

## Book Review

***Home is Where the School Is: The Logic of Homeschooling and the Emotional Labor of Mothering*, by Jennifer Lois. New York: New York University Press, 2013, 229 pages.**

In Jennifer Lois's (2013) book, *Home is Where the School Is: The Logic of Homeschooling and the Emotional Labor of Mothering*, she explains how homeschooling mothers actively engage intense emotional and discursive processes to combat the stigma they perceive from outsiders such as extended family members and school people. These processes "fit" social storylines that help mothers negotiate the challenges of their labor-intensive project of educating their children at home.

Homeschooling is an important phenomenon for scholars of family diversity to understand for a number of reasons. First, although homeschooling emerged in the 1970s, it is now the fastest-growing schooling form in the United States, comprising 3.4 percent of the school-age population (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). Second, whether the reasoning for homeschooling is religious/moral or academic, mothers do the labor of teaching, mothering, and keeping the home (Murphy, 2012). Third, homeschoolers increasingly enroll in and interact with public or private brick-and-mortar schools, for example through virtual home-school partnership programs (Lois, 2013). And finally, as many of my colleagues around the U.S. and I have encountered, the numbers of teacher candidates who have been homeschooled is increasing. Teacher educators can no longer assume that all pre-service teachers come with personal apprenticeships in P-12 schooling. School and community-based educators are increasingly likely to mix with mothers who homeschool their children as well as with pre-service teachers who were homeschooled. Lois's book provides rich information about homeschooling that should contribute to better understandings and relationships.

Jennifer Lois, a sociologist at Western Washington University and self-proclaimed "outsider" to homeschooling, has studied the emotional lives of homeschooling mothers for the past decade. In her first book on homeschooling, she provides a fascinating introduction for educators interested in learning more about this group. She uses a feminist lens and rich descriptions and voices in a manner reminiscent of Hochschild's (2001) very readable work *The Time Bind*, about the gendered construction of household labor.

In crafting her book, Lois uses a longitudinal research design to explore the lives of 24 mothers in Washington State. She follows up with 16 of these women about seven years later in order to capture their trajectories and the role that a home-school partnership program run by the school district now plays. Lois met most of these mothers through a homeschooling support group called PATH (a pseudonym) that she observed monthly for three years.

Homeschoolers are typically white, middle class, and conservative Christians (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). However, African American and Muslim groups are increasing very rapidly, due primarily to their dissatisfaction with the racial and cultural biases of their local schools (e.g., see Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). Lois included one African American mother

and two Latina mothers in her study (all middle class), but the vast majority of her subjects were white. She sampled two working class families (white), with the remainder being upper-middle class and middle class. Three of the participants were secular and two were liberal or progressive Christian, while most were conservative Christians. Nearly all were married. In her sample, Lois captured the mainstream of the movement, although very few from the rapidly growing sub-groups were included.

Lois uses her longitudinal design to capture a shift in local policy involving partnerships. By interviewing the same mothers years apart, she is able to consider their lives before and after experiencing a Parent-School Partnership (PSP). The PSP is a local school district initiative popular with many homeschoolers. It provided a certified teacher to act as an educational consultant. Sometimes there were organized classes for the students who were homeschooled. By counting these students in enrollment, school districts received state and federal monies to educate them. In return, parents received \$400 for nonreligious curriculum and materials reimbursement. Some families, according to Lois, appreciated this support while others resisted. The resisters saw the partnership as government control and a threat to their civil liberties. As other scholars have brought up, families that use PSPs or similar programs may engage in religious practices at home while using state-funded curriculum and materials (Apple, 2006). These kinds of family-school partnerships are also growing around the U.S. For instance Molnar et al. (2014) recently synthesized the extant literature on the nationwide rise of virtual schooling, which can take various forms of partnership but usually involves children completing an online curriculum at home.

Lois shows that PSPs may ease some of the teaching burden of homeschooling mothers, whom she finds to be overworked with teaching and homemaking responsibilities. Lois chronicles the workload that homeschooling mothers perform and how they deal with the burden. "Family" itself is framed by most of the participants within the conservative Christian family model, a patriarchal nuclear family. But what is interesting is that even the most liberal mothers take on the housework and teaching.

As Lois discovers, the emotional processes that support homeschooling and mothering are universal across selected mothers of various backgrounds and identities. Lois organizes her explanation of sociological emotional processes into two parts: The first is about creating an emotional culture of "good" mothering through choosing to homeschool and actively defending a "good mother" identity against criticisms from outsiders. The second part is about the temporal-emotional conflict of good mothering. This second section includes information about the domestic labor, burnout, and loss of "me-time" that occur when mothers add the teacher role to mothering. These emotional contexts and processes are related to Sharon Hays' (1996) well-known work on the intensification of motherhood in neoliberal times. Lois refines Hays' ideas by explaining that mothers manipulate time to emotionally "savor" their children's development by remaining at home while also "sequencing" homeschooling in their minds by telling themselves that their intense teaching and home labor will not be forever. They are then able to deal emotionally and logically with the intensity by following the idea that they can have it all, just not all at once.

Lois's approach is somewhat different from theoretical arguments about homeschooler identity, for example that homeschooling mothers don't do the rhetoric of oppression for political and policy gain (Apple, 2006). Lois avoids this argument and instead shows through her analysis that society does frame women, and particularly homeschooling mothers, as deviant for their choice to teach at home. Through her grounded theory analysis, she shows that mothers' emotional strategies become powerful buffers for dealing with this low status. Specifically, mothers used discursive strategies for justifying the normalcy of what they were doing. They "rejected the accusation of maternal deviance and cast themselves instead as hyperresponsible mothers ... in emotional terms" (Lois, 2013, p. 70). Whereas fathers were less-often criticized and very rarely in emotional terms, mothers tapped into the "good sense" of intensive mothering discourse in order to reframe concerns that they were academically arrogant, socially overprotective, morally self-righteous and extreme, and relationally hyper-engaged. They answered these criticisms by saying instead that they express reasonable academic confidence, that they appropriately protect their children, responsibly cultivate them, and sensibly savor and sequence time in order to focus on the importance of childhood. Another important finding is that all the mothers, no matter their race/ethnicity, class, socio-economic status, or religious background, used these emotional processes in somewhat similar ways to deal with the difficulties they face as mother-teachers.

What is different among the mothers in her sample is that they fall into two distinct categories. "First-choicers" always knew that they would homeschool. These are typically the most conservative and fundamentalist mothers who rarely attend brick-and-mortar schools once they begin homeschooling, unless desperate financial issues emerged. In contrast, "second-choicers" were pressed into homeschooling, sometimes by issues related to the schools or the individual child. For instance, sometimes special education support was unavailable, or the child was particularly shy or had severe allergies. The second-choicers in this study often engaged with PSPs and shifted in and out of homeschooling and brick-and-mortar schooling. The first-choicers did this only rarely, when they were backed into the schools by severe financial hardship. She found that both groups used similar emotional processes but in some cases, these processes could be intertwined and supported by engaging with PSPs.

Lois does suggest that although all the mothers share similar emotional processes, race/ethnicity is an important part of the story. Her book lays the groundwork for more research with second-choice homeschoolers seeking culturally relevant education.

These findings bring up important questions for all educators regarding our assumptions about homeschooling mothers. Although Lois is not a P-12 educator, she does a good job of outlining some of the educational considerations. Lois does not speak directly to the efficacy of homeschooling versus public schooling. However, the examples shown are generally quite positive. This could be in part because the sampled mothers all chose to join with a mother's collaborative and/or were supported by PSPs. While it is not within her scope to study the children's lives, some of her provocative interview data shows some of the very real struggles between children and mothers around homeschooling decision and outcomes. Further exploration of these contexts is crucial to understanding how to promote equity for all children and their families. While Lois does not mention it, there are organizations that take a critical view of homeschooling situations from within. For example, Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out (HARO) is a nonprofit organization that supports increased regulation of homeschooling.

A couple critiques that I have of the book itself are related to its scope and ability to capture the construction of emotion work. First, a slightly broader ethnographic approach, including observations of the PSP context and additional interviews with educators, non-homeschooling parents, and community members, would frame more fully the inside/outside nature of the emotion work that Lois discusses. For example, Lois presents the homeschooling mothers' perceptions of stigma, but what did the "other" side look like in terms of constructing those emotions? How did the public school educators, for example, perceive that they contributed, what blind spots were apparent, and what emotional processes did the educators experience in their relationships with homeschoolers? All of this would be important information for teachers and teacher educators as well as homeschooling mothers seeking a better understanding of this context. Secondly, Lois generally selected the mainstream of the movement, but what about the many (low income, minority, immigrant, sexual/gender diverse) families traditionally marginalized in brick-and-mortar school contexts? Where do they "fit" within/outside of the homeschooling motherwork described in this book? Lois's sample is limited in this respect, although it does flag the need for more research.

New research questions and policy and practice considerations may more directly influence concerns of home-school partnerships and family diversity. More studies are needed to understand the unique experiences of homeschooling family members from various groups. Mazama and Lundy (2013a; 2013b; 2014)/Lundy and Mazama (2014) have written a number of articles on the context of African American homeschooling in the past few years, as has Fields-Smith with her co-authors (Fields-Smith & Wells Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). Meanwhile Ray (2015), who operates the National Home Education Research Institute, a homeschooling think tank with a conservative Christian worldview, has recently published a report on African American homeschooling in the *Journal of School Choice*. Here are some additional questions related to family diversity that might be explored in future research: What are the experiences of immigrant families who homeschool in the U.S.? What are the experiences of siblings when they attend different school forms (some attend homeschool, some attend public schools, etc.)? How do the fathers contribute (this question has been broached by Vigilant, Anderson, & Trefethren, 2014)? How do parents' and children's sexualities/gender interrelate with homeschooling? What are the roles of the grandmothers and grandfathers regarding the next generation of homeschoolers? What wisdom can teachers provide around supporting homeschooling families who transition often and/or use public school resources? These are several of the many questions that Lois's book suggests that have not been answered yet in the homeschooling literature. This is a fairly emergent field in need of more voices contributing to the research. In her book, Lois (2013) has provided an important perspective.

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