



Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out
presents

Identity as Means of Control:

Results from the 2015 Survey of Identification Abuse Within
Homeschooling

February 18, 2015

For more information about Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out, visit
<http://www.hareachingout.org>.

About the Survey

The 2015 Survey of Identification Abuse Within Homeschooling is an informal survey conducted by [Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out \(HARO\)](#) of homeschool alumni who experienced identification abuse. HARO's purpose is to advocate for the wellbeing of homeschool students and improve homeschooling communities through awareness, peer support, and resource development.

While this was not a formal survey, our goal is to get a better picture of identification abuse within homeschooling and collect stories about such abuse. Identification abuse, also known as identity or ID abuse, was previously defined by HARO's [2014 Survey of Adult Alumni of the Modern Christian Homeschool Movement](#) as one's parent, guardian or primary caretaker "not providing you with, withholding, or destroying any of your identification documents: driver's license, social security card, etc." The 2014 survey found that, out of 3703 homeschool alumni, 3.65% (or 135 respondents) experienced some form of identification abuse. There are also [a plethora of stores online](#) from alumni who have experienced this, including high profile cases like [Cynthia Jeub](#) and [Alecia Pennington](#). Thus we desired to get better information about this phenomenon.

To take the 2015 survey, respondents had to be at least 18 years of age and have been homeschooled for at least a year. The survey opened on SurveyMonkey on February 12, 2015 and closed on February 17, 2015. 68 individuals took the survey. U.S. states represented by respondents include: Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin, Other places of residence represented include Nova Scotia and Ontario. Several individuals were also from military families that frequently moved.

You can [view the text of survey here](#).

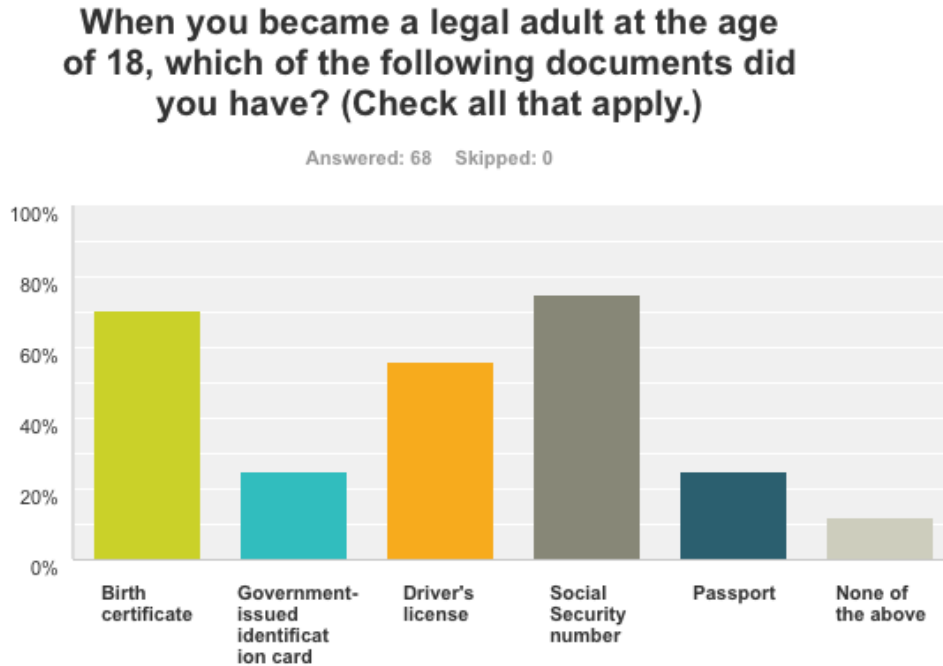
Documents

Individuals were asked which documents they personally possessed upon becoming a legal adult at the age of 18. (See Figure 1 below.) The document options given were: birth certificate, government-issued identification card, driver's license, Social Security card, and passport. The documents which respondents were least likely to possess were government-issued identification cards and passports. This is unsurprising as those two forms of identification are usually obtained for specific purposes (travel, for example) that are not universal.

In terms of documents that one *ought* to possess at the age of 18 (birth certificate and Social Security card), birth certificates were the document most commonly not possessed. 29% of respondents did not possess a birth certificate whereas 25% did not possess a Social Security card. Only 56% had a Driver's License at the age of 18 (compared to [the](#)

[national average of 85% in 1996 and 73% in 2010](#)). And 12%, or 8 respondents, possessed not a single one of these documents.

Figure 1: Documents Possessed at Age 18



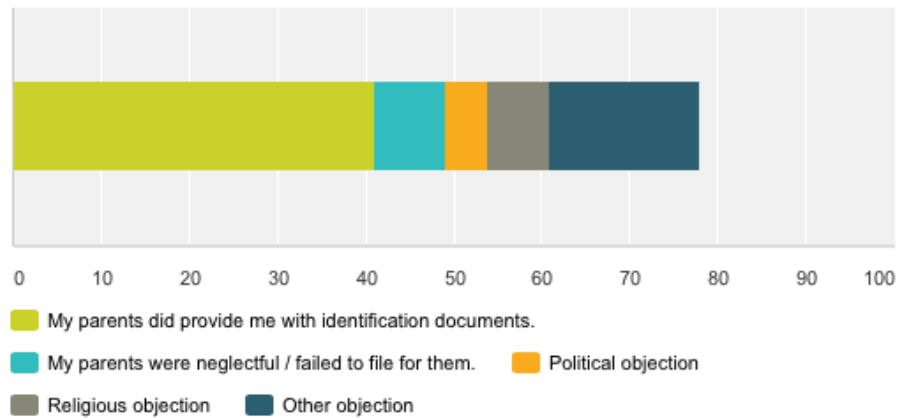
Rationale

Among respondents who were not provided with identification documents, political objections least frequently underlie parents' reasoning. Only 5 respondents, or 8%, said politics motivated their caretakers to not obtain documentation for them. Religious objections made up 11%. Simple neglect, or failure to file for one's children's documents, made up 13%. And the most commonly selected objection was "Other," with 27%. See Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Objections to Documentation

If your parents did not provide you with certain identification documents, why was that? (Check all that apply.)

Answered: 63 Skipped: 5



The following are several given explanations for the “Other” objections. The most common theme among all these explanations is *control* of the adult child and that adult child’s future decisions. Other reasons include a desire to preserve past family secrets, punishment, spite, and the mistaken idea that parents own their adult children’s identification documents.

- *“My mother was preventing me from applying to community college. She wanted me to only go to one particular Christian college. She also tried to prevent me from getting a job..”*
- *“Both because The Anti-Christ in my dad’s case (political and religious) and negligence and desire for control in my mother’s case.”*
- *“The documents (my expired passport, Social Security card, and birth certificate) were ‘theirs’ and I had to spend money to get copies from the government of ‘my own.’ It was a mixture of control and selfishness.”*
- *“Parent declined to give documentation out of spite, claiming that documents were lost.”*
- *“I left due to physical abuse and they refused to give me any documents as punishment.”*
- *“An attempt to make it more difficult to leave.”*

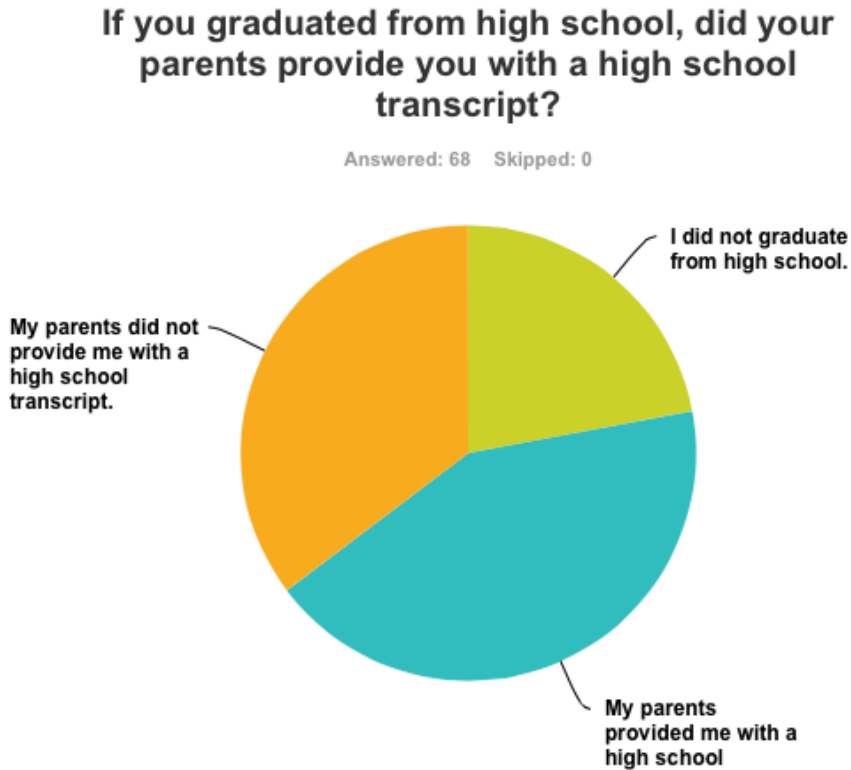
- *"I was a stay at home daughter and didn't need a drivers license."*
- *"At 18 i requested my SSN card and birth certificate from my mother. she informed me that as i was still living at home, i did not need them, and besides i would just lose them. at age 23 i was moving out, and i again requested my documents. i was informed that i didn't need them as i was only supposed to be gone temporarily."*
- *"Although I technically *had* documentation, I was not allowed to access it as my parents and especially father deemed me irresponsible."*
- *"My mother knew if I had them it would facilitate me to move out."*
- *"Mother did not wish for me to see that she'd given birth to a previous living child"*
- *Control. Giving me my legal identification would have given me the power to leave."*
- *"I am sure the reasons were general control."*
- *"It was an interesting mixture of religious "God owns the world, we only answer to God, we are above man's laws" and anarchist political leanings."*
- *"Could lead to freedom"*

High School Transcripts

High school transcripts are generally not considered a form of personal identification. However, we included a question about transcripts on our survey because, in cases of identification abuse, one potential solution to the problems that abuse causes is to use a transcript as a secondary proof of one's identity and birthdate. For example, [according to the Department of Motor Vehicles](#), when applying for a government-issued ID or driver's license, one document you can provide to verify your identity is a certified school transcript. Thus a transcript can become a vital source of assistance when one needs alternatives for proving one's identity.

Out of the 68 respondents who took the survey, 15 (or 22%) did not graduate high school, and thus do not have a high school transcript. 24, or 35%, did graduate from high school but their parents did not provide them with a transcript. Only 29, or 43%, both graduated from high school and were given a transcript. That means the majority of respondents (57%) do not have a high school transcript. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Respondents With and Without a High School Transcript

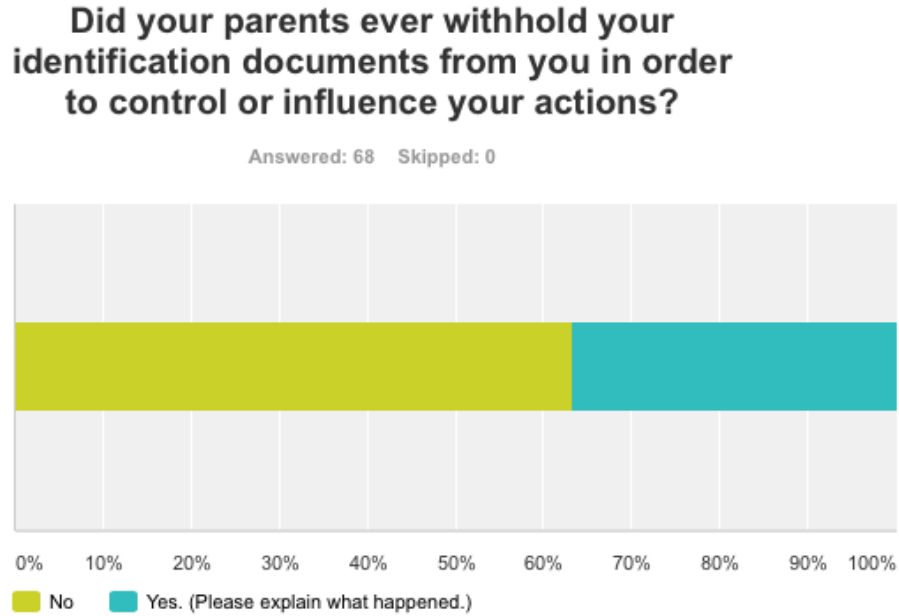


Identification Abuse and Control

Even if a caretaker has identification documents for an adult child, sometimes that caretaker may withhold — or threaten to withhold — those documents in order to control that child's actions or behaviors. This threat to control can target anyone, but often manifests against certain groups of people, like women or LGBT* individuals. [One example is "Susie,"](#) a pseudonymous contributor to Homeschoolers Anonymous who is a lesbian. Susie's parents took away her driver's license, passport, social security card, birth certificate, credit card, and debit card in order to force her to attend conversion therapy.

Among the 68 respondents to the survey, 25 (or 37%) experienced this form of identification abuse (the withholding of documents in order to control). See Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Respondents Who Experienced Withholding of Documents to Control



Respondents who experienced this form of ID abuse were asked to explain what happened. The following are their individual answers:

- *“Transcripts and FAFSA withheld because college was not ‘God’s Will’ for a female.”*
- *“Withheld Social Security card to control relationships and keep me from getting a job.”*
- *“They kept promising to let me get a driver’s license in exchange for (numerous ‘good’ behaviors) but never did. When I wanted to apply for college they wouldn’t let me have a transcript.”*
- *“My dad used them to extort my address.”*
- *“i was not allowed to leave to go to college. they held my documents so that i would stay home and work where they chose.”*
- *“My parents never gave me a transcript and refused to release a copy to any college other than where and when they allowed me to go. They still never gave me a high school diploma.”*
- *“Parent did not want me to leave the house and enlist, withholding documents was a power play.”*

- *“I was adopted, but my family chose to withhold my identification so that I could not leave or obtain employment. They brought out documentation in order to get a passport or state ID, but I was not allowed to keep those on my person once traveling was over. At 26 I still did not have it because they did not believe women should work outside of the home, and that was the only reason I would need it. If I needed to go to the hospital or something they would have gotten it out of the file, but they did not want me keeping it on my person.”*
- *“My father hid my documents in an attempt to prevent me from escaping a life threatening situation.”*
- *“I wasn't allowed a driver's license until a couple of weeks before my wedding to keep me under their control. My mom's explanation was that I wouldn't be allowed to go anywhere by myself anyway, so there was no need to get me a driver's license. I think it was partially because my mom couldn't be bothered to take me to get one, and partially to keep me from leaving home until it was to an approved husband.”*
- *“They didn't want me to be able to leave, so they prevented me from having access to copies of my birth certificate or passport (which I only had because we'd needed to leave the country because my grandmother was very ill) to make it as difficult as possible. I was able to steal my passport back.”*
- *“Withheld document so that I could not get a driver's license almost until the age of 18. Withheld tax documents from a sibling so they could not access funding to go to the college of their choice.”*
- *“Taking my license as punishment, and the reason they still keep my birth certificate is for control.”*
- *“my parents are currently withholding my birth certificate and social security card as an attempt to have leverage to get me to move back home. fortunately i had a photo id so was able to get new copies on my own - but it took an absurd amount of time, effort, and money.”*
- *“The stated reason was that I was irresponsible; the consequences included being unable to apply for financial aid for college and being able to apply to only one college (not one I wanted to attend).”*
- *“my birth certificate and social security card to keep me from moving out.”*
- *“My mother was very abusive and possessive of me and the withholding of my birth certificate was part of her punishment to me for leaving her influence.”*

- *“I ‘stole’ my SS card from my mother's stash of our legal documents when I ran away at 16. I had never been allowed to have any legal id in my possession prior to that time, and when I asked about it, was told I had no need of those things, they were primarily for parental purposes.”*
- *“It was subtle, but they controlled every aspect of my life. Both parents were very overwhelming and overbearing.”*
- *“They withheld some, but fortunately I got help from the state to get the documents I needed.”*
- *“When I moved out, my parents emptied my savings account of \$10,000 and refused to give me my passport, social security card, or birth certificate.”*
- *“Kept me from getting certain documents. When I left without their blessing at 21 they withheld my birth certificate, Social Security card, transcript, immunization records and all other documents to identify me. They said that they owned them.”*

Identification Abuse and HSLDA Membership

In response to the high profile case of Alecia Pennington, leaders of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) made clear that they are willing to advocate on behalf of homeschool alumni who have experienced identification abuse. However, the same leaders have also stated that they have never encountered alumni with such experiences. In [a public statement made on their Facebook page](#), HSLDA declared the following:

“HSLDA Senior Counsel Jim Mason learned of Alecia’s story soon after her video was posted. He contacted her and offered to help. As of this time, Alecia has not taken HSLDA up on the offer. We understand that conflicts between parents and their adult children can be complicated, and that we likely do not know all of the facts in Alecia’s situation. But we do support homeschool graduates’ right to have an identity, get a job, and fully participate in society. In over 30 years of defending homeschoolers, we have never seen allegations like the ones in this situation. We encourage homeschool graduates who encounter problems with documentation, diploma validation issues, or discrimination in employment or postsecondary education to contact us for assistance. We want to help if we can.”

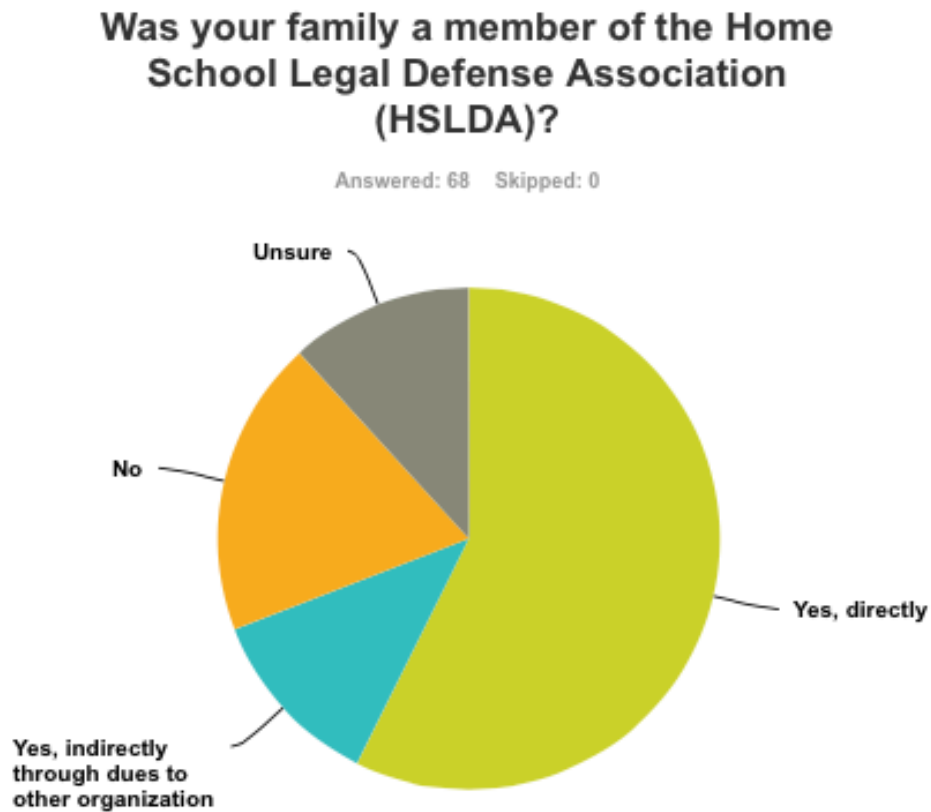
In light of the fact that HSLDA has never seen allegations like Pennington’s, individuals who took our survey were asked if their families were members of HSLDA. This question’s purpose is to provide a better understanding as to whether HSLDA membership is necessarily a guarantee against identification abuse.

As demonstrated in Figure 5 below, the overwhelming majority of respondents (69%) were members of HSLDA, either directly or indirectly through dues paid to a state organization.

Only 13 respondents, or 19%, were not HSLDA members; 8 respondents, or 12%, were unsure regarding HSLDA membership status.

It should go without saying that the fact that 69% of respondents were members of HSLDA does not necessarily imply any connection between HSLDA membership and identification abuse. What it simply demonstrates is that, among respondents who experienced identification abuse, HSLDA membership did not protect against this abuse and some number of HSLDA member families have in fact engage in such abuse.

Figure 5: HSLDA Membership In Relation to Identification Abuse



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes, directly	57.35% 39
Yes, indirectly through dues to other organization	11.76% 8
No	19.12% 13
Unsure	11.76% 8
Total	68

The findings of this survey — that the majority of identification abuse survivors grew up in HSLDA member families — are in line with the findings of HARO's [2014 Survey of Adult Alumni of the Modern Christian Homeschool Movement](#). Out of the 135 respondents to the 2014 HARO Survey who experienced identification abuse, [the majority \(78 individuals, or 57%\) were HSLDA members](#). (Note that these findings are representative only of the survey respondents, not necessarily the general homeschooling population.)

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of the 2015 Survey of Identification Abuse Within Homeschooling is to get a better picture of identification abuse within homeschooling and collect stories about such abuse. The picture that emerged from our findings is that, among the most important identification documents, birth certificates are the least commonly possessed among survivors of identification abuse. The problem of identification abuse disproportionately impacts individuals who identify as female; this disproportionate impact seems to correlate with families adhering to the ideology of Christian patriarchy, as numerous stories of identification abuse reference gender roles and the stay-at-home-daughter movement.

Furthermore, the most common reason for parents withholding an adult child's identification documents is *control*: control of the adult child and that adult child's future decisions. Less common reasons were political and religious objections to the documentation itself. Also of concern was the fact that, among those who suffered identification abuse, only 29 respondents, or 43%, both graduated from high school and were given a transcript. In other words, the majority of survivors do not have a high school transcript.

Finally, it is the case that membership in HSLDA does not protect against identification abuse. This should highlight to not only HSLDA as a homeschool movement leader, but also HARO as an advocacy organization as well as all homeschooling communities, that awareness and education about the importance of procuring identification documents for one's children is vitally important. That importance should be communicated from all levels of homeschooling power structures. Such structures should also *encourage* families to procure such documentation. The future health and well-being of homeschool alumni depends on it.