions of the OSI-R, including a description of each sub-scale measurement.
**Table 5**

*Scale Descriptions of the OSI-R*

**Occupational Roles Questionnaire (ORQ)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>What Each Scale Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Overload</td>
<td>Job Demands, Resources, Ability to complete tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Insufficiency</td>
<td>Fit between skills and job, Need for recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity</td>
<td>Awareness of one’s work expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Boundary</td>
<td>Level of conflict loyalties and priorities in workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Responsibility</td>
<td>Feeling of responsibility of welfare and performance of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>Exposure to stressful work environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>What Each Scale Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Strain</td>
<td>Attitudes toward work, problems in work quantity/quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Strain</td>
<td>Whether employees are experiencing psychological problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Strain</td>
<td>Degree of disruptions in interpersonal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Strain</td>
<td>Symptoms of physical illness and health worries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>What Each Scale Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Level of recreational and leisure activities engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Care</td>
<td>Participation in stress-reducing habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>Feeling of having support and help from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational/Cognitive Coping</td>
<td>Use of cognitive techniques in dealing with stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The OSI-R theoretical model of stress hypothesized that stressors within the work environment affect how people perceive their work roles; that work stressors and work roles can create personal and psychological strain, and that coping resources that a person possesses, or has access to, can influence the level of strain one experiences (Hicks et al., 2006). I believed that such an assessment would be helpful to understand stress levels in the participants of this study. The OSI-R demonstrates high reliability and validity (Osipow, 1998). Although a quantitative assessment tool, the information collected from this test allowed comparison with other stress indicators expressed by the co-researchers later in the interview process. Additionally, information gathered from this assessment served to help develop questions for use with the focus group and individual interviews.

**Focus Group**

Gall et al. (2007) described a focus group as a “group interview that involves addressing questions to individuals who have been assembled for a specific purpose” (p. 244). Krueger and Casey (2000) noted that a focus group allows for a relaxed, comfortable, and often enjoyable discussion as members share ideas and perceptions. Qualitative researchers have found that the interactions between participants in focus groups stimulate feelings, beliefs and perception that would not have occurred in individual interviews (Morgan, 1997; Williams & Katz, 2001). Aligning with the philosophy of heuristic inquiry, focus groups often start with one question because participants take on a major responsibility for stating and drawing out the views of those involved (Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1990). In this study, I used the research questions to initially stimulate discussion on both stressful and enhancing aspects of home education.
In an effort to stimulate further discussion and rich detail regarding stress in homeschooling, the nine co-researchers in Okinawa, Japan met together as a focus group. Utilizing Skype and a recording device, I joined the focus group from my residence in Thailand. The focus group took place in a facility that was capable of providing the necessary technological equipment to record the audio portion of this focus group. Each co-researcher had completed the homeschool questionnaire and Occupational Stress Inventory- Revised. During the focus group, I loosely guided the conversation, but primarily allowed the co-researchers to develop, consider, and verbally contemplate their personal stresses incurred in homeschooling.

**Individual Interviews**

The most common way of gathering data in heuristic inquiries is through extended individual interviews (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher is encouraged to express ideas, feelings, and images in a natural manner. Moustakas (1990) believed in the strength of the in-depth interview in heuristic inquiry research. This interview simulates an “informal conversational interview that relies on spontaneous generation of questions and conversations, in which the co-researcher participates in a natural, unfolding dialogue with the primary researcher” (“Methods of Collecting Data”, para. 2). Even though I began each interview with the same question: “What were your reflections on the focus group?”, I did not hold to a strict set of questions for each interview. However, before each individual interview, I spent time focusing on each co-researchers completed homeschool questionnaire, OSI-R report, and comments made during the focus group. This allowed me to be very familiar with the ethos of each co-researcher during our conversational interview.
Individual interviews took place at the convenience of each co-researcher. I conducted each interview with co-researchers via Skype, which recorded the conversation into an mp3 format, using recording software. Per IRB regulations, I saved each interview transcript in a password-protected folder. All printed versions of transcripts are saved in a locked filing cabinet in my home. These transcripts will be disposed of three years from the completion of the research. A heuristic inquiry is complete only when the individual has had an opportunity to tell his or her story to a point of natural closing. At such a time, the primary investigator is ready to locate and interview others (Moustakas, 1990).

Data Analysis

Data analysis, where qualitative research is concerned, is complex because the researcher is seeking to understand human relationships and experiences. Nonetheless, it is incumbent on the researcher to bear the responsibility to provide a clear and concise accounting of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In particular, Lauri and Kyngas (2005) suggested the use of inductive content analysis for studies where there is little former knowledge of a phenomenon. This type of analysis moves from specific details in the data to general themes (Chin & Kramer, 1991).

Coding

Open coding, also called inductive coding, is the primary method for organizing data in inductive content analysis. Unlike a priori codes that have been predetermined before data collection, open coding takes place as the researcher examines the data line by line and identifies predominant themes and categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Maxwell (2005) stated that coding allows the researcher to “rearrange data into categories to
facilitation and aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (p. 21). I utilized open coding for each data collection tool in this heuristic inquiry.

**Homeschool questionnaire.** Primarily a demographic tool, the homeschool questionnaire answered questions regarding the make-up of each family. Regarding the first research question, “What are the unique stressors that a home educator experiences?” I coded questions #8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 18 in particular. In light of the second research question, “What are some ways that a home educator can flourish in light of these unique stressors?” I examined questions 6, 7, 13, 20, 21 and 22 from the questionnaire. I noted common stressors from each homeschool questionnaire and compiled them into a master list of codes (see Appendix H).

**Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised.** The results from each OSI-R provided data for this heuristic inquiry. Items from the Occupational Role Questionnaire (ORQ) and Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ) portion of the OSI-R added information for research question one. I added areas to the master list of codes that fell outside the normal stress range for each assessment. Regarding the second research question, I examined the Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ) portion of the OSI-R. This section looked specifically at four types of coping methods each co-researcher utilized while homeschooling. I reviewed these four areas: (a) Recreation, (b) Self-Care, (c) Social Support, and (d) Rational/Cognitive Coping to discover themes that fell outside the normal range of coping skills. I added these areas to the master list of codes. I considered possible lines of inquiry for the focus group and individual interviews based on the results from both the questionnaire and OSI-R.
Focus group and individual interviews. Heuristic inquiry differs from other methods of phenomenological research in two distinct ways: (a) the inclusion of the researcher’s voice, and (b) the absence of pre-planned interview questions in data collection (Moustakas, 1990). Regarding the researchers voice, Moustakas and Douglass (1985) stressed the value of self-disclosure and interaction in the process of heuristic study: “At the heart of heuristics lies an emphasis on disclosing the self as a way of facilitating disclosure from others-a response to the tacit dimension within oneself sparks a similar call from others” (p. 50). Concerning the use of concrete interview preparation, Moustakas (1990) stated that while general questions may be considered in advance, genuine dialogue, a key component to heuristic research, cannot be planned. Heuristic inquiry leans heavily on the importance of dialogue in data collection. Moustakas (1990) believed that dialogue should be “like a mutual unveiling, where each seeks to be experienced and confirmed by the other” (“Methods of Collecting Data”, para. 4).

I coded the focus group and individual interviews in a similar fashion. To ensure accuracy, I recorded the focus group and interviews electronically and transcribed them myself. The process of transcription provided immersion in the data. After transcribing the data, I utilized open coding to examine both of these collection tools. The codes from the focus group and individual interviews are included in the master list of codes (Appendix H). A sample coding page can be found in Appendix I.

After compiling a master list of codes from all four data collection tools, I began to synthesize the codes into comprehensive themes. Dey (1993) stated that when formulating categories by inductive content analysis, the researcher comes to a decision, through interpretation, as to the coalescing of categories. Namey, Guest, Thairy and
Johnson (2007) suggested a good starting point for reduction of data is frequency of themes, which gives an idea of the prevalence of similar responses across participants. I began to reduce the data from each collection tool initially by the frequency of similar themes. Reducing the data by frequency allowed me to see the most common themes within the data. After reducing to the most prevalent categories, I looked for relationships within the remaining categories. For instance, while determining that discipline was a major theme, I placed heart attitudes and motivation inside this stressful theme. Creswell (2007) stated that the final phase of coding takes place when the researcher “systematically relates the phenomenon to other categories and thus validates the relationships” (p. 240). The final process of coding and reducing the data became clear as I began to see the relationships between stressors and flourishing factors of the home education experience. It was at this time, that I began to see the relationships between stressor and flourishers and five predominant themes for each became clear.

**Memoing.** Maxwell (2005) noted that memoing is “a form of writing used to facilitate reflection and analytic insight (p. 12). In addition to inductive coding, I utilized memoing to determine low-inference descriptors. Husserl (1927) believed in the importance of the voice of the researcher in phenomenological research. Moustakas’ (1990) heuristic inquiry in particular, demands the inclusion of the voice of the researcher throughout the data analysis. To ensure this pivotal aspect of heurist inquiry, I included memoing in the analysis of the data collection in this study.

I found that memoing often took place simultaneously while coding the data. As I color-coded line-by-line, ideas and themes often came to mind. I kept these in a handwritten journal because I found that, personally, writing ideas with a pen was a more
reflective process. While color-coding on the Microsoft Word document, I kept my reflective memoing journal beside my computer and often stopped coding to note questions, concerns, or additional thoughts that occurred during the coding process. A typed version of a sample memo is found in Appendix J. I believe that the additional step of memoing helped maintain what Moustakas (1990) called a “self-dialogue” that is incumbent upon the heuristic researcher.

**Peer Review**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the role of a peer reviewer as a “devil’s advocate”. They believed that a peer reviewer adds credibility to the research by helping to “explore aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). I obtained the assistance of one other person to review the coding of the data uncovered in this study. This individual has earned a Masters in Counseling and lives in Okinawa, Japan. We teleconferenced regarding each type of data collection and remarked about themes and categories that impressed each of us. She also notated themes she identified in the data and we collaborated in the final selection of themes presented in the findings of this study. Her e-mails and documents regarding the research are kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home.

**Member Checking**

Gall et al. (2007) stated that member checking ensures that the emic perspective of the co-researcher is accurate and complete. After the focus group and each individual interview, I transcribed each audio recording and e-mailed the transcription to the corresponding co-researcher. Carlson (2010) stated that member checking can take place as a single event or continuously throughout the data analysis process. I chose to have
formal member checks for all transcribed material (focus group and individual interviews). Each co-researcher reviewed the transcription for accuracy and was encouraged to add comments and feedback to the document.

**Trustworthiness Issues**

Due to the nature of qualitative studies, many researchers have considered ways to evaluate the rigor of data collection and analysis (Pidgeon, 1996). Lincoln and Guba (1985) felt that it was incumbent on the researcher to:

- provide enough details about participants so readers could make their own judgments about the study findings;
- use diligent and effective data collection and analysis methods; and
- establish consistency of the data by using techniques such as triangulation, audits and reflexive journaling (p.305).

They argued that the quantitative concepts of reliability and validity are incompatible with qualitative research. As an alternative, they introduced a framework for qualitative research with the concept of trustworthiness, which was comprised of the elements of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.

**Credibility**

Merriam (1998) believed that credibility considers the question of congruency between the findings of a study and reality. Three aspects of this study substantiate credibility in this inquiry. First, Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed that a “prolonged engagement” between the investigator and participants help to establish a relationship of trust between the parties. Because of my relationship with the co-researchers involved in this study, as well as my involvement in the homeschooling arena, I satisfied this
credibility demand. Secondly, Lincoln and Guba asserted that use of triangulation adds to the credibility of a study. They stated “the use of different methods in concert compensates for their limitations and exploits their benefits” (p. 85). The four data collection tools and data analysis methods provided triangulation for this study. Lastly, Patton (1990) believed that the background and qualifications of the investigator lends credibility to a qualitative study. My experience and education in counseling and home education helped ensure that the findings of this study were congruent with reality, and therefore, credible as well.

**Transferability**

Merriam (1998) stated that transferability is the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. This provides an interesting tension for qualitative studies that particularly seek to understand phenomenon that are limited to a population or largely unstudied. This inquiry considered stress in American home educators living overseas. The transferability for this study will thus, be limited. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the most important aspect of transferability is the responsibility of the researcher to provide contextual information to enable the reader to transfer findings. This inquiry clearly provided this contextual information to setting, as well as in the rich data offered by the co-researchers.

**Dependability**

In qualitative research, dependability refers to the ability to replicate the research with the same context, methods and participants, and achieve the same results (Creswell, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that a demonstration of credibility largely ensures dependability of a research study. To achieve dependability in this heuristic
inquiry, I provided a lengthy and detailed process of the methods taken throughout the study. A clear understanding of the research completed in this study adds to the dependability of this and future research.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability in qualitative studies ensures that the findings are the result of experience and ideas of the participants in a study, and not the researcher (Merriam, 1998). However, because of the nature of heuristic inquiry and Moustakas’ (1990) demand to include the voice of the researcher, this study presents both the findings of the co-researchers, as well as additional thoughts and perspectives of the primary researcher. In light of this, I added audit trails of both data collection and analysis to allow observers to trace the course of the research step-by-step, as Koch (2006) suggested.

**Triangulation**

Gall et al. (2007) suggested that qualitative researchers “vary the methods used to generate findings and see if they are corroborated across the variants” (p. 475). By doing so, a researcher effectively “self-checks” the collection and analysis that the study incorporates. I triangulated this heuristic inquiry by the following data collection methods: homeschool questionnaire, Occupational Stress Inventory-Revised, in-depth interviews, and a focus group.

The homeschool questionnaire and OSI-R provided initial thoughts regarding stressors, flourishing factors, and coping skills that the co-researchers were experiencing. I used the results from these data tools to later confirm and correlate to the findings discovered in the focus group and individual interviews. Coding and memoing, peer review, and member checking triangulated the data analysis for this heuristic inquiry.
Audit Trail

Koch (2006) suggested that an audit trail allows the reader to trace the events, influences and actions of the researcher. Additionally, it can represent a means of assuring quality in qualitative research (Akkerman, Admiral, Brekelmans & Oost, 2006). Rice and Ezzy (2000) stated that “maintaining and reporting an audit trail of methodological and analytic decisions allows other to assess the significance of the research” (p. 30). To increase the trustworthiness of this study, I provided audit trails of the data collection (see Figure 1) and analysis procedures (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Data Collection Audit Trail

![Figure 1. This audit trail depicts the various tools utilized in this study for data collection.](image-url)
Ethical Considerations

As the primary researcher, I hold a worldview set forth by the Bible, its commands, and doctrines. The co-researchers in this study share a similar worldview as me, making the data from this research *more* transferable to a certain population, but may
render it *less* applicable to the larger homeschool community. The supreme authority of
the Bible and its commands guided the ethics maintained throughout this study.

I made the best effort to protect confidentiality and respect the privacy of the co-
researchers. Throughout the data collection process, I sought to ensure confidentiality by
keeping records (both printed and electronic) securely filed. Upon receipt of individual’s
homeschool questionnaire, I printed, saved, and securely filed each document. The
Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised was maintained on a secure website that I alone
had access to. Each printed copy of the results were securely filed in a safe inside my
home. Regarding the focus group, I informed each co-researcher before, during, and
afterwards that the matters spoken about were to be held in the strictest confidence.
Lastly, individual interviews, both the transcription and electronic file are securely filed.
These efforts hoped to provide the most ethical, integral, and confidential findings for the
research study.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this heuristic inquiry was to identify unique stressors that occur within the homeschooling context. Moustakas and Douglass (1985) stated that self-disclosure and experience lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry. In light of this, I, as the primary researcher, was actively involved in discussing unique stressors that occur in the homeschooling process. A homeschooling questionnaire, the Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised, a focus group and individual interviews composed the four data collection instruments used in this inquiry. Nine homeschooling mothers participated in this study as “co-researchers”. In denoting the participants in this way, I hoped to communicate the importance of our collective voice throughout the research process.

Regarding the first research question, each co-researcher considered the unique stressors they experience because of their decision to homeschool. The second research question asked each co-researcher to share what she believed enhances home education. Analysis of the data revealed important themes regarding stress in homeschooling. Member checking, peer review and coding helped to identify common stressors and enhancers of homeschooling. The remainder of this chapter discusses these findings in detail.

Meet the Co-Researchers

The co-researchers in this study were selected because of their relationship to the primary researcher. Their experience in home education ranged from two months to 10 years, which provided for varied responses regarding unique stressors in homeschooling
involved in the process. Additionally, these participants exhibited passion not only in home education, but also in overall learning experiences for their children. When approached with the idea that they could be actively involved in a greater understanding of home education and shed light on unique stressors and enhancers, they were more than willing to help. Each story, while unique, joined in a passionate thread of helpfulness and enthusiasm for this research study.

Each interaction with the co-researchers revealed two goals of their homeschooling experience: (a) a quality education for their children and (b) a nurturing and loving relationship with their children. These desires, however, were also marked with frustration and struggles that each openly and honestly shared with me. I believe their stories will give a much deeper and fuller picture of home education and provide meaningful encouragement for primary home educators.

**Rosey**

At the time of this study, Rosey had two months of experience home educating her 1st grade son. I included Rosey because I wanted to ensure that a “novice” home educator had a voice in this inquiry. It was clear that she was just beginning to get traction with a homeschool routine. A self-described “type-A” personality, she chose a curriculum that had every subject and teaching day planned. Rosey’s desire to homeschool began due to concerns regarding her son’s experience in Kindergarten on the military base in Okinawa, Japan. Citing teacher frustration and a disappointing learning environment, Rosey began entertaining the decision to homeschool.

I was really nervous to make the decision to pull my son out of [traditional] school. Even though I couldn’t stand the situation he was in, I wasn’t sure I could
do any better. After talking with a lot of my friends and my mentor, I decided to take the plunge…it was really scary.

Despite feeling like a novice, Rosey has a strong “I can do it” attitude. When she sees her son struggling, she is quick to seek help from other educators, home or traditional. She enjoys being able to tailor school to be more “boy-friendly”.

Many times, I hear about what others are doing, and I think, “yeah, right…you have a girl! Handwriting made me want to throw in the towel until I talked to Jen and heard her stories of her own frustrations and how she overcame them with Jack. “Tweaking” curriculum is something that initially freaked me out because I really like to follow the plan, but even in just two months, it is something I have learned to love about homeschooling.

**Jane**

Jane has been homeschooling her two daughters for over two years. I chose Jane to be a part of this study because of our prior conversations regarding stress in home education. She admits that homeschooling has been a difficult journey for her. Jane’s husband made the decision for their family to homeschool; yet, it has become her primary responsibility. While she ultimately feels that it is the right thing to do, home education is often a source of struggle for her. A strong introvert, Jane finds that much of her energy is drained in the process of interacting and teaching her children all day.

Homeschooling does stress me out. By the end of the day, I need to not be touched for like, five minutes, after I put them to bed. My husband gets up at 5, and as a homeschooler, we don’t have to get up at 5, we can get up at 8:30…so my schedule is that I want to be up till 12:30 so if I don’t put my children to bed
until 9, he’s ready for bed by 10 and at about 9:05, he wants to spend time together.

The demands of homeschooling seemed to increase stress in what Jane describes an “already difficult” marriage. Jane agreed that the process of homeschooling reveals character flaws and weaknesses in her own life.

I have two daughters that are just one year apart in school and very different. One of them is less motivated and it really reveals my sinful behavior. As their teacher, I’m accountable to my daughters for my behavior, and they’re very forgiving. Where as if they were in school, the teacher might not compare the two, “Oh, your sister finished her work and you haven’t…” [which I do]. Homeschooling definitely pulls out some of the bad things in my heart and that is stressful while I’m teaching.

More than any other co-researcher in the study, Jane spends a great deal of time analyzing and criticizing her performance as a home educator. Her self-described “perfectionistic” tendencies leave her feeling a routine pattern of guilt and disappointment. This occurs most often when the homeschooling day is interrupted or incomplete. Still, Jane feels that home education is a true “calling” for her family, and overall, it benefits both her children and her personal growth.

Ginger

Ginger and I are both employed with Cadence International, and have known each other for over 12 years. I believed she would bring an honest and thoughtful response to the topic of stressors in home education. Spiritual growth and maturity is Ginger’s
primary desire in homeschooling. This goal impacts her choice of learning techniques, curriculum and daily schedule.

Ginger has been homeschooling her three children for eight years. During that time, Ginger’s family lived in Germany and Japan, where the only affordable educational choice was home education. During one six-month furlough in America, she sent her older boys to public school. At that time, Ginger realized the difference in her children’s response to a traditional educator as compared to the way they responded to her. This is a frequent discouragement to Ginger in homeschooling.

I couldn’t believe how willing they were to do anything she asked! If I had asked them to do that, there would have been non-stop whining and griping. They always tell me I ask too much of them, but I know what they can do, partly because I’m a certified teacher, but also because I saw them do it for someone else!

Motivating her children to do work is also very frustrating to Ginger. This year, while still feeling called to homeschool her younger children, she and her husband have decided to send their oldest son (7th grade) to a local International Christian School, in part for this reason. Her son is enjoying his private school experience and Ginger continues to homeschool her younger children.

Anna

Anna is the most experienced home educator among the co-researchers. With 10 years of experience, Anna is unique to the group because of her experience educating teenagers. I chose Anna, in particular, because of this dynamic. I believed that homeschooling during the teenage years would present unique stressors. For the last two
years, Anna’s two oldest children attend the Department of Defense School part-time, which allows them to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities that the school offers.

We have just entered a new stage…we liked our life simple, staying home, and limiting the activities. This year with our oldest in High School, I’m that lady out there driving around all day. I realized we have four years left and he’s out of the home. I look at it as though, this is the season…because we’re glad that he’s running Cross Country with the high school, it just means on homeschool days I have to take him there and come home and then on soccer days, I go there and I pick him up. A neighbor helps me get the other two to soccer, and I’m able to carpool children from cross-country practice to soccer.

Anna’s youngest child is in first grade, which puts Anna at both ends of the home education spectrum. As her older children participate in other events outside the home, she has just finished teaching her youngest child how to read. She offers a unique perspective to this study because of her ability to reflect upon experiences with her oldest children, and consequently, readjust with her younger son. Her voice added a steady, strong and wise refrain to this inquiry.

**Melinda**

Melinda is currently in her fourth year of homeschooling. During the last two years, Melinda and her husband have been integrating a Thai, non-English-speaking, 12 year old into their family. Homeschooling cross-culturally is very challenging and stressful for Melinda. This struggle largely correlated to Melinda’s strong sense of responsibility and role overload. Melinda and her husband are also colleagues with
Cadence International, providing ministry to American Military personnel in Okinawa. Their home is located inside their ministry complex, which often leads to distractions in homeschooling.

I have to put a “We’re homeschooling – don’t come in” sign on the door, which was difficult for me at first. We’re here to minister to people, but it’s gotten to the point now where I’ve realized there will always be an emergency that needs our attention and we’ll never get homeschooling done. It feels harsh, but if I’m going to be successful at teaching my children, I have to have strong boundaries.

Recently, Melinda and her husband have decided to put her adopted teenager in the local International Christian School in Okinawa. The struggle and stress of teaching cross-culturally created too much of a stress on their family as a whole. It has proven to be a good decision, thus far, for her family.

Cindy

Cindy and her husband lead the local Calvary Chapel ministry in Okinawa, Japan. They have been homeschooling their four children for two years. Prior to homeschooling, Cindy’s children attended the local International Christian School. A trained traditional educator, Cindy never believed she would homeschool. What changed her mind was a continual frustration with the negative exposure her children received (even in a Christian school), as well as the long commute to and from the school. She shares this story:

The teachers didn’t reinforce attitudes of the heart in the same way that I would. There was some bullying going on in school and my daughter tried to stand up for it and the teacher was like, “Go sit down, Don’t talk to me, I don’t want to hear it”. Being able to encourage my daughter and say, “That was right that you stood
up for that little girl” was what she needed to hear. I was able to affirm what was already going on in her heart…I realized our values were in conflict with what the teachers were saying to our children. They were discouraging the things that we were teaching our children, even at a Christian school. I was disheartened…my daughter was sent to the Principal for standing up for what was right.

Cindy considers one-on-one Biblical discipleship with her children to be both a stressor and a benefit of homeschooling. Being around her children all day means that she comes face to face with character issues in each of them.

I see so much more because we’re always home. Sometimes I think, “I can’t believe that’s in your heart!” They irritate each other and it brings out some ugly stuff, but it’s really neat because it always an opportunity…I tell them, “listen this is iron sharpening iron”…we’re allowing all this junk to come to the surface cause that’s what in our heart and we need to deal with it and it’s good. It’s interesting because now my children are older, in middle school and in youth group, and issues with friends and people come up that are similar to what we’ve already dealt with in our family. The things they are learning can transfer to relationships with their peers.

When the stress of commuting to a Christian school that did not reinforce her family values became too high, Cindy and her husband decided to home educate. In the process, they have come face to face with heart issues that require constant attention and discipline. In her words, she’d “have it no other way”.

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Elizabeth

Elizabeth is the kind of homeschool mother who does not get easily frustrated or stressed. Knowing she had this kind of calm personality, I was eager to hear her reflections after the focus group. She simply replied, “I can’t believe that so many homeschool mothers are that stressed out!” I included her in this study for this very reason: she seems to handle homeschooling with grace and ease. When pressed for her reasons for homeschooling, her number one motivation was being able to interact minute-by-minute with her children’s heart and behavior.

For me, behavior wise, I don’t know, I just feel like by them not being in school and being exposed to 25 other children with little adult supervision all the time, I feel like their behavior is better because they don’t get exposed to so many behaviors I don’t want them to be exposed to. They don’t have that attitude that I see a lot of children have. They’re not perfect by any means, but I think it helps them not learn new negative behaviors. We just have our own little family negative behaviors.

Elizabeth was the co-researcher in the study who aligned with what Ray (2011) cited as the chief reason parents homeschool: concerns over the environment to which their children are exposed. A licensed social worker, Elizabeth understands the impact negative environment have on children. In her words, she just likes being able to “control that part of my children’s life…what and who they are exposed to”.

I found it ironic that Elizabeth and her husband really consider education to be subsidiary to all the other reasons to homeschool. Both she and her husband have post-
bachelor degrees and value education highly. They simply do not value it as much as their children’s heart and environment.

I don’t know…for me, the academic stuff really isn’t all that important…in the long run, I really don’t care to be honest…I don’t care if they go to college, I really don’t care…it’s the heart what matters to me. It’s being able to focus on what’s important to our family, and not what would be important in the school system or to anyone else.

Belle

Belle is the first to admit that homeschooling was never in her plans. As she says, “My heart was not to homeschool…I thought, ‘Oh man… my children are going to be in Kindergarten and I’m going to have some more time to myself!’” Slowly, she began to consider the benefits of homeschooling; in particular, the influence and time she shared with her children. With the support of her husband and friends, Belle began homeschooling her children.

It has not been easy, however. Belle is plagued by the ever-present fear that she is not teaching her children well enough. The lack of feedback in home education often leaves her comparing her children to other children their ages.

One thing that I always feel is, “Am I teaching them well enough?” You know, are they learning . . . I’m always asking others, “So what are your children learning, in 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade” . . . just to see if my children are kind of . . . I don’t know why . . . to make sure that I’m doing a good job.

Belle’s words bring up the issue of confidence in home education. She admittedly feels insecure and less confident than most home educators she knows. This lack of
confidence seemed to induce more stress in her home education experience, particularly in the areas of discipline and motivation.

**Emily**

Emily is the prime example of an extremely confident and competent home educator. An eight-year homeschooling veteran, her voice led the crowd during our focus group and provided balance to those who felt highly stressed regarding home education. Concerning stereotypes of homeschoolers, Emily was the first (and only) to respond, “Who cares?!” She is a determined, strong and obvious mentor to others, leading the charge of home education.

Emily is a mother of five children, and possesses an abnormally high ability to manage many different things at once. She is flexible while strong, determined yet relaxed, confident, yet winsome. While she feels the stressors of homeschooling, what set her apart from the other co-researchers is that those stressors seem to gain very little or no traction at all. During our phone interview, her heart to encourage young homeschooling mothers became clear.

I think homeschooling moms, especially young and new ones, need practical encouragement and advice. Someone needs to tell them that it’s not going to look like a picture in a magazine and their children aren’t going to bring them an apple and set it on their desk. They need to know that their child might cry through math every day for a month, but they will get it eventually, and everyone will be fine. So many homeschool moms are too worried about what they think it should look like that they can’t handle what it does look like.

Every time I spoke with Emily, the word “resilient” came to mind. She certainly
experiences stress, but has found a way to keep those stressors in their proper perspective. One reason for this is her very helpful husband. When she gets behind in homeschooling, her husband steps in and helps in whatever way he can. A clear stress reducer for Emily is her husband’s desire to bless, encourage and take responsibility for other areas in the home.

**Research Question One**

The first research question of this heuristic inquiry focused on unique stressors that are experienced in the home education process. In answering the question, “What are the unique stressors that a home educator experiences?” I collected data through a homeschool questionnaire, the Occupational Stress Inventory-Revised, a focus group and individual interviews. Using coding and memoing, member checking and peer review, I triangulated the data analysis to identify the prevailing stressors that home educators experience.

This inquiry revealed five predominant stressors. While each co-researcher felt these stressors in varying degrees, the following dynamics were found to be the predominant stressors within the home education context: Overwhelming Responsibility, Dealing with Behavior & Motivation, Curriculum Choice, Stereotypes and Stigmas, and lastly, Distractions/Extra’s. The remaining portion of this chapter details these areas in detail.

**Overwhelming Responsibility**

Motherhood alone is a monumental task. As families consider the option of homeschooling, the full responsibility of education for children comes back squarely on
the parent’s shoulders, most often the mother’s. Emily was the first to speak in our focus
group concerning this responsibility.

It’s a one-stop shop. Everything happens under that one roof…the whole
day…and you have to be accountable for all of it, and make sure that everything
happens…it’s a responsibility that other people don’t hold.

Each co-researcher in the room nodded in agreement with this assessment of a
unique stressor in home education. Melinda shared these thoughts, carefully outlining the
many responsibilities that mothers already hold. Homeschooling, she felt, added one
more thing to an already full job.

I think that one stressor is that homeschool moms feel responsible for feeding
their children, cooking all the meals, keeping the house in order, educating their
children, refereeing arguments, providing social hour, play time, soccer
mom…It’s endless, there’s no role that you do not have when you’re a
homeschool mom. You don’t hand anything over to anyone. You do have that
pressure of making sure that everything is going well…that’s a big sense of
responsibility.

Jane worries that such a great responsibility causes her to be a more ineffective
parent, doing more harm than good. This fear almost kept her from homeschooling a
second year.

I felt like I didn’t want to homeschool because I didn’t want to mess my children
up at all…I want them to remember Mommy as…well, I want to be a great Mom
to them, and I want them to have good memories with me, and not moments of
frustration and impatience because I didn’t get school done…I don’t know. My
mom was great, but I have a lot of memories that I wish I didn’t have. I’m always afraid my children will have that.

The stress derived from this overwhelming responsibility not only includes things to do, but also, what a home educator has to leave undone. Anna speaks to this frustration:

I think as a homeschool Mom, the issue of responsibility and the fact that we do everything is a daunting one…I find myself getting frustrated with not being able to do everything. Something usually gets left undone…it’s hard to have something always unfinished.

Even for co-researchers in this study who hold teaching certificates, the idea that you are in total control of your child’s education was a daunting one. Questions such as, “Am I doing it right?” and “What if I’m not doing enough?” echoed in the co-researchers minds. In particular, I found this to be a predominant stressor for home educators who had less than 3 years of home education experience. The veteran home educators in the group seemed to have experiential “proof” to assuage these feelings of incompetency.

**Dealing with Behavior and Motivation**

Throughout the data collection, the co-researchers reflected negative behavior and motivation was very stressful. Cindy describes this dynamic below.

The huge thing for me is that my children are all together all the time, and they fight all the time. It is different than you would have when they are in school and they have time away from each other and then they come back together at the end of the day and it’s kind of more…”this is what happened, this is what happened” and there’s not as much fighting. But now it’s serious issues that come
up…everyday there’s something. Their behavior, I feel like I see everything and it’s frustrating and disheartening sometimes. And they’re not angels and I’m not either, and my behavior. It’s just kind of what grows weary through the day when it’s all you hear, “Don’t touch me”, “He’s rocking the table”, “He crossed my line”, “Stop making that noise”.

Ginger, a certified elementary educator, describes how behavior problems can be unique to home education.

If you get into this big confrontation, then nobody wants to do school. Like, I’m mad…he’s mad…and then your day stretches on forever. When I was teaching, you know, 2:30 comes and you’re done. Whether you got it done or not, they’re out the door, but with your own children, if you’ve had a bad day and they are not getting it done, your day keeps going…it’s almost like a punishment for you as well because you’re not done then because they haven’t done what they’re supposed to.

This stressor includes motivation as well as discipline and negative attitudes toward each other and schoolwork. In homeschooling, familiarity seemed to undermine student motivation and diligence. The co-researchers questioned whether these behaviors would take place in traditional school. Anna, whose daughter attends the local public high school part-time, feels this stress acutely.

My daughter has a Biology test at home today, but she went to the public school today and since she’s involved with Student Council and the National Junior Honor Society, so we let her go on this day [not her normally scheduled day] to do those activities, and that bake sale for NJHS was more important than studying
for her Biology test and she never would’ve done that with one of her classes at school.

Ginger addresses another aspect of familiarity in homeschooling: a deep understanding of your child’s capabilities.

I think for me too, because I’m their Mom and we know each other so well, I don’t think they always work as hard for me as they would for a teacher. For me, my children were in public school for a little bit and they worked so hard for that teacher. Whereas for me, they’re like, “Do I have to do this?” It’s like it’s a battle where they always feel like I’m giving them something that’s just outrageous and because I know them so well, I know what they’re capable of.

Belle finds it difficult to motivate her child to finish homework within a specified timeframe. With no bell, recess or detention to give as an incentive to finishing within a certain period of time, she finds that her daughter sometimes exhibits a laissez-faire attitude toward finishing her daily schoolwork.

My daughter has been taking two hours for math lately and she used to just go right through it. We can’t start History until she’s finished, because we do that together in the afternoon while the babies are laying down”. (That’s another stressor, babies!) I tell her, “If you were in school, you wouldn’t be able to take two hours, they would move on and you would have to do this for homework”. She replies, “But I am home!” And then I feel stuck! I’ve got to try and make it so that it’s in the evening time when her friends are home and she can’t go out and play.
Traditional or home educator, discipline and motivation are major causes of stress in a learning environment. In a home education context, these situations are unique because they take place in the home, where the parents are the final authority. The response to misbehavior and poor motivation is typically the mother’s responsibility (and occasionally the father). There is no behavior specialist, principal or paraprofessional to collaborate on disciplinary action. This additional burden acts as a major stressor in the experience of the home educator.

**Curriculum Choice**

Throughout the study, curriculum choice proved to be a major stressor for the co-researchers. Interestingly, this particular stressor was more poignant at specific times in the homeschooling process. Rosey, a home educator of only two months, remembered this initial stress well. After deciding to homeschool, Rosey stated that she “drove everyone crazy” as she tried to determine which curriculum to use.

It was really hard deciding because I started looking up different things and I had no idea what I was looking for…I had no clue. I knew he needed to learn all this stuff, but I didn’t know what level it was on and since he went to school last year, I started with that in mind. What he learned last year is really different than 1st grade Sonlight, so it was almost as if he didn’t go to school last year, because a lot of the stuff he learned there was just irrelevant this year. I like that [Sonlight] Binder and I like opening it up and getting rid of the weeks as we pass through them. I feel like just being new to it, that that is an accomplishment to me, so I love checking off those boxes.
The options for curriculum abound, and this in itself can be overwhelming. Melinda, a home educator who prefers a “boxed” curriculum, where every lesson is laid out for her by subject and day feels that to avoid this stress, she settles in to her curriculum and doesn’t bother looking elsewhere.

I mean, I think that going another route is awesome, but for me, it’s one area I don’t have to stress. It’s just one way I can cut out a stressor…I just obey the binder, I don’t even like to shop, I don’t’ even look online at the other stuff, I don’t even want to know, I’m sure it’s fabulous. But with this, I feel like it’s done, and I don’t have to worry about it.

In addition to timeframe, this stressor can also be understood through the lens of experience. As each co-researcher shared, it became evident that for the most part, experience played a large role in alleviating this stress. Emily shares how this happened for her.

There is a major stressor during the early years, I think. Initially, I enjoyed a set curriculum, but the more comfortable I got with homeschooling, I found going eclectic was better, choosing what things I liked for each subject and that fit well with the children and that we enjoyed and that worked for them. Eclectic, for me, seven years sounded like, “Aghgh!” but now I can’t imagine not choosing all the different subjects and what works for us… “this science for this child and this science for that child” but it can be overwhelming definitely, especially with the more children that you homeschool.
While this stressor was felt most strongly in the initial stages of homeschooling, the co-researchers noted that curriculum needs often change over time. Belle shares this experience:

The first year I ordered Sonlight and I loved it, next year, I tried some other things, and it was just way too overwhelming and it didn’t work like Sonlight did. I was asking all sorts of questions and became really unsure of myself. This year, I went back to Sonlight and even in the middle of last year, I went back to Sonlight with my older because it was tried and true…I knew it would work for us again.

Personality seemed to play a role in curriculum choice. Co-researchers with a more relaxed personality felt that curriculum issues were one of the less stressful dynamics of homeschooling. Conversely, co-researchers like Melinda, who considers herself a “Type A” personality, consider this a significant homeschooling stressor.

I think it really depends on your personality…because even in a very structured curriculum that tells you everything to do, you then have to decide to “Well, am I going to do every box?”…and you can’t, because it will kill you and homeschooling will become like a chore you hate doing. So then you have to approach it with some element of flexibility, which does not come naturally with my personality, and decide which boxes you’re going to skip.

Emily added that experience has allowed her to be more flexible in her approach toward curriculum.

I think that personality definitely has something to do with it. I started with Sonlight for the first three years and I loved it when I did it, but there came a
point when it didn’t work for us. Being eclectic the first couple years was getting
the groove of that but now I love it and it’s not stressful for me and we’ve found
our groove with different things and I know what works for us and what doesn’t.
So now, going back to something that’s laid out for me would be difficult.

Curriculum choice is a unique stressor that home educators face. As a
foundational element of home education, curriculum is the major conduit to the learning
experience. New home educators, in particular, sense the importance of this choice and
subsequently feel pressure to make the right one.

**Stereotypes and Stigmas**

Homeschoolers represent a small, yet growing, population of students when
compared to traditionally schooled children. Many co-researchers felt that stereotypes of
home educated families presented a unique stress in their life. Anna, whose teenage
children attend public school part-time, explains her approach to these remarks.

Because of our involvement with the school, we’ve interacted with some people
who have a perception of what homeschoolers are. I think sometimes dealing with
that stigma/stereotype of what a homeschooler is can definitely be a stressor. It
can be, but I tend to kind of smile and think, they said that out of ignorance and
that’s ok, they’re not familiar with who we are. We often get comments like, “Oh,
I don’t know your children, but I heard they’re very well socialized.” Or “What?
You’re daughter is homeschooled?…I never would’ve guessed!” And that is
supposed to be a compliment, you know!

Two co-researchers spoke of their aversion toward questions or situations where
they could be identified as homeschool families. Ginger remarked, “I hate going to the
store during homeschool time, because people automatically think, “homeschool”…I hate that…they’re probably not even thinking that at all, but I still feel it. It affects me…I don’t want to care, but I do!” Cindy shares this sentiment and says that she “avoids going outside during school time…the children want to go out and ride their bikes…and stuff and I’m like I ‘just wait’… I just want to avoid the questions.”

Melinda remarked that this stereotype also occurs with extended family. Many co-researchers had relatives that disagreed or exhibited prejudice toward their decision to homeschool. Elizabeth shared an experience where she felt this stress.

We’ve had over the years, a particular family member who um, says that they agree with our homeschooling, but they tend to quiz our children when they see them. (Laughter). It’s really annoying to have that relative, significant relative, go “So [name of one of her children]…and then try and give them problems, or things like that, or test them on spelling…” They don’t question us; they question the children, to like, see their knowledge. You know? And a lot of times I will just walk in and interrupt the conversation and pull my children out, because you’re not doing it to the other cousins or the other children that are public schooled, so leave my children alone! I try to be gracious about it, but it’s hard when you see that it happens each time we visit to make sure that they’re learning.

This stressor is unique to homeschooling because it can be assumed that no one questions families who send their children to traditional school. When others discovered that they were homeschooling, the co-researchers often felt the need to justify their educational choice. Cindy expressed her frustration with this below.
Sometimes you feel like you have to justify how well they’re doing, or you want to say, “this is what we’re studying”…because people seem a little questioning like, “Why are you doing this?” I don’t always justify it, but sometimes I feel like I need to, because they just don’t understand.

While this stressor impacted the co-researchers, there was a general consensus that the stereotypes of homeschooled families were beginning to change. Cindy continued:

On the positive side, though, people are beginning to understand our decision as more families choose to homeschool. People like and enjoy my children…we even sometimes now hear, “oh, that’s pretty cool!” Even my Mom and Dad’s view is changing, and they thought we were crazy at first! It’s true…people’s attitudes and stereotypes are changing more for the positive concerning home education.

Co-researcher Anna concurs. Concerning stereotypes, she adds:

I think homeschool Moms are changing . . . our CC group [a homeschool co-op] is becoming more diverse…we have Moms with tattoos! I mean, nothing against tattoos, but it’s much different than it has been…even in the last year.

The co-researchers believe that the stigmas and stereotypes of home education are changing; yet they still find it difficult to stop justifying their decision to homeschool. By and large, I felt that many of the co-researchers perceived the need to maintain a defensive posture concerning their educational choice. Their interaction with prejudice and stereotypes outside the homeschool community proved to be key stressor for home educators.
Distractions and Extracurricular Activities

Another unique stressor in home education is the numerous distractions that occur within a typical day. In light of these, many co-researchers found it stressful to keep homeschooling as the primary focus every day. Melinda, who has the ability to homeschool in a separate room from her home speaks to this dilemma.

I think it’s challenging to compartmentalize time and space. We have the luxury of moving out of our house for homeschooling and that helped a lot for me because I can just leave my house trashed, close the door, homeschool the children, and come back. Unfortunately, we school them where we minister [in the Harbor], so I’m still often pulled into caring for the needs of the Harbor. Cindy is diligent to delineate between anything other than homeschooling. A better understanding of her family’s limitations has helped her consistently complete daily lessons.

They know “this is school time”, we had to really compartmentalize…which means no housework…we have to stop, we cannot do it during the school day.

It’s very difficult to turn my focus from the house…it’s like a battle. I just want to go switch a load and it’s really hard, but that’s the only way we can be successful in homeschooling.

During this discussion, the following distinction between the co-researchers became clear: those who primarily taught girls felt as though they could incorporate distractions differently than those who primarily taught boys. For instance, Emily, who primarily homeschools older girls, feels differently than Cindy does. One of the reasons
she enjoys homeschooling is because she can tend to housework simultaneously. In response to Cindy, an interesting interaction between the co-researchers occurred:

Emily: We’re opposite. I still do the house every day while we do school.

Melinda: At the same time, though?

Emily: Yes, same time. If they need me, they’re at the table working…and I’ll go do laundry and tell them, “Call me if you need me.” They sit there and do their work and I’ll give them instruction when they need instruction. When they’re done, we have a pile where the grading goes and they put it in the grading and go on to the next subject so I can get chores done.

Cindy: That would work for my girl, but not my boys!

Emily: I haven’t gotten to the boys yet! See they’re little! I’m schooling all girls right now and so they’ll sit down and do their work and I can do stuff and then I’ll give them instruction. My youngest is pretty much the only one who is still totally hands-on. The older girls are pretty independent…I just give the instruction and then there’s other stuff we do together, so I can still get things done. Parts of the day I’m sitting with them and other parts of the day I’m tending to the house.

At this point in the focus group, co-researchers who primarily homeschooled boys made it clear that distractions caused more stress for them. For the most part, these co-researchers were unable to do other things around the house because their boys were not as willing to do work independently. Unique to homeschooling, home educators are often doing non-educational tasks at the same time as the teaching process. While a typical mother whose children attend traditional school might finish work, pick up the children from daycare, and figure out what is for dinner, these events occur simultaneously for a
home educator. The homeschool teaching process must remain a significant priority or it can easily be neglected. Ginger sums this up:

It depends on what is my priority. Like if I’m really task oriented and have to get something done, then school isn’t the priority, and the path of least resistance happens. The children end up floating around and are like “Oh great, Mom’s distracted, I can do what I want.”

Another distraction the co-researchers collectively agreed on was the many extracurricular activities available to their children. While traditional school offers classes like PE, music, and drama within its own context, home educators must intentionally provide these activities for their children. Each co-researcher experienced a considerable amount of stress from the desire to provide the most for their children. While these activities seemed innocuous, their integration into the homeschool process was stress producing. Rosey, as a new home educator, feels this tension.

I love the fact that there are extracurricular things…but, selfishly, the running around gets in the way of housework, my time, grocery shopping, and other things that need to be done. While I’m glad that we can participate, a really bad side of me comes out because it’s frustrating that we have to be places at certain times. Often it means a lot of driving throughout the day. If we miss for any reason, we lose out on the money we paid for the activity.

Jane also resonates with this frustration:

It’s frustrating…I want to add extracurricular activities, because I know I can’t teach them everything. I do feel like it’s a nice break, but driving around is stressful. It’s not even like the money is the stressful thing, though it can be
expensive, and the money does add up. If I feel like skipping it, I think to myself, “Oh my gosh, I’m throwing this money away, even though the children might not care, and it’s only 15 dollars, but I paid it!” In reality, I’m adding a possible outburst or tantrum, and I think, “Well that wasn’t worth 15 dollars!” Often I participate in extracurricular activities because I see other families doing them and I don’t really have anybody else to compare the children to. They don’t get grades and stuff, so except for other homeschooling families, I can’t tell what is the right amount of outside things to do. I find myself thinking, “Do I need to add more activities?” or “Are they well-balanced?”…questions like that. It is a little stressful.

As with other stressors in this study, this stressor is felt more strongly at different times. Differences in location, family tempo, and children’s ages can affect the degree to which homeschool families participate in extracurricular activities. Emily reflected on this below.

I think there are different seasons of [extracurriculars] too. We’ve done co-ops, and all those things. But I think it gets harder when your older ones have different curriculum needs and your little ones would really enjoy a co-op. You can’t give a whole day to a co-op because of your older ones needs. I think that the Lord provides because then the younger ones have playmates in the older ones, where the older ones, when they were little, they didn’t have those extra kinds of playmates. In a larger family, the children can meet each other’s social needs. We were in one location where there was a co-op that really suited large families well, but that was unique, and a very specific season for our family.
For some, the extra work that other classes or activities entail are not worth the stress and disruption in the learning process. Cindy, specifically, must limit her extracurricular activities to ensure successful homeschooling.

See, I can’t really do a lot of extras. We do have one PE group that meets twice a month, where one of the Dads teaches fitness and how to play games. That’s kind of the limit for me. Because I found that I’m more stressed out and yelling, “Hurry up, we gotta go, you gotta finish!”…and it’s just not worth it…we even have one girl who comes to our home and teaches Japanese and I even see that this is too stressful, “Hurry up, we have to have everything ready by…”…and it’s not worth it, so we stay home and do very little else.

As home educators take on the responsibility of educating their children, their desire to ensure that they are doing enough often leads to an over commitment in “extra” activities. Without discernment, it is easy for these activities to become overwhelming to a home educator, leading to feelings of frustration and stress.

**Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised**

As part of the triangulation of the data collection in this research study, the co-researchers completed the OSI-R to: (a) initially provide information (along with the Homeschool Questionnaire) regarding stress levels the co-researchers were currently experiencing, and (b) later corroborate the information gleaned from the focus group and individual interviews. The following figures highlight the Occupational Role Questionnaire (ORQ) portion of the OSI-R, in which co-researchers were asked to consider “home education” as their occupation (many already consider homeschooling in this light). Figures 3 and 4 below highlight the co-researchers results.
The ORQ portion of the OSI-R attributes a score of 40-59 (shaded gray) as one standard deviation from the mean and should be interpreted within the normal range. Scores below the mean represent a relative absence of occupational stress, scores 60-69 indicate a mild level of maladaptive stress and scores at or above 70 show a strong probability of maladaptive stress and strain (Osipow, 1998).

From the figure, it is clear that the co-researchers in this study are at the high normal to mild stress level when considering their role overload. This coincides with the co-researchers statements that they feel stressed because of the many roles they handle at the same time. Melinda’s words that a home educator also ensures the “feeding their children, cooking all the meals, keeping the house in order, educating their children, refereeing arguments, providing social hour, play time, and soccer mom” confirms the
data from this sub-scale of the OSI-R. With the exception of Rosey, the co-researchers scored within or above the normal range of stress regarding Role Insufficiency and Role Ambiguity.

In addition to the Role Overload portion of the ORQ, the co-researchers confirmed that responsibility is a major stress in home education. With the exception of one high normal score, every co-researcher scored in the “mild stress” category of Responsibility. This sub-scale was the most revealing of all scales on the OSI-R, and substantiates what each co-researcher shared throughout the data collection process. Lastly, the findings of the ORQ showed two co-researchers to be mildly stressed regarding the environment in which they homeschool. These co-researchers, Belle and Elizabeth, both have small children under the age of three present when homeschooling older children.
Research Question Two

I will never forget the shift in attitude and countenance in the room when the focus group began to discuss the aspects of homeschooling that contributed to a flourishing and positive home education environment. Though I was a country away and communicating through an online telephone service, I could feel the change in the room. It had been an authentic and frank discussion of things that cause stress in home education, but everyone visibly breathed a collective sigh of relief as they began to consider factors that help and encourage them in their homeschooling.

Though my children currently attend a Christian International School, as my co-researchers began to recount the very essence of “why they do what they do”, I found myself so thankful for the time that I homeschooled my children. It was as if a common thread of both value and vision for education connected the entire room. We had just walked through the “valley” of the homeschool experience and as we collectively considered the encouraging and flourishing aspects of home education, the joys and pleasures of this educational choice truly radiated in each co-researcher’s (and my) face.

Research question two endeavored to discover this “upside” of home education. Five prominent themes from the data emerged in reference to what helps home educators to flourish in light of the unique stressors they experience. Analyzing the data from each collection methods, the distinct areas that provide strength and encouragement in home education include: (a) control and freedom, (b) poignant moments, (c) the right curriculum, (d) supportive spouses, and (e) the greater homeschooling community.
The ability to be autonomous and in control of their child’s education unmistakably empowered the co-researchers involved in this study. Every decision throughout a home educator’s day is at the discretion of one person: herself. As a previous home educator, I resonate with this freedom. While attending my children’s Fall Orientations this year at their current school, I could not escape the feeling that I had lost control of my children’s education. I felt as if a large part of me had been replaced and I was reduced to a participatory role instead of my previous role where I commanded every part of my children’s schooling. While I was simultaneously thankful and excited for this new experience for my children, a part of me walked away thinking and feeling as if I was losing control. I have since come to understand and describe these feelings and attitudes as “the remnants of homeschooling” in my soul. The co-researchers reflect on this flourishing, empowering aspect below:

Anna: I do think the ability, the control, to make changes when I feel like we need to really helps….I’m not stuck to trudge through the whole year with a curriculum that doesn’t seem to be working.

Belle: For me, it’s not so deep…I just like not being told what to do. We can go on vacation when we want to go on vacation. I can take my children to the park if I want to take them to the park, and not have all these deadlines or schedules at the school. They can hang out when their Dad’s here, or I can take them out to lunch with their Dad. It’s not so strict and I am the one who gets to teach them what I want.

Melinda: We get to be in charge and we should be, they’re our children!
This theme of total control resonated in each co-researcher. Once the decision to home education was made, it became intensely personal and the freedom it offered sustained the co-researchers during stressful times. Cindy shares regarding this freedom below:

While homeschooling is definitely overwhelming at times, all it takes for me to regain perspective is to hear another Mom [who is not homeschooling] talk about bad teachers, required reading for their child that they don’t agree with, projects with deadlines, or having to get their tired children out of bed early each morning and I think, “Yes, I love homeschooling!” because I feel none of those pressures, and for me right now, those seem way more overwhelming than the frustrations of homeschooling. It might not always be that way, but it is that way today.

Poignant Moments

When the co-researchers reflected on what helps them flourish in the homeschooling context, all of them discussed times where they had the privilege to be involved in priceless disciplinary and learning moments with their children. All educators know these moments. They are the times when a child learns to read or the class bully sees that kindness really is stronger than cruelty. Home educators feel privileged to secure these times with their children. I couldn’t help but feel a “magical” sense as the co-researchers spoke of these moments. Emily remarked:

For me, I love those “a-ha” moments, similar to learning to read. Each child, several times during the year, has a time when they’re working on something and there’s that “a-ha” moment when it “clicks”. I always try to encourage them when they’re struggling through something like long division or those things, and
there’s that moment when it clicks and you can see it when you’re working with them, and it’s so nice…you know, that you can see it! Then you see the excitement in them that all of a sudden it’s clicked and they don’t have that struggle anymore. It’s so encouraging for both them and me.

Ginger spoke about being a part of her children’s learning as well as being able to weave the Bible into the academic process below:

I think just knowing, and being a part of their learning process. I remember thinking that when I was a teacher that I spent more time with those children than their parents do (this has good and bad points)...but that you’re a part of their world and you know everything that’s going on there, and of course, being able to sit down with them and read the Bible with them and getting to weave it throughout every lesson. Depending on what school they’re at, they may or may not get that. As a parent, they’re your child, you’re going to do whatever you can to help them succeed, whereas with a teacher, it can be hit of miss, they may or may not get your child or even care about them. But you really love and care about them and want the very best for them and you’re going to kill yourself trying to make that happen.

Emily reflected on how home education provides the opportunity for her to know her children on a different level than she would if she was not with them all day.

I love that homeschooling allows me to know my children at a deeper level than if I sent them away to school. I know my children… I know their personalities and they’re all so completely different…I know what makes them tick…I know when they’re sad, when they’re happy, when they’re feeling good or not feeling good
just by how they look. This gives me such an incredible advantage in education and I’m so thankful for that.

Elizabeth added that another flourisher for her is the poignant moments she sees between her children. Elizabeth and her husband highly value the bond their children share together. One aspect they enjoy about homeschooling is the ability to strengthen the connection between their children by spending time together. Cindy added:

Once I remember talking with my children about how you can tell what’s important to people often by what they do, wear, drive or live in…how it shows in the life of a person. I asked my children, “What do you think is the most important thing to me?” and they said, “We are!” I thought that was just so cool that they knew that they were the most important thing in my life. That was just a huge reward and blessing to me. When my children were away, I missed those moments. They spend so many hours a day away and you don’t even know what they’re learning or what they’re hearing or how they’re being affirmed or discouraged.

Cindy’s comment reveals that these poignant moments are not confined to academic issues, but matters of what the co-researchers continually described as the “heart”. The co-researchers in this study are Bible-believing Christians and their references to the “heart” are best understood within this context. Biblically defined, the heart encompasses many parts of a person: emotions, reasoning and the will. Each researcher highly valued the moments where home education aided the training and shaping of this Biblical definition of “heart”. Consider Anna and Cindy’s words below.
Anna: As a parent and teacher, you know their heart issues, and you’re able to deal with them while we’re educating them. There’s no distinct time where “this is school” and “this is Biblical child rearing”…it blends and happens all at the same time.

Cindy added: While it’s hard at times to have behavioral issues in the midst of school, on the other hand, the children are able to work it out because you can’t live your whole day out like that. They have to get to the root and the heart of it. And it forces us to have to work on things and learn how to identify our own character issues, instead of just pointing out other people’s character issues. It’s been hard, but I think that it’s providing really good tools for them for their life…these heart issues will be with them forever and homeschooling provides the context for working through them.

While not daily or even weekly occurrences, the poignant moments of learning and ability to shape their children’s hearts provides great encouragement to home educators.

**The Right Curriculum**

Finding and settling into a curriculum that “fit” the co-researcher’s family was clearly viewed as one of the best conduits to successful homeschooling. In many ways, this flourisher was a silent lurker in the background of home education. If a curriculum didn’t work, it immediately came to the forefront and demanded quick attention. However, with the same intensity, having the right curriculum and plan for the family is equally important and foundational for the home education process. Belle comments on a time when she moved away from what had really worked and how frustrating it became for her.
I was going to say my first year was awesome! I was so happy that I had made the decision to homeschool. I think a lot of that was because I had the right curriculum for our family and for my children learning styles. [I did Sonlight]. The second year, I ventured out, tried new things and it just didn’t work. Everything felt wrong and I felt like my second year was just kind of crazy. I kept getting discouraged and thinking that we weren’t learning anything and it really derailed us from getting any traction.

This aspect of flourishing was difficult to see in the data, but could not be denied in the voices of the co-researchers. Each co-researcher in this study has clearly settled into what works for their family. The confidence with which each home educator spoke of their particular learning plan was compelling as I read through the data. If the curriculum worked, there was not much discussion regarding the subject because it was doing its job: providing direction and dictating the appropriate pace for each family. While often silent, having the right curriculum for a homeschooling family was a strong flourishing factor for each co-researcher.

**Supportive Spouses**

Every co-researchers involved in this study underscored the importance of their husband’s support in their homeschooling. This support is evidenced in different ways for each co-researcher. For some, it involved taking on a portion of the teaching, for others, it meant help in address behavior or motivational issues. For still others, it simply meant being “on the same page” regarding their children’s education. Anna remarks:

My husband has a demanding work schedule and he can only be involved minimally, but the way he has supported me this year has been critical. He does
have a math major and he has stepped in and helped our daughter with her math on the weekends and late into the evenings. Having that support now and even when they were elementary-aged, just knowing that when he came home at 6 o’clock that he wanted to see how the day went. The children knew that Daddy was going to check their work and if he wasn’t satisfied, they lost playtime. My hope for home educators would be that everyone would have that husband and father who supports them.

Unique to homeschooling is the lack of structure to fall back on. There is no principal to send unruly children to, or a union with whom to speak your grievances. Ginger relays how important her husband is with regards to support:

I always feel like, he doesn’t help with the teaching part a whole lot, but I always know that he has my back. If there’s been a really rough day, he talks with the children and he has a way with them. They listen to him and they respect what he has to say. They also know he will not tolerate any disrespect and that kind of thing.

Melinda adds:

My husband is a tremendous source of encouragement to me as I homeschool. Philosophically, he and I are on the same page. We both want to follow God’s calling on our lives each year, whether that is to homeschool each child or send any of our children to school. We discuss daily the children’s progress and obstacles I’m facing – this isn’t done in a formal way, rather in bits and pieces of conversation throughout the day whenever we have a second. He’s engaged and offers alternate ideas when needed. In addition, he is the children’s math teacher.
Because we are missionaries overseas, his office and our home are connected, so he is near us all day. The children go to him for a chunk of time once a week, and then for smaller bits of time on the other days for their math lessons, drills and tests. I never have to give math one thought, which is a great benefit. Lastly, he is available for disciplinary issues. It’s nice to simply tell a child to go speak to their father rather than disrupt my teaching of all the children to deal with one.

As Rosey began her homeschooling earlier this year, it was difficult to figure out how and where her husband could help. She shared about this initial awkwardness below.

I finally realized that I needed to open my mouth when I needed help and not wait for some random affirmation or offer to help. I talked honestly with him about how much I disliked the science experiments. I cannot stand them! So we discovered a way that worked for both of us. When I come to Bible Study on Tuesday nights, my husband takes our son and plays with the magnets all night! That makes me feel good because I feel like that’s just his little bit that he’s giving, and he doesn’t mind playing with magnets every week . . . maybe it’s a boy thing. And they’re getting that time with their dad and that I feel like I feel is really needed because they’re with me every day, and at the end of the day, we [the children and I] need a break from each other.

Cindy, whose oldest son struggles with school, has found that her husband being very involved in his schooling has made a tremendous difference.

My oldest son just doesn’t complete his work unless we’re really on him. We have really evolved where Tom has to have a more active part in this. Tom has been great – we developed a little checklist and my son brings it to me every time
he finishes something. At night, Tom comes home and checks off and grades things that I haven’t gotten to, which is good, because my son often thinks I’m being picky and too critical and expecting too much, so when his Dad does that, he can be mad at him and not just me. With the rest of the children it’s fine, but because this son struggles so much with school, Rick has been really integral in helping me work through that.

For Emily, husband support means that areas that she didn’t get to in the day are seen and addressed. While it’s not linked in any way to actual schooling, she feels that where her husband steps in and helps in other areas is crucial to her success in homeschooling.

He helps me in other ways, he does 85% of cooking dinner, which I love…so he comes home from work, and if we’re still schooling, he takes over in the kitchen, or he takes the boys outside so I can finish up with the girls. And so, although he doesn’t do the hands on curriculum stuff, he relieves me in other areas. That is a huge blessing to me…so it’s not like I go straight from schooling, from switching the laundry, to the kitchen…he walks in the door and goes right in the kitchen…”hey have you started dinner yet?” “No, I haven’t gotten there yet” and he just takes over…so I’m blessed in that he’s a homeschool partner. Because I think he realizes that although I’m doing this aspect of our home, it’s his home and so he readily helps out and takes the pressure off me in other areas, so that homeschooling is not a stressor to me because he’s relieving it in other areas.
While most home educators are mothers, it is clear that the fathers play an essential role in the homeschooling process. The commitment and involvement of both mother and father is vital to a thriving home education.

**The Homeschool Community**

The last most common flourishing factor in the co-researcher’s homeschooling experience was the immeasurable encouragement from the homeschooling community. While opportunities in the homeschool community include a large range of activities (play dates, field trips, science exhibits and meetings over coffee), they primarily occur within two venues: extracurricular activities as well as the support and friendships found among other home educators.

**Extracurricular activities.** While already discussed as sometimes being stressful for homeschooling families, one reason that extracurricular activities became flourishing to home education families is how much home schooling students enjoy these activities.

Ginger: My children *love* it…[everybody in the focus group collectively agrees… yeah “they do!!”]…I mean, personally, I am more of an introvert and a lot of the times I hear what all the other Mom’s are doing, and I think to myself, “This is it for me, this is my one day”. When I get there, [to co-op] I enjoy it…yeah, I do enjoy it, I enjoy teaching the other children, it is encouraging to me, I’m like, “oh yeah…this is something I like.” And you get the added benefit of other Moms, that I trust, teaching and investing in my children. They’re teaching them things that I may or may not cover or even think to teach.
As home schooled students move into higher grades, often the pull to outside activities grows. Anna speaks about extracurricular activities regarding her teenage home-educated children.

My daughter is on the student council even though she’s part time and she’s the co-president of the NJHS and these are all things that she wanted to do and we feel like this is a good leadership opportunity for her that she’s not going to get at home and I realize that I guess I’ll be driving a lot, but these things have really gained importance and value in our home education. Our children really enjoy them and it makes the whole experience better for our family at this time.

Elizabeth, who is in charge of a large co-op in Okinawa, speaks to the benefits that being involved in larger homeschooling community offers.

We really just focus on fellowship, getting together, having fun, encouraging and training your children in the Lord. So it’s not such a big deal to be academic, our hours are shorter; we don’t give homework…it’s a lot more laid back. I think it’s really good for a lot of the parents, especially those who are not very confident…because having the chance to talk to the other moms, especially since we are not so academic, we have more of a chance to talk…and that seems to be very helpful for the new moms…maybe not as overwhelming.

Personally, I remember our family’s involvement in a homeschooling co-op as rewarding and encouraging. Purposefully, I chose a group that stressed academic and classical learning for this reason: if I missed something during the week, I could take heart knowing my children were getting something of academic value taught to them on Friday. It was really that simple: a pre-planned guilt assuager. In this way, like for many
other co-researchers, extracurricular activities were a great source of strength in my home education experience.

**Supportive and empathetic friendships.** Without question, in addition to supportive spouses, the availability and empathy of other home educators was pivotal to a flourishing homeschool experience. Like-mindedness seemed to quell many of the stressors experienced and provide a renewed and energetic passion in home education. Jane reflects on this support below.

I have such a support system here in homeschooling. There are so many people here who homeschool and are at the same place in life and it makes it easier because you’re not alone.

Anna continues:

Friends…the relationships we have with other homeschooling families. That Mom that we can e-mail or call, and you know, talk through things, um…I think not that we…as Lew says, we don’t toss our net very far from the shore/boat, so we’re happy and content with a few close relationships versus being out there more visible and involved.

Cindy, who does very little extracurricular activities outside of her home, also finds this to be true.

Even though I’m not a part of any co-op groups [other than PE twice a month], I have a great support system. There are a lot of homeschooling families that are in our church who are my friends. When it’s hard, we just vent to one another, support each other, and pat each other on the back.
For myself, I have found that after a supportive husband, that the homeschool community can provide the greatest strength in home education. For some people, this looks like a co-op, for others, it is reading the same books to your children, and for others, it is simply having coffee together after a particularly hard day. Regardless of what form type of community takes, the camaraderie that home educators feel cannot be understated as a flourishing factor in the process.

**Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised**

In considering this research question, the data from the Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ) can be used to help triangulate the data received from the questionnaire, focus group and individual interviews with the co-researchers. The PRQ was designed to consider the underlying facets of coping resources available to a person (Osipow, 1998). The four scales included in this portion of the OSI-R are: Recreation, Self-Care, Social Support and Rational/Cognitive Coping. In this scale, a score of 40-59 (shaded gray in the figures below) was reported to be within the normal range of coping skills. Unlike the ORQ and PSQ, a score lower than 40 indicated a mild deficit in coping skills, and scores of 60 and higher revealed highly developed coping skills. Each co-researcher fell into the normal range or higher for Self-Care and Social Support as shown in Figure 5 below.
However, the two spheres of Recreation and Rational/Cognitive coping showed co-researchers Cindy and Rosey nominally outside of the normal range, indicating a mild deficit in coping skills in these areas. This confirms many of the statements made by Cindy, who rarely spends any time outside doing extracurricular activities except for two times a month. The information also points to Rosey’s relatively new experience in home education, as she spends much of this year “figuring out” what is best for her family. (See Figure 6 below)
Conclusion

This chapter introduced the nine co-researchers and their interactions with the two research questions that form the basis for this heuristic inquiry. It also presented information gathered through four resources, a homeschool questionnaire, the Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised, a focus group, and individual interviews. I analyzed this data through coding and memoing, peer review, and member checking.

Five predominant themes answered research question one, “What are the unique stressors that a home educator experiences?” Co-researchers agreed that they felt an overwhelming responsibility regarding the education of their children. Additionally, the
strain of addressing behavior and motivation often led to unproductive teaching times and caused discouragement among the co-researchers. Thirdly, choosing a curriculum for their family in the early stages of home education was a particularly stressful event, which at times had to be re-evaluated due to a particular child’s learning ability. Fourth, the stereotypes and stigmas that have accompanied the homeschooling movement are weighty burdens for home educators to bear. Lastly, the distractions and extracurricular activities were often seen as “more trouble than they’re worth”. Still, the co-researchers often felt obliged to participate and thus ended up feeling more stressed because of their involvement.

Considering research question two, co-researchers shared their thoughts on “What are some ways that a home educator can flourish in light of these unique stressors?” Again, five distinct categories emerged through the data analysis. Co-researchers felt that their absolute control over their children’s education was very empowering and allowed them the freedom to “do what they want”, instead of answering to a traditional schools schedule or workload. Secondly, the poignant moments of intervening in behavior and learning with their own children gave them great strength in their teaching endeavors. Thirdly, the right curriculum for the family afforded the home schooling family great context and boundaries for the educational process. Fourth, the co-researchers agreed that supportive spouses are a significant source of strength in homeschooling, even when the husband is not actively involved in the teaching. Lastly, the homeschooling community is a safe haven of empathy and encouragement when home educators feel discouraged or exceedingly stressed in their homeschooling. Chapter five discusses these findings, along with implications for further research and the limitations of this study.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this heuristic inquiry was to discover and identify unique stressors that home educators incur in the homeschool process. Additionally, the unique aspects of homeschooling that enable a home educator to flourish were also considered. These findings are discussed in detail in this chapter. Moustakas (1990) describes the process of heuristic research in the following way:

This type of inquiry is an extremely demanding process, not only in terms of continual questioning and checking to ensure full explication of one's own experience and that of others, but also in the challenges of thinking and creating, and in the requirements of authentic self-dialogue, self-honesty, and unwavering diligence to an understanding of both obvious and subtle elements of meaning and essence inherent in human issues, problems, questions and concerns (“Closing Comments, para. 1).

Throughout this research inquiry, there proved to be times where I felt as though I was completely absorbed in the home education experience. My immersion into the topic reminded me keenly of the two years that I homeschooled our children. Voices of the past left their hiding and recaptured my thoughts, as I considered both the stressful and flourishing aspects of homeschooling.

In my interaction with the co-researchers, I found that with one exception, there was an initial awkwardness in considering negative or stressful aspects of home education. In considering the data collected, it became clear why this dynamic presented itself. First, there is a sober and appropriate hesitation to speak negatively about a
decision you have invited, even beckoned, in your life. This is a humbling and vulnerable process. Secondly, every stressor found in this study seemed to have another “face”. For instance, “dealing with bad behavior” was wearing on a homeschool mother, and yet the same situation provided an opportunity to “communicate family values, teach, and train” which was a primarily *flourishing* and positive aspect of home education. What seemed to be an initial reluctance is what I believe to be an inner tension of categorizing any facet of homeschooling as *completely* stressful.

Lazarus’ (1991) appraisal theory provided insight into these double-sided responses to the homeschooling experience. Smith and Kirby (2009) stated that:

> Two individuals will react to the same circumstances with different emotions if they appraise the personal significance of those circumstances differently. Similarly, the same individual will experience different emotions to the same circumstances over time if his or her appraisals of those circumstances change (p. 1353).

As the co-researchers spoke of homeschooling aspects, they sometimes “appraised” the same situation to be frustrating, yet and other times, flourishing. The same event, depending on situational context and personal coping abilities (secondary appraisal), could “make or break” the homeschooling process for that day.

This heuristic inquiry revealed that many of the stresses mentioned, in a different light, could strengthen the homeschooling experience. The five major stressors cited in this study are actually allayed by what I believe to be a correlating stress-reducer or flourisher. Figure 7 summarizes these inextricably linked sides of home education below.
Responsibility vs. Control

Co-researchers in this study felt an enormous responsibility to ensure that their children were receiving a quality education. In a twist of culture, these home educators are adding another charge to parenthood; one that has for many years been regarded as the responsibility of public or private traditional educators. Feelings of insecurity lurked in the shadows for many home educators as they innately compared their children’s educational experience to those attending traditional school. This responsibility felt very heavy at different times and seemed to increase as children get older and their academic needs become more complex.
This responsibility can be understood in light of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory. Home educators alone offer the social context that provides learning that leads development, unlike those who send their children to traditional or private school, where instruction is shared. Additionally, a home educator understands their obligation to translate lower learning functioning into more highly developed learning functions that underpin Vygotsky’s theory of learning. These are heavy implications for highly trained educators, much more for home educators.

Conversely, on the flourishing side of home education, having the control that this responsibility brings is empowering to the home educator. The co-researchers in this study loved the freedom that they experience in home education – the ability to “do what they want”. The chains of schedule, perceived traditional teacher inadequacies or peculiarities, as well as undesirable environments for their children, are all elements that home educators don’t stress about. This freedom allows home educators to choose the social context that their children are exposed to, providing purposeful and strategic modeling opportunities that Bandura (1986) espoused in social cognitive theory. However, this control clearly cannot be experienced without the substantial responsibility that accompanies a choice to home educate.

**The Struggle of Behavior/Motivation vs. Teachable Poignant Moments**

Personally, I understand and empathize with the co-researchers and their struggle to deal with disappointing behavior and motivation while educating their children. It is likely the most discouraging area in home education. Misbehavior, and the time and effort needed to handle discipline and correction, has been linked to emotional exhaustion and distress in traditional educators as well (Kokkinos, 2007; Tsouloupas et al., 2010).
Unique to homeschooling, a home educator also plays the parental role and thus, is more culpable in the discipline and correction process. Whereas a traditional educator may simply “wait it out” and make it till the next period, the home educator experiences behavioral issues in the context of both parent and educator. One co-researcher said it the following way:

And you know, if I only had the children home 3 hours a day, I could probably make it through most days and not snap…but, instead I’m with them 16 hours a day and sometimes I snap.

Perhaps one underlying frustration with our children’s behavior is that it reveals our own inadequacies in patient correction and discipline. Ozdemir (2007) found that educators with low classroom management efficacy are prone to burnout. Similarly, a home educator’s inability to deal with misbehavior can also be stressful. A family unit usually functions with an honesty that does not translate in other areas. While teaching in a traditional school, social pressure constrains my frustration and inclination to obvious disappointment and discouragement. On the other hand, my family knows my best and worst sides. My children also know how to “push my buttons” more than 25 comparable strangers. In effect, I am armed with social stigma and responsibility in a traditional classroom that sometimes dissolves in the face of my own children. I believe this underlying stress is unique to the homeschooling process.

Ryle (2007) is quoted as saying, “The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay; the same sun which makes the living tree grow, dries up the dead tree, and prepares it for burning” (p. 210). The truth of Ryle’s statement resonates in this homeschooling tension. Surely, the drain of visible, negative, behavior and motivation is mitigated by the
intimate, life-giving rebukes that Proverbs 15:31 speaks of: “He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.” The co-researchers in this study found themselves buoyed by the platform home education provides to speak into their children’s hearts and lives.

Interestingly, the very things that frustrated each co-researcher also provided the platform for them to interact with their children in a passionate and personal way. These instances paved the way for the discipleship and mentoring process that is so valuable to these home educators. Additionally, the joy of learning together, couched in the mundane moments of everyday life, was very encouraging to the co-researchers. Vygotsky (1986) stated, “as a child begins to practice with respect to himself, the same forms of behaviors that others formerly practiced with respect to him, he has internalized the behavior and concept” (p. 39). Homeschool parents resonate with this underlying principle of sociocultural theory. Home education affords parents the ability to model a Biblical worldview, to know their children intimately, to expose negative and sinful attitudes, create unity, and be part of the learning process. This opportunity seemed to abate the stress of misbehavior and discipline.

**Curriculum Choice vs. The Right Curriculum**

It is easy to see the dichotomy of this important part of the home education. The co-researchers enthusiastically agreed that finding the right curriculum for your family is one of the most significant decisions that a home educator makes. The availability of information on the World Wide Web has provided both a conduit and curse for choosing curriculum. There is an abundance of options for homeschooling curriculum, making it
difficult for a novice home educator to choose. This stressor is especially notable during the early years of home education.

Traditional schools often have a team of dedicated curriculum specialists to assist with this portion of the educational process. These individuals focus on finding a fit for a large group of students to help meet their learning needs. In contrast, most home educators are untrained in such a specialized area as curriculum choice. This can often be overwhelming to home educators who feel insecure in discerning these types of educational decisions.

After a homeschooling family finds the right curriculum, this stressor promptly moves to the flourishing side of home education. Consider Melinda’s comments:

My child was really struggling to understand the Math curriculum that came with Sonlight. I didn’t know anything about Math curriculums, but I knew this one wasn’t working. After talking with some other homeschooling moms, I found another one that had worked for children who were struggling the same way that my daughter was. I ordered Math-U-See, and it’s been smooth sailing ever since. If she were in traditional school, we would have to keep plugging away at something that wasn’t working for her. The right curriculum made all the difference for her.

In the above situation, Melinda provided a clear example of Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) appraisal theory. The co-researchers felt that homeschooling became a highly stressful process when they utilized a curriculum that did not work. Using primary appraisal, Melinda assessed the situation’s significance to their homeschooling “well-being”. Secondary appraisal allowed Melinda to evaluate her ability to deal with the
situation created by the problematic curriculum. By changing curriculums, Melinda reduced the amount of stress in her homeschooling experience.

Home education allows for individualized learning and management of learning difficulties. Unencumbered by school demands, home educators have more freedom to meet their children’s needs with different teaching methods, curriculum, or presentation (Ray, 2002). Curriculum choice at the onset of homeschooling can be highly stressful. However, each co-research concluded that the right curriculum provided an essential foundation a thriving home education experience.

**Stereotypes and Stigmas vs. The Right People’s Opinions**

Bandura (1986) believed that social learning is rooted in symbolization. Additionally, he also believed that people are “self-reactors with a capacity for self-direction” (p. 168). As home educators choose to go outside the mainstream and provide different opportunities for their children academically, they are sure to encounter opposing views regarding their decision. This proved to be a struggle for many co-researchers, ranging from odd looks at the grocery store to unofficial “testing” of the children’s academic prowess by relatives or friends. These interactions ebbed away at a home educator’s confidence and caused them to feel defensive regarding their choice of education.

Making the choice to home educate is a very personal one. As the co-researchers interacted with others regarding this decision, opposing views and opinions affected their outlook regarding home education. Bandura stated that self-direction serves as a “major guide, motivator, and deterrent. People do things that give them self-satisfaction and self-worth, and refrain from behaving in ways that produce self-censure” (p. 168). As co-
researchers spoke, it was clear that their choice to home educate stemmed from a highly
developed value and belief system. Many times, they felt the awkwardness that
accompanied interactions with others who could not understand this educational path.
Unique to the homeschool experience, home educators feel the need to justify why they
have made the decision to homeschool, unlike parents who send their children to
traditional school.

Conversely, I was struck by the weight with which the opinions of the right
people could encourage and breathe life into a home educator. The empathy and strength
of a supportive spouse is crucial to the family’s success in education and unity.
Additionally, every co-researcher remarked that other home educators were a significant
source of help and inspiration and contributed to a flourishing educational endeavor. The
negative perception of others who were distantly connected (if at all) could be
discouraging, but every co-researcher had people they could go to for reassurance and
support as they home schooled their children. This may account for the growth of
encouragement or support groups for home educators around the United States. The
findings of this study suggest that such a group, whether living abroad or in the United
States may help reduce stress in home educators.

Distractions and Extras vs. The Homeschool Community

The numerous distractions that occur as home educators teach their children were
notably discouraging and stressful. Many of the co-researchers in this study have small
children who are not yet school age, often making it necessary to teach around nap and
feeding times. If, for any reason, those windows of teaching closed, a home educator
often found herself falling behind in their schooling. Furthermore, there is sometimes the
perception that a homeschooling family is always available. Anna, the co-researcher of older children, has found that people often ask her daughter to babysit during the day, making the assumption that she’s free.

The co-researchers also agreed that the effort that a home educator puts forth for extracurricular activities often created more stress they were worth. Having courses like Drama, Art, and Physical Education incorporated into the school day is normal in a traditional school setting. For most home educators to participate in these kinds of activities, they must commit and drive to another location to take part in them. The co-researchers felt that, in particular, if other core subjects were not completed, these kinds of activities created a significant amount of stress in the home education experience.

In my interaction with the data, I once again found that this particular stress had roots in a flourishing aspect of home education. Homeschool co-ops, where many of the extracurricular activities took place, were a great source of encouragement to home educators, especially those who were new to homeschooling. These settings and “extras” are also activities that home-educated students really enjoy, providing an often needed “win” for the home educator. Additionally, home educators understand that they are not the “competent adults” in every area that Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development suggested for optimal learning. Surrounding themselves with people who can facilitate learning in unique disciplines contributes to greater learning (Vygotsky, 1978). In the case of home education, it can also alleviate stress. I remember many times, the attitude change in my children after Art class or Gymnastics. These types of events might not have been easy to get to, but the fun that it brought into my children’s lives usually relieved stress in mine.
Bandura (2003) noted the power of social support in social cognitive theory. He stated “enabling social supporters can raise personal efficacy by modeling effective coping strategies for managing difficult situations. This demonstrates the value of perseverance and provides positive incentives and resources for efficacious coping” (p. 171). The strength the co-researchers received amongst other home educators was essential to a positive homeschooling environment.

Many co-researchers reflected on the “seasons” that a homeschooling family experiences at different times in home education. The same activity, considered stressful at one point in the home education journey, can be flourishing at another time. As one co-researcher said, “Every year we have to re-evaluate what we can and cannot do”. This particular finding of this heuristic inquiry stresses the discernment and discretion that a home educator must have in order to foster a thriving home education experience.

**Implications in Light of Relevant Literature**

Jane, the one co-researcher who stated that she “did not choose” homeschooling for her family, exhibits frustration and often feels that homeschooling is “very stressful for her”. This correlates with McDowell’s (2000) research regarding the profound impact that motivation plays in the homeschooling experience. In McDowell’s case, the two participants who felt “forced” into homeschooling exhibited greater stress and bitterness toward the entire educational process, much as Jane does, even while exhibiting great commitment to it. This suggests that if homeschooling is an intrinsic decision, it is more likely that the home educator will experience less stress. However, home educators who choose homeschooling for external reasons, or as a last resort, tend to exhibit stressful and unhealthy levels of coping.
During this research process, I interviewed Dr. Susan McDowell, author of the research cited throughout this paper. Her work was the only homeschooling specific research related to stress that a home educator experiences. As we spoke, she mentioned her use of the word “feminist”, which she cleverly attributed to home schooling mothers. Ironically, she felt as though home educators (mothers only in this case) embodied the true definition of feminism and found them to be “passionate about the education of their children, highly informed concerning their legal rights and obligations, unhesitatingly vocal in their opposition to any perceived infringement on or lessening of these rights, and generally suspicious and untrusting of established institutions” (McDowell, 2000, p. 2).

McDowell spoke of the negative reaction of this label by the Christian Homeschooling Community regarding her published work. While not the stereotype normally attributed to home educators, this inquiry provided experiences with home educators that affirmed McDowell’s characterization of many homeschooling mothers. Consider Anna’s remarks regarding the removal of her son from what she perceived to be a detrimental learning environment for him:

When I think about stress level…the day we pulled Gil out of that Spanish class, I felt liberated…I was no longer trying to help him follow this teacher’s assignments or logic, and I was like, “Whoo Hoo! We got off that roller coaster!” And that is what has kept us from going back. I mean, obviously there were a lot of reasons over the course of the year, and she’s continued to give me reasons over this year. I’m thankful that I had the discernment to not put Anna in that
class even when we were assured that everything would be different. Yeah, that having the control can feel liberating at times.

The co-researchers in this study were formidable women who took home education seriously. Their commitment to providing a quality, unique, and purposeful learning experience exhibited unrivaled strength, correlating with McDowell’s (2000) vision of feminism in the context of education.

**Limitations**

In considering the limitations of this study, my relationship with the co-researchers is noteworthy. Moustakas (1990) stated “one must create an atmosphere of openness and trust, and a connection with the other that will inspire that person to share his or her experience in unqualified, free, and unrestrained disclosures” (The Internal Frame of Reference, para. 2). During the past ten years, it has been my privilege to consider many of these participants both friends and homeschooling colleagues. As a friend, I have been an unofficial confidante and listening ear over coffee, soccer games and church. In a counseling setting, this dynamic is a “dual relationship”, where a therapist is involved with a client in a different capacity than counseling. Bourdeau (2000) argued that therapy and qualitative research often mimic each other, both procedurally and philosophically. As I considered compelling participants for this study, I believed that my insight and knowledge of these particular home educators would strengthen this study. In order to corroborate this study’s findings, I utilized a triangulation approach for my data collection to ensure diversity and quality in the research (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007).
One limitation of this study is the selection of the co-researchers involved. As the primary researcher, the study is limited to my impressions and assumptions of people I selected to contribute to this heuristic inquiry. Also noteworthy, the co-researchers in this study were all living outside of the United States, though they had privileges afforded them that were very “American” in nature (on-base food and materials, restaurants and U.S. Postal service to name a few). Still, they lived and home educated outside the United States, and this aspect of the study cannot be ignored and may render this study less transferable to other homeschooling populations. In addition to this characteristic of the co-researchers, this study incorporates my perception and beliefs of who would be the best voice for this topic.

Another limitation of this study is the use of the Occupational-Stress Inventory in relation to stress in the home education process. While the OSI-R results did support findings with the other data collection methods, the assessment was originally designed for stress in the workplace and stressors unique to that environment. The co-researchers in this study had to equate home education with their “occupation” to understand and effectively complete the test measurement. I believed that this stress inventory was the best assessment tool available for this research study and while it was not a perfect fit, it played a corroborating role in the data collection and analysis. For future research regarding stress that home educators experience, a researcher-developed tool may be a worthy consideration.

Additionally, the co-researchers in this study were all evangelical Christians whose motivation to home educate centered on providing an education with a Biblical worldview. Home education for each co-researcher was less about education than it was
about discipleship and mentoring of their children. The results of this study reflect this ethos, and stressors of home educators who are motivated by other factors, will most likely differ than the results presented here. Further studies that incorporate parents with primary motivations, other than the co-researchers in this study, will add more to the research considering stress in home education.

**Trustworthiness**

In addressing the trustworthiness of this study, I was mindful of the areas of credibility, dependability and transferability throughout the research process. Moustakas (1990) uses the term “verification” in reference to credibility in heuristic inquiries. This research study sought credibility by returning to the co-researchers and sharing the results of my reflection and analysis of the data received, and “seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy” (Moustakas, 1990, “The Validation of Heuristic Research”, para.4). Throughout the process, I spoke with each co-researcher and asked for feedback regarding what I believed were the most common and poignant themes of this researcher. Each concurred with what I had assessed and felt as though I had correctly characterized their contribution. This process mimics the data analysis process of member checking, but allows for multiple considerations until both the co-researcher and primary researcher feel that the data has been saturated.

Transferability refers to the possibility of the current findings being applicable and relative to other contexts. Throughout this research, the inter-connectedness of home educators was remarkable. While every story is unique, the common thread of home education runs deep throughout this community of educators, giving them a unique ability to empathize, connect, and identify with each other. When discussing my research
with friends who homeschool, but were not part of this project, their interest and excitement over the topic and study results was palpable. Anna, a home educator for ten years, shared the following story of this unique connection within the homeschool community.

I know when our children were younger…we would be out and about and I would see a family and my first thought would be, “I wonder if they homeschool”…not even, “I wonder if they’re Christians”. Somehow you can identify those that have that in common with you…by the way that they are relating to each other. My husband and I will periodically discuss it and ask ourselves ”Why are we drawn to those people?” or ”Why do we think that they homeschool?” There’s something there that we connect with and can even tell from a distance.

It is my belief that the home education community maintains a distinct “culture” that makes this study very transferable. In my personal ministry of counseling to home schooling families, I have found that the findings of this study “ring true” in the lives of home educators not involved in this study. McDowell (2000) found that similar results in both stressors and flourishing factors that home educators experience.

Ideas for Future Research

Personality

Throughout this research, a major theme that kept reoccurring was the idea that personality types would lend important information to this subject. Studies regarding traditional educators have shed light on themes of personality and their perception of effective instruction (Kneipp, Kelly, Biscoe & Richard, 2010). During the focus group, I watched some home educators cringe while another explained a particular stressor in
their homeschooling experience. Examination of the transcripts revealed strong and variant personality types through the typewritten words. While some co-researchers strongly felt the fear of others opinions of their homeschooling decision, others cared very little. Co-researchers who describe themselves as “Type A” seemed to struggle differently than their “Type B” counterparts. Consider Jane’s inner struggle:

I think my number one stressor actually comes down to high expectations on myself, and then not meeting them because I add other things or I lose my cool with them [the children]. Usually because my expectations are so high that nobody is meeting them. I don’t think that they can be met and I put them on my children, I put them on myself, just in life. Like, I don’t think I would ever have a day that meets where I want to be as a Mom or a teacher, and then I beat myself up. Yeah, it looks like, I know what I need to get done, then I add something and get stressed, maybe lose my cool and then I feel like, because I’ve already failed…like it feels like the day is already ruined and I finish out the day, but I’m like, well, chalk this day up as a loss. It’s probably more of a personal not meeting my own expectations…I don’t know if the children notice as much as I do, but I hope not. I think I’m just more neurotic. I mean, really, I think I just stress out, more about, not just homeschooling, it’s just anything…I don’t know why I’m like that but I am.

For Jane, perhaps her perfectionistic tendencies would cause her to struggle, no matter what the experience was. It is difficult to understand her unique homeschooling stress because some of these strong personality traits infiltrate every area of her life.
It would be interesting to conduct research concerning introversion and extroversion personality traits of home educators. Sears and Kennedy (1997) and Kneipp et al. (2010) hypothesized that extroversion would significantly predict a perception of higher instructional quality. However, both studies revealed that introversion and extroversion did not show any significant results regarding educators perceived as successful. It may be that home educators part ways with these results. Traditional educators can most likely count on some alone time, thus energizing the introverted teacher for the next class. A home educator is with her children all day and rarely afforded the quiet and peaceful time that some more introverted people may need. It would be helpful to this topic of stress in home education to consider homeschooling stressors in light of personality types to provide a more focused insight into this phenomenon.

Feedback

Another area that warrants further exploration in light of these findings involves the idea of feedback for the home educator. In considering the data from this study, I often found myself thinking that these co-researchers received little, if any, objective feedback regarding their progress in the home education process. I believe this is why so many of them find comfort within the homeschooling community. Surely home educators find like-minded ideas, encouragement and empathy in that context, but what about honest or constructive feedback? Outside of other home educators, the only other venue where the co-researchers seemed to get feedback was with their spouses, and yet this relationship did not seem the most conducive for this type of communication. Consider the dialogue from the focus group regarding feedback from spouses:
Melinda: It’s easy to take any input or criticism really personally.

Ginger: My husband’s input, it’s really the only input…you don’t get any feedback from anybody except your children, who gripe about every step…and then if he [my husband] says anything about it, I think, “well, that’s it, it be true cause that’s the only input I really get”

Anna: Like I mentioned, I had a year with a non-supportive husband because of his work. He also has a tendency to be very critical…probably not intentionally, but I do take it personally. So when he attacks what I’m doing in homeschool, I’m like, ‘Well wait a minute!”

Cindy: Even if he just reflects on what I’m doing, I tend to take it as an attack, you know what I mean? I mean, even if they’re really trying to be very constructive, I immediately feel like, “What? Fine! You do it then!”

[The Group collectively and enthusiastically agrees]: Right! Yeah!

As home education continues to grow and become increasingly viable for families around the world, an avenue for constructive and honest feedback will become increasingly more important.

**Context**

Though the co-researchers in this study were all U.S. citizens, they all resided outside the United States during the time of this research. It would add to the literature regarding stress that home educators face if a study similar to this one involved home educators residing in the United States. This would help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of unique stressors that home educators experience.
Conclusion and Creative Synthesis

This heuristic inquiry has provided a much-needed in-depth look at the unique stressors that home educators experience. Furthermore, this study considered flourishing factors that strengthen home educators in light of these unique stressors. These findings add to the relatively small research conducted on home educators. It is my fervent hope that these findings will provide insight to those concerned with the field of home education and continue its journey as a remarkable educational alternative for families around the world.

Creative Synthesis

The conclusion of a heuristic inquiry research design includes a creative synthesis where the primary researcher produces an original literary piece that describes the inquiry experience. Moustakas (1990) explained that the creative synthesis invites “a recognition of tacit-intuitive awareness of the researcher and knowledge that has been incubating over the months of research” (“Outline Guide for Procedures of Analysis of Data, para. 8). To end this heuristic inquiry into the stressors and flourishing factors of home education, I submit this charge to Home Educators with the hope of inspiring them toward a rewarding, steadfast educational experience as they lead their children with grace and dignity.
Home Education Charge

Surely

Surely, there will be moments of frustration – but they will be shadowed by poignant ones of learning and discipline.

Surely, the times of exasperation will be exchanged with hopeful years of peace as you diligently train your children.

Surely, your fearful decision making will be one day become the wise counsel you pass on to another.

Surely, that doubting look from another will be dissolved in the strength of those who support you.

Surely, the distractions and activities of today can be your joy tomorrow.

Surely, these momentary struggles mask your greatest strengths.

Surely, your hope is in the One who can “turn your grief into joy, your mourning into dancing” (Psalm 30:11)

Surely, to God alone be the glory, great things He has done...and will do!
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November 15, 2011

Jennifer Rathmell
IRB Approval 1184.111511: A Heuristic Inquiry into the Stress that Homeschool Families Experience

Dear Jennifer,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
IRB Chair, Associate Professor
Center for Counseling & Family Studies

(434) 592-5054
APPENDIX B. Letter of Invitation

Jennifer Rathmell  
178/697 Soi. 28 T. Hang Dong  
World Club Land  
Chiang Mai, Thailand 50330

Dear ____ (Participant)____,

As part of the requirements of the Ed.D. Doctoral program at Liberty University, I am conducting research regarding the stress that families incur while homeschooling. This study will involve participation through the completion of a questionnaire, the Occupational Stress Inventory-Revised (online at www.sigmatesting.com), a focus group and a personal interview. Your participation in this research study will be used to formulate common stressors that home school families experience through the process of home education.

Please review the following informed consent to indicate your involvement in this study. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and every effort will be made in this research to maintain the highest of confidentiality throughout the study. Thank you for your participation and I look forward to working with you.

Jennifer Rathmell  
178/697 Soi. 28 T. Hang Dong  
World Club Land  
Chiang Mai, Thailand 50230  
US Phone: 1-540-322-2721
APPENDIX C. Informed Consent

Letter of Consent to Participate

A Heuristic Inquiry into the Stress that Homeschool Families Experience
Jennifer L. Rathmell
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study considering various aspects of stress as it presents in the context of homeschooling. You were selected as a possible participant because of your willingness to speak honestly and openly about this aspect of home education. Your thoughts and insight will prove valuable to this study as it seeks to broaden the body of knowledge in this area of education. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Jennifer L. Rathmell, Principal Investigator, Liberty University Doctoral Student.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to explore various aspects of stress in the homeschooling context, and in particular, as to its impact on the family unit. While there is a great deal of information and research regarding the academic benefits to home education, there is little research regarding the stress that homeschooling adds (or subtracts) the family. In considering home education, families restructure their lives with the added element of education. This research study seeks to understand more directly how homeschooling affects the family in stressful ways. While many informal venues speak to this topic (blogs, e-zines, etc.), this will be, to my knowledge, the first official research done regarding this aspect of home education in over 10 years.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a Homeschooling Questionnaire
2. Complete the Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised Stress Assessment on line.
3. A focus group with 6-11 other home educators.
4. Participate in an interview with the researcher
Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study contains minimal risk, meaning that it offers no more risk than you might encounter in everyday life. It is hoped that this study will shed light on the honest and true aspects of homeschooling, and in particular, how it impacts the family unit. All information will be held confidential.

The benefits of participation in this study are largely altruistic in nature. Each participant will become a co-researcher who will assist the primary researcher by adding to a very limited body of knowledge that is currently available to the homeschooling community. It is hoped that this study will discover more information relating to stress in homeschooling mothers, in an effort to provide a more comprehensive and helpful response to those who may be in need.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report the researcher might publish, she will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Each interview will be recorded for data purposes, but after transcription, the digital recording (and transcribed portion) will be stored in a locked safe for three years and destroyed thereafter.

Information regarding the security of Skype phone calls: The online communication system (SKYPE) will be used for any interaction that cannot be handled face to face. This will most likely concern the individual interviews after the focus group. Skype uses encryption, digital credentials and an independent security review to maintain the utmost confidentiality and privacy within their system. While there is no 100% security, you can be sure that the information that is transmitted and communicated on Skype is as secure as possible. (See http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/security/detailed-security/ for more information). The conversation will be recorded and transcribed, and stored in a locked safe & password-protected file on the primary researcher’s computer.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with Liberty University or the primary researcher.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer L. Rathmell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at: 178/161 Soi. 6 Hang Dong, Chiang Mai, Thailand, (US Phone: 1-540-322-2721), or jlrathmell@liberty.edu

Additionally, you may contact the Chair of this Research Project, Dr. Gail Collins at: glcollins@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ______________
APPENDIX D. Home Schooling Informational Questionnaire

1. Please list your children by sex and age.
   1. Child’s Sex: M/ F, Age: _____
   2. Child’s Sex: M/ F, Age: _____
   3. Child’s Sex: M/ F, Age: _____
   4. Child’s Sex: M/ F, Age: _____
   5. Child’s Sex: M/ F, Age: _____

2. How long have you home schooled your children?

3. Have you home schooled all your children? _____ yes _____ no
   a. If not, why have you home schooled some and not others?

4. How were you introduced to home schooling?

5. Have your children ever attended another form of schooling?
   _____ yes _____ no
   a. If yes, was it:
      _____ a public school
      _____ a private school
      _____ a charter school
      _____ some other form of schooling; what was it? ________________________

6. What do you consider your top three reasons for home schooling your children?

7. What do you, as an adult, enjoy about home schooling?

8. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being “dislikes completely” and 10 being “likes completely”), how much do your children enjoy homeschooling?
9. Do you see any negative effects to home schooling on your children?
   _____ yes _____ no
   a. If yes, what are they?

10. As an adult, what do you enjoy least about home schooling?

11. What does your child enjoy least about home schooling? List each separately.
   a. What do you think your child enjoys most about homeschooling?

12. What concerns do you have about home schooling?

13. Are there other families that you home school with? _____ yes _____ no
   a. If yes, how many? ________________________________________________

14. Where do you home school your children?
   _____ kitchen _____ family room _____ bedroom _____ special schoolroom
   _____ other (describe: ________________________________)

15. Is there a time period specifically set apart for school? _____ yes _____ no
   a. If yes, what is it? ________________________________________________

16. Is there a time limit? _____ yes _____ no
   a. If yes, what is it? ________________________________________________

17. Is there a daily schedule? _____ yes _____ no
   a. If yes, what is it? ________________________________________________

18. What are some ways you motivate your children to learn and complete their work?

19. Do you teach all the subjects to your children? _____ yes _____ no
   a. If no, who teaches the rest?
   b. What subjects are they?

20. What are some strategies that you use to present the material?
21. What was important to you regarding your choice of curriculum for your children?

22. Are you presently linked with some other form of schooling in addition to home schooling?

_____ yes _____ no If yes, why?
APPENDIX E. Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised (OSI-R)

Section One (ORQ) Make your ratings in Section One of the Rating Sheet

1. At work I am expected to do too many different tasks in toolittle time. 13. I am bored with my job.

2. I feel that my job responsibilities are increasing. 14. I feel I have enough responsibility on my job.

3. I am expected to perform tasks on my job for which I have not been trained. 15. My talents are being used on my job.

4. I have to take my work home with me. 16. My job has a good future.

5. I have the resources I need to get my. job done. 17. I am able to satisfy my needs for success and recognition in my job.

6. I’m good at my job. 18. I feel overqualified for my job.

7. I work under tight time deadlines. 19. I learn new skills in my work.

8. I wish that I had more help to deal with the demands placed upon me at work. 20. I have the to perform tasks that are beneath my ability.

9. My job requires me to work in several equally important areas at once. 21. My supervisor provides me with useful feedback about my performance.

10. I am expected to do more work than is reasonable. 22. It is clear to me what I have to do to get ahead.

11. My career is progressing about as I hoped it would. 23. I am uncertain about what I am supposed to accomplish in my work.

12. My job fits my skills and interests. 24. When faced with several tasks I know which should be done first.

13. I am bored with my job. 25. I know where to begin a new project when it is assigned to me.
26. My supervisor asks for one thing, but really wants another.

27. I understand what is acceptable personal behavior on my job (e.g., dress, interpersonal relations, etc.)

28. The priorities of my job are clear to me.

29. I have a clear understanding of how my boss wants me to spend my time.

30. I know the basis on which I am evaluated.

31. I feel conflict between what my employer expects me to do and what I think is right to do.

32. I feel caught between factions as work.

33. I have more than one person telling me what to do.

34. I know where I fit in my organization.

35. I feel good about the work I do.

36. My supervisors have conflicting ideas about what I should be doing.

37. My job requires working with individuals from several different departments.

38. It is clear who really runs things where I work.

39. I have divided loyalties on my job.

40. I frequently disagree with individuals from other work units or departments.

41. I spend time concerned with the problems others at work bring to me.

42. I am responsible for the welfare of subordinates.

43. People on the job look to me for leadership.

44. I have on-the-job responsibility for the activities of others.

45. I worry about whether the people who work for/with me will get things done properly.

46. My job requires me to make important decisions.

47. If I make a mistake at work, the consequences for others can be pretty bad.

48. I worry about meeting my job responsibilities.

49. I like the people I work with.

50. On my job I am exposed to high levels of noise.

51. On my job I am exposed to high levels of wetness.

52. On my job I am exposed to high levels of dust.

53. On my job I am exposed to temperature extremes.

54. On my job I am exposed to bright light.

55. I deal with more people during the day than I prefer.
56. My job is physically dangerous.  
57. I have an erratic work schedule.  
58. I work all by myself.

59. On my job I am exposed to unpleasant odors.  
60. On my job I am exposed to poisonous substances.

Section Two (PSQ)

Make your ratings in Section Two of the Rating Sheet

1. I don’t seem to be able to get much done at work.  
2. Lately, I dread going to work.  
3. I am bored with my work.  
4. I find myself getting behind in my work, lately.  
5. I have accidents on the job of late.  
6. The quality of my work is good.  
7. Recently, I have been absent from my work.  
8. I find my work interesting and/or exciting.  
9. I can concentrate on the things I need to do at work.  
10. I make errors or mistakes in my work.  
11. Lately, I am easily irritated.  
12. Lately, I have been depressed.  
13. Lately, I have been feeling anxious.  
14. I have been happy, lately.  
15. So many thoughts run through my head at night that I have trouble falling asleep.  
16. Lately, I respond badly in situations that normally wouldn’t bother me.  
17. I find myself complaining about little things.  
18. Lately, I have been worrying.  
19. I have a good sense of humor.  
20. Things are going about as they should work.  
21. I wish I had more time to spend with close friends.  
22. I often quarrel with the person closest to me.  
23. I often argue with friends.  
24. My spouse and I are happy together.  
25. Lately, I do things by myself instead of with other people.  
26. I quarrel with members of the family.
27. Lately, my relationships with people are good.

28. I find that I need time to myself to work out my problems.

29. Lately, I am worried about how others at work view me.

30. I have been withdrawing from people lately.

31. I have unplanned weight gains.

32. My eating habits are erratic.

33. I find myself drinking a lot lately.

34. Lately, I have been tired.

35. I have been feeling tense.

36. I have trouble falling and staying asleep.

37. I have aches and pains I cannot explain.

38. I eat the wrong foods.

39. I feel well.

40. I have lots of energy lately.

### Section Three (PRQ)

**Make your ratings in Section Three of the Rating Sheet**

1. When I need a vacation I take one.

2. I am able to do what I want to do in free time.

3. On weekends I spend time doing the things I enjoy most.

4. I hardly ever watch television.

5. A lot of my free time is spent attending performances (e.g., sporting events, theater, movies, concerts, etc.)

6. I spend a lot of my free time in participant activities (e.g. sports, music, painting, woodworking, sewing, etc.)

7. I set aside time to do the things I really enjoy.

8. When I’m relaxing, I frequently think about work.

9. I spend enough time in recreational activities to satisfy my needs.

10. I spend a lot of my free time on hobbies (e.g., collections of various kinds, etc.)

11. I am careful about my diet (e.g. eating regularly, moderately, and with good nutrition in mind.)

12. I get regular physical checkups.
13. I avoid excessive use of alcohol.
14. I exercise regularly (at least 20 min, 3 times a week.)
15. I practice “relaxation” techniques.
16. I get the sleep I need.
17. I avoid eating or drinking things I know are unhealthy (e.g., coffee, tea, cigarettes, etc.)
18. I engage in meditation.
19. I practice deep breathing exercises a few minutes several times a day.
20. I floss my teeth regularly.
21. There is at least one person important to me who values me.
22. I have help with tasks around the house.
23. I have help with the important things that have to be done.
24. There is at least one sympathetic person with whom I can discuss my concerns.
25. There is at least one sympathetic person with whom I can discuss my work problems.
26. I feel I have at least one good friend I can count on.
27. I have a circle of friends who value me.
28. If I need help at work, I know who to approach.
29. I am able to put my job out of my mind when I go home.
30. I feel that there are other jobs I could do besides my current one.
31. I periodically reexamine or reorganize my work style and schedule.
32. I can establish priorities for the use of my time.
33. Once they are set, I am able to stick to my priorities.
34. I have techniques to help avoid being distracted.
35. I can identify important elements of problems I encounter.
36. When faced with a problem I use a systematic approach.
37. When faced with the need to make a decision I try to think through the consequences of choices I might make.
38. I try to keep aware of important ways I behave and things I do.
39. I feel loved.
40. There is a person with whom I feel really close.
APPENDIX F. Sample Result of OSI-R Assessment
OSI-R™ Profile for

Occupational Role Questionnaire (ORQ)

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Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ)

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Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ)

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<th>Combined T score 40 50 60 70 80</th>
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OSI-R™ Profile Description

The charts above list this individual's raw scores for each of the OSI-R™ scales, followed by standardized T scores that first compare this individual's scores to those of the males in the main OSI-R™ normative sample, then the females in the normative sample, and finally to the entire combined normative sample. The combined T scores are also graphed. T scores are linear transformations of raw scores, derived to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.

Interpretation of T scores

For the ORQ and PSQ scales, high scores suggest significant levels of occupational stress and psychological strain, respectively. T scores at or above 70 indicate a strong probability of maladaptive stress, debilitating strain, or both. Scores in the range of 60-69 suggest mild levels of maladaptive stress and strain. Scores in the range of 40-59 are within one standard deviation of the mean and should be interpreted as being within normal range. Scores below 40 indicate a relative absence of occupational stress or psychological strain. For the PRQ scales, high scores indicate highly developed coping resources. For these scales, T scores below 30 indicate a significant lack of coping resources. Scores in the range of 30-39 suggest mild deficits in coping skills. Scores in the range of 40-49 indicate average coping resources, whereas higher scores indicate increasingly strong coping resources.

APPENDIX G. Sample Individual Interview Transcript

Date: November 22, 2011

A: Are we on the same time zone?

PI: No, we’re two hours behind…it’s only 9 here, I just dropped the children off at school…isn’t it so ironic that I’m doing this research on homeschooling?

A: Well, I think there’s a season for everything…this is just part of your journey.

PI: Yeah, and I wouldn’t be adverse to homeschooling again, I just happen to be in a really great situation so…

A: Yeah, so enjoy it! I think as homeschoolers, we can really appreciate what teachers do. While other parents might take it for granted, we can…

PI: Yeah, I thought that Laura made a really good point that about teachers having to only teach one class, and then they teach the same stuff to the next group of children and they don’t have to do as much “plate-spinning” as a homeschooling teacher does. I had not really thought of it as much as she had.

A: This is my third year teaching 1st grade, but it’s pretty routine. I went to the Abeka for Levi and once he has the phonics and reading skills, then I like to make the switch to Sonlight, and I dabble around a little bit.

PI: It was really interesting to type out the focus group…took a long time, almost 12 hours. I was tempted to outsource it, but it ended up really helping me hear everything because I listened to it about five times more than I would’ve. It was interesting to hear everyone again and study it and see the themes…I had such a good time.

A: Yeah, it was really good for me to listen and reflect…things about a slave to my curriculum…revisiting why I started this journey…encouraged to have more grace with
the children. And realizing that having a high school student makes you feel like you’re at a whole new level, because that responsibility…we have to do it right, because this is your transcript…colleges are going to be looking at this, and the reality is, again, that we are interested in the total child. And we need to be focused with the education, but there’s more to it than grades on the report card.

PI: And the pressure is a lot more intense…scholarships, etc.

A: Right..yes.

PI: What did you feel like were the prevailing themes of major stressors in homeschooling from the Focus Group?

A: The level of responsibility that we feel and perceive. And our perception really does become our reality. You know, in terms of being responsible for their education…that and the general feeling of feeling responsible for everything, and again, I don’t know how much of that is personality…I wonder how similar…there are a lot of different ways to homeschooling. I wonder what our personality type and our homeschooling type would look on paper. I think that was the overall theme.

PI: That’s what keeps coming up in those stress inventories..everyone peaks out at responsibility. It’s high…not abnormally high to the point where people would be labeled chronically stressed, but there’s a mild stress of responsibility. Which is kind of interesting, because as I was thinking about it, it seems tied to the issues of control. So if you get the control that you want, then you have to take the responsibility…that’s the sword that it comes with, ya know?

A: Yes! You know with the children part time in the school…it’s kind of allowed me to step back a little bit for those subjects and I think it’s been good, and at the same time, I
like not being responsible for part of their education. Obviously if we had a Christian
school that we could afford, I would probably be very open to that.

PI: It was really interesting as we delineated between stressors and flourishing aspects of
homeschooling, after talking about the stress of responsibility, what everyone seemed
really jazzed about was the idea that “we get to do what we want”.

A: Yep, the control…exactly.

PI: Seriously after Cassie said that, there were about 5 people saying, “Yep” “Um-
HMM”, in response to it. It was really interesting because I thought, these might be the
two major pieces…what helps you flourish is that you’re running the ship, but what can
sink the ship is that you’re running the ship!

A: Yeah, that’s true! Definitely!

PI: I kind of sat there thinking that in some ways, a homeschoolers biggest enemy is
themselves. I really think that stress in homeschooling occurs when people can’t handle
that tension. In some ways, that tension seems really good…people think, “Ok, I’ve taken
this risk…here I go” And everyone, save one or two, in that room is willing to take that
risk.

L; When I think about stress level…the day we pulled Gil out of that Spanish class, I felt
liberated…I was no longer trying to help him follow this Lady’s assignments or logic,
and I was like, “Whoo Hoo! We got off that roller coaster!” And that is what has kept us
from going back. I mean, obviously there were a lot of reasons over the course of the
year, and she’s continued to give me reasons over this year. I’m thankful that I had the
discernment to not put Anna in that class when we were assured that everything would be
different. Yeah, that having the control can be liberating at times, so yeah.
PI: It’s interesting, there was a lady who did research in homeschooling over 10 years ago and I found this research one night and she actually referred to homeschooled Mom’s as the most liberated Mom’s on the planet…they are actually willing to think outside the box…a stereotype of the “liberated woman”…I spoke with her and she said she really took a lot of heat from the Christian Homeschooling community because of the connotations that that term implies. But she said that as she studied these women, she realized that most of them are strong, liberated women, who are willing to take on the school piece of their child’s upbringing and are not afraid of it.

A: Yeah, like it’s ok if I’m different and I don’t have to be like you…certainly.

PI: I really resonated with that thought in the focus group. I kept thinking, these women are not afraid of much…it’s not like we were out there trumpeting causes, but they are confident women…what does confidence bring to the table…more things to be able to research about this… If you’re a confident woman, will you be more likely to take your kid out of school because you believe you can figure out the school piece?

A: Yes, I think homeschool Moms are changing..our CC group is becoming more diverse…we have Moms with tattoos! I mean, nothing against tattoos, but it’s much different than it has been…even in the last year.

PI: Well, talking about Classical Conversations is a good segue into some of the thoughts you wrote me about financial stresses that homeschooling families endure…do you see people in there that are stressed financially?

A: I see one Mom, and I think, man..this must be hard. CC for us is “only” $312 a year, but somebody who is moving back to the States because it’s over $1000 per child because the church where they meet charges a fee because they have to buy additional
liability insurance, which makes the fee higher. I do think that we’re in a place that has a “buffer”, because of things like that.

PI: And you have COLA!

A: Yeah, we don’t live on our COLA, but it’s hard…things have gotten more expensive and we’re eating more food…but I do wonder about those single moms or who work a job and homeschool or quit the job to homeschool. But I do believe that living on a budget makes you more “rich” than not doing so, but that and other health concerns. I wonder how people with chronic health problems would affect your stress level in homeschooling.

PI: What do you think of the homeschooling families that have home businesses?

A: I think it’s a great fit…if you can find something that your family enjoys. Living in the military makes it more difficult to do this, but it definitely could work.

PI: It seems that many homeschooling families (Moms) have a personality that is willing to take on a lot of things (school being one of them) that it can come back to bite you a little bit too. For instance, being the taxi driver homeschool Mom…taking your children to everything and anything. My friend that I reference in the Focus group…because she has the personality to take things on, plus having a lot of energy…she sometimes seems like she’s running a marathon, but then she crashes and burns.

A: And that to me is…(names a person we both know)..and I think it’s wonderful that she has that level of energy and thriving on all that, but the Dyers, we quickly learned that we do better with fewer activities…but you know, as they’ve gotten older…it’s a season and fortunately, cross country is over…and we cut out piano lessons this year, but we picked up a Japanese class for our 1st grader. It has been super helpful for us to get a tutor that
comes to our home in the evening for Spanish. That helps a lot. We were neighbors with (this friend) and sometimes I would be like, “Oh….I don’t know how you do it” and if we would have a really busy week, my children would say, “Mom…we’re acting like the ________! This is too much!”

PI: It does seem if people knew their energy levels before they got into it (homeschooling)…then you could coach homeschoolers about what they can and can’t do…and help people know what their margins might look like depending on their energy levels/personality. Kind of like preventive health care! 😊 But then you’ve got people like Laura who are like, “I don’t care! I don’t care…What people think!!”

A: Yeah, like shopping in the commissary, I’ve found that it’s really rare for me to not see other school-age children as well. It says to me that there’s more out there than you think. I don’t know how many there are in Okinawa.

PI: So could you just remind me what you would think are your personal top things for you that help you succeed and flourish as a home schooler?

A: I would say, a supportive husband. And no matter what happens, we feel like we’re walking in obedience with the Lord by homeschooling. And when we get frustrated we can say, “OK, this is where God has us”, and it brings great comfort. I do think the ability, the control, to make changes when I feel like we need to. I’m not stuck to trudge through the whole year with a curriculum that doesn’t seem to be working. Like I mentioned, I had a year with a non-supportive husband because of his work. he has a tendency to be very critical…probably not intentionally, but we do take it personally. So when someone attacks it, we’re like, ‘Well wait a minute”.

PI: Or even if they just reflect on it, I tend to take it as an attack, you know what I mean?
A: Right!

PI: Even if they’re being really normal, I’m like, “What!?? Fine! You do it then!”

A: That’s right, here!!

PI: So you would say number 1 is your husband being on board.

A: Yeah, because being in sync as a family is really important to us as a family as our
ship sails around the world….you know I think that control that brings that stress of
responsibility, but that control…Ya know…Friends…the relationships we have with
other homeschooling families. That Mom that we can e-mail or call, and you know, talk
through things, um…I think not that we…as Lew says, we don’t toss our net very far
from the shore/boat, so we’re happy with a few close relationships versus being out there
more visible and involved.

PI: I almost wonder, if you know…how when you meet military people and you can
connect with them right away (like the TCK thing) Have you read that?

A: Yeah, some of it.

PI: So, I almost think that homeschooling is a mini-sub group/culture like that because
you can sit down with a homeschooling family, and there’s so many things you can talk
about, so many buoy’s in the water…curriculum, “oh, I got frustrated with my
children”…there’s always the math harbinger…there’s just some real avenues to relating
on a quick, deep level.

A: I know when our children were younger…we would be out and about and I would see
a family and my first thought would be, “I wonder if they homeschool”…not even, “I
wonder if they’re Christians”. Somehow you can identify those that have that in common
with you by the way that they are relating to each other.
PI: Interesting point.

A: Lew and I will periodically discuss it. "Why are we drawn to those people”, "Why do we think that they homeschool?” . . . kind of discussing some of the stereotypes that we’ve encountered over the years. There’s something there that we connect with and can even tell from a distance.

PI: What are you going to do with your children as far as schooling when you move back to America next year?

A: We’ve looked into the private Christian school in Beaufort, and even the Classical education programs that are offered there. I contacted the board of Education there and talked with them about their standards and such. Ya know, I would really like to be a part of the solution to the education problem in our country. At this point, I just don’t feel led to sacrifice my children for it…it will be interesting to see where the Lord leads this year on the School Advisory Committee, the Spanish teacher is one of the two teacher representatives on the committee, and I find that interesting. (PI NOTE: This family had enrolled her child in a DODD Spanish class and had to remove them for questions regarding her propriety and educational acumen). I think the Lord is doing something there and I want to walk in obedience and see what happens.

PI: So are you not interested in the Classical Academy thing?

A: Yes, definitely, for Anna and Levi…but with Gil and his desire to play sports, this is our concern…there are not homeschool leagues like there are in some larger areas…we’re going to look into some private soccer clubs, and though it will cost, it will not be as expensive as the private Christian school that is $11,000 per student/per year.

PI: Oh my
A: So, ya know…if…if they had a job for me that would cover tuition for 3 children, I would entertain and look into it. Like I said with Lew, we said, “we’ll do what we need to do . . . if we need to just put Gil there, then we’ll find a way to make it work”

PI: Yeah, I know what you mean about finding a way to make it work. Thank you so much for talking with me and adding some really important points to this discussion. I really appreciate it.

A: No problem, it was my pleasure.
APPENDIX H. Master List of Codes

Research Question One - Master List of Codes

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<th>Focus Group &amp; Interviews</th>
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<td>Feedback – Royal Blue</td>
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<td>Exccurricular activities – Dark Blue</td>
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<td>Starting Out – Aqua</td>
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Research Question Two - Master List of Codes

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<td>Being a part of children’s education – Royal Blue</td>
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APPENDIX I. Sample Coding Pages

Melinda: I think one thing everyone feels is that homeschool moms feel responsible for feeding their children, cooking all the meals, keeping the house in order, educating their children, refereing arguments, providing social hour, play time, soccer mom. It's endless, there's no role that you do not have when you're a homeschool mom. You don't hand anything over to anyone...  

Emily: It's a one-stop shop. Everything happens under that roof...the whole day...and you have to be accountable for all of it, and make sure that everything happens, so that responsibility other people don't hold.  

Cindy: The huge thing for me is that my kids are all together all the time, and they're all at home. It is different than you would have when they are in school and they have time away from each other and then they come back together at the end of the day and it's kind of more...this is what happened, this is what happened and there's not as much fighting. But now it's all on the line. But then on the flourishing side, they are able to, they have to work it out because you can't live your whole day out like that. They have to get to the root and the heart of it. And it forces us to have to work on things and learn how to identify our own character issues, and you just want to point out other people's character issues. It's hard to think things through when you're in the moment, but also when you're looking back and you're reflecting on what happened when you're still young, you wish you would have handled it a little better and people don't always know how to handle it so when you're looking back, you're like...  

Ginger: I think for me too, it's like, because I'm their Mom and we know each other so well. I don't think they always work as hard for me as they would for a teacher. For me, my kids were in public school for a little bit and man, they worked their butts off for that teacher. You know? Whereas for me, they're like, "Do I have to do this." And it's like, "Yes, you do. You have to do this. And it's going to work out fine, you can figure it out, but it is work."

Anna: My daughter has a Biology test at home today, but she went to the DoDD's school [they go part-time, so they go on "A" days], but she wanted to be involved in Student Council and the National Junior Honor Society, so we let her go on this day to do those activities and that bake sale for that NHS was more important than studying for her Biology test and she never would have done that with one of her classes at school. We've also seen, we've had a positive relationship with the school but if we see something that's not right, we do go in and speak up. But we have seen, we struggle with the level of involvement, the expectation of home and their. Our curriculum is written for one lesson per day, but we have to do two lessons a day because the way that schedule works, and they think that two lessons a day is too much, and that it's not fair, but they have to do two lessons a day.  

Pl: So their "off" days, the days where they kind of relax, are the days they go to (traditional) school.  

Anna: Yes, yes...we had this conversation...fortunately we have a Spanish tutor who last night told them the benefits of homeschooling for them, the positive things they are learning by being pushed and gaining a hard work ethic. And Gil is kind of being pushed a little bit at school with some writing assignments, um, which I appreciate having someone else grade those. Because in my mind, he's at a certain level and as a parent you have an expectation, that maybe he's a "B" student when it comes to (writing)...to have that outside input has been helpful.  

Pl: They're willing to take it a little bit more?  

Anna: Definitely. From the second day they're not even willing, and they're 13 and 15, and then we have a 1st grader, and he's unique in himself.
Anna: Because of our involvement with the school, we've interacted with some people who have a perception of what homeschoolers are. I think sometimes dealing with that stigma/stereotype of what a homeschooler is, um...it is a stressor...it can be, but I tend to kind of smile and think, they said that out of ignorance and that's ok, they're not familiar with who we are. Like, "Oh, I don't know your children, but I heard they're very well socialized." Or "What? You're daughter is homeschooled...I never would've guessed!" That's a compliment, you know. These are from school teachers, and so we've really stressed that our children would be good ambassadors, which is part of our prayer for them is that they would be good ambassadors for homeschooling, especially in those environments. So maybe sometimes the stereotype/stigma, whether in the school or in the neighborhood, because we tend to live very closely to people and sometimes they're really curious for not the right reasons.

Ginger: I hate going to the store during homeschool time, because people are automatically, "homeschool"...I hate that...they're probably not even thinking that at all, but I still feel like...

Emily: See, I don't even care!

Ginger: I do care though...I don't want to care, but I do!

Cindy: I avoid it. I try not to go outside during school time...the kids want to go out and ride their bikes...and stuff and I'm like "just wait..." want to avoid the questions?

Emily: See, my thinking is, public school kids get recess, why shouldn't mine? They get breaks, they don't just sit at their desks for 12 hours. They get breaks and my kids deserve that also...they deserve to go out...I mean, when Cassie left our house, my kids were outside playing this morning. They deserve to be kids too...I don't care.

Melinda: I think a unique stressor is prejudice or pressure from your extended family, or maybe even your spouse if you're not on the same page, relatives. Just like what Lynda said, but closer to home.

Cindy: And sometimes you feel like you have to justify how well they're doing, or you want to say, "this is what we're studying..." because they are (s)omething questioning, "why are you doing this?" And so, but then I don't always justify it, but sometimes I feel like I need to, because they just don't understand.

Rachel: Not necessarily with my family, but with whoever, "how well they're doing" because people always have an opinion about it, one way or another, you're not sure which.
APPENDIX J: Sample Memoing

December 4, 2011

Continued reflections on the focus group:

It seems that homeschooling really is a stressor that everyone here chose (except Jane) for whatever reason. These women have invited, maybe even beckoned, the stressors that accompany homeschooling. At some point, the “pain” was greater to send their children to school than to homeschool.

Being able to teach the Bible, to know their kids so well and to teach what they want them to learn seems utopian. And maybe that’s ok... maybe that’s the way it should be. Maybe that’s what Deuteronomy 6 means when it says for parents to teach their children. So give them the very best — even though we’re racked with sin, and it will always be messed up.

I’m so interested by the idea that each of the co-researchers noted that homeschooling takes away:

- “what you think you deserve”
- “time away from the kids”
- “me time”

Each feels that they had been duped into thinking that they should get those things as part of the mothering process. I need to think more about that.

The one person (Jane) who did not choose homeschooling is most stressed. Hands down. I want to make a note to ask her why her non-believing husband is pushing homeschooling. With so many people choosing homeschooling because of a Biblical influence, hers is choosing it without any spiritual underpinnings.