

CAN FAMILIES ALWAYS GET WHAT THEY WANT? FAMILIES' PERCEPTIONS
OF SCHOOL QUALITY AND THEIR EFFECTS ON
SCHOOL CHOICE DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

Can Families Always Get What They Want? Families' Perceptions of School Quality and Their Effect on School Choice Decisions

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School quality and school choice are two hotly debated issues within current academic research, and the two topics are not wholly disconnected from one another. School quality literature includes debates over the most accurate definition, or definitions, of what constitutes school quality. Research addressing school choice often includes references to issues of school quality, albeit with different conclusions about the level of importance school quality plays in actual school choice decisions. In order to understand families' decisions about schools, one must recognize not only the ways in which perceptions of quality influence choices, but also that school quality and school choice are, at the same time, conceptually distinct topics. Therefore, the primary question guiding my research asks, "Is there a relationship between families' perceptions of quality education and the school choices they ultimately make?"

More specifically, my research first explores how families determine what constitutes a "quality" school, and second, how that informs the schools they select for their children. I examine six distinct types of school choice options families may choose for their children: private, neighborhood public, magnet, charter, non-neighborhood public, or homeschooling. I investigate whether or not family assessments of quality vary along racial or socioeconomic lines and whether such variation explains some differences in families' school choices by these sociodemographic characteristics. I explore families'

behavior during their search for their children's school to determine if any racial or socioeconomic variation exists in how different families conduct this search. I also examine factors that may prevent some families from actualizing their ideals of school quality in their choices. In other words, are there obstacles to particular school choices for families from diverse social backgrounds?

Data in this study comes from the Pennsylvania and Metropolitan Area Survey, collected with the Philadelphia Indicators project and Temple University's Institute of Public Affairs. This survey includes households within five Pennsylvania counties; Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties as well as four counties in New Jersey: Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem counties. This sample includes only households including at least one school aged child (enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade) providing a sample size of $N = 589$ households.¹

My findings demonstrate that significant variation by race and class exist in families' perceptions of school quality, in specific school characteristics they report represent the most important indicator of school quality, in the number of school choice options families consider during the process of school choice decision making, in specific factors families report as most important for school choice decisions, and finally in the actual school choices families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds make for their children's education. Research about how families choose schools and how this decision making process differs by race and socioeconomic status can serve to inform discussions about increasing the amount of public "choice" schools such as magnets, charters, non-

¹In Chapter 5 of my study, the unit of analysis for my sample size changes from families ($N = 589$) to the total number of school choices those 589 families made for their children, resulting in a sample size of $N = 655$ choices used only in Chapter 5.

neighborhood public school transfer programs. This research has the potential to assist policy-makers in determining whether expanding such choice options may result in either an increase or a decrease in the ability of racial minorities and those with fewer financial means to attend “quality” schools. This research may also help determine whether current levels of school segregation along racial and class lines will improve or worsen as families’ ability to choose schools for their children expands.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Both school quality and school choice are hotly debated issues within current academic research, and the two topics are not wholly disconnected from one another. Within school quality literature, debates rage over the most accurate definition of what constitutes school quality (Wells and Crain 1992; Lee, Croniger, and Smith 1994; Holme 2000; US Department of Education 2000; Johnson 2006). Research addressing school choice often includes reference to issues of school quality, albeit with different conclusions about the level of importance school quality plays in school choice decisions (Chubb and Moe 1990; Wells and Crain 1992; Young and Clinchy 1992). For the purposes of my research, one must recognize not only the ways in which these two issues can overlap but also that school quality and school choice are, at the same time, conceptually distinct topics. Therefore, the primary research question guiding this study asks, “Is there a relationship between families’ perceptions of quality education and the school choices they ultimately make?”

One could argue school quality constitutes an “ideal.” School quality, or quality education, does not yet exist uniformly within the US education system, but is a goal which researchers, educators, legislators, and families hope to achieve for all schools. For families especially, this ideal aspect of school quality may play an even larger role in their perceptions of quality than it does for researchers. For example, when asked to define a “quality” school, families may describe the school environment they most desire for their children without necessarily thinking about the reality of being able to enroll

their children in such a school. In this way, perceptions of school quality seem more abstract than school choice decisions.

School choice decisions are more concrete than perceptions of school quality simply because they have a visible outcome: selection of a specific school for a child's education. In addition to this outcome, making a school choice involves a decision making process. At the most basic level, a family engaged in the school choice decision making process evaluates schooling options available to them and selects a school for their children. Certainly this process is much more complicated in reality; however, the above description of school choice decision making serves only to demonstrate further an important conceptual difference between issues of quality and issues of choice. While a family's perceptions of school quality may be formed with little connection to their ability to actualize these desires, a family's school choice decision is rooted in the reality of the schools to which they have access.

Recognizing this conceptual difference between school quality and school choice is vital for achieving one of my research goals. I evaluate families' perceptions of school quality and then move to an examination of their actual school choice decisions. Initially addressing school quality and school choice separately provides me with more specific information about the ways in which these issues operate both within individual families and across different types of families. An attempt to discern if such a relationship exists contributes to what appears to be a lacuna in existing literature on school quality and school choice. Researchers have addressed perceptions of school quality and the school choices of families; however, these studies tend to address *either* school quality *or* school

choice. Rarely do they attempt to determine ways in which school quality and school choice work together at the family level.

In this research, I examine the relationship between perceptions of school quality and the actual school choice decisions families have made for their children for families from different social backgrounds. This study poses five specific questions. First, what are families' perceptions of quality education? In other words, what characteristics do families associate with "good" schools? Second, is there any variation in perceptions of school quality amongst families from diverse social backgrounds? Third, is there a relationship between families' perceptions of quality and their actual school choices? Fourth, does variation exist in the actual school choice decisions families make and does school quality mediate this relationship? More specifically, do families from diverse social background have the same access to or opportunities for the school choice decision they most desire for their child? Finally, if diverse families experience varying levels of access to their primary school choice for their children, is it possible to identify specific factors contributing to this variation by race and socioeconomic status?

In the literature review below, I review three bodies of research: school quality literature, school choice literature, and literature addressing how people make choices. Within my review of school quality literature, I first review researchers' suggestions for definitions of school quality. Amongst researchers, I find instances of both consensus and disagreement over measures of school quality demonstrating the inherent complexity involved in defining what constitutes school quality. Next, I elaborate further on the conceptual distinction between school quality and school choice introduced above and its implications for researchers attempting to discern how families determine what they

believe school quality is. Finally, I review studies whose findings suggest family perceptions of school quality are influenced by issues of both race and socioeconomic status.

I turn next to school choice literature, and first examine the debate over the best theoretical framework from which to view the decision making process involved in school choice. Some researchers advocate rational choice theory and I describe the basic principles of this theory as well as its application to the process of school choice. Others feel the rational choice approach is too narrow, overlooking important social and cultural influences on families when making such decisions. I borrow the phrase “cultural logic of families” from Fuller, Elmore, and Orfield (1996) to name this competing theoretical perspective and describe how these researchers believe the cultural logic of families is a more appropriate framework from which to understand school choice decision making. Finally, I address recent school choice studies demonstrating variation in the choice decision making process along racial and socioeconomic lines.

In my review of current literature examining how people make choices, I first address ways in which this broader literature about choice making lends support to one side of the debate over the best theoretical framework one should use to understand the process of school choice decision-making. I then turn to a discussion of how the human brain operates when one makes a choice. Finally, I address specific external influences that shape the ways in which people make choices. In particular, I focus upon socio-structural influences on choice making as well as the influence that other individuals have upon a person faced with making a choice.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

School Quality

The adjective “quality,” regardless of the noun it describes, is a difficult term to define. Inherent in the definition of quality is a judgment of sorts or “...a normative or comparative element” (Mortimer and Stone 1991: 70). As a result of this judgmental/comparative aspect of quality, it is often the case that an object, process, or institution one individual sees as representing quality can be viewed in exactly the opposite way by another individual assessing the same thing. Whenever one attempts to define something as “quality,” the task is automatically veiled in ambiguity. Definitions of educational quality are not immune to this uncertainty. Numerous researchers have attempted to explain more fully why some schools in the United States are more successful in helping students learn than other schools (Purkey and Smith 1983; Hanushek, 1986; Ferguson 1991; Byrk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Hedges, Laine, and Greenwald, 1994; Ehrenberg and Brewer 1994; 1995; Ballou 1996; Lee and Smith, 1996; US Department of Education 2000). However,

In more than 30 years of research and study of schooling and the educational process...a conclusive understanding of the definitive features of quality schools has yet to be found. However, it is apparent that no single factor guarantees school quality...school quality depends on a multiple, interdependent elements. (US Department of Education 2000: 3)

Given the complexity involved in achieving precise definitions of school quality, I address three specific components of school quality to provide a more comprehensive picture of the different ways in which people define school quality. These three components are indicators of school quality commonly used by researchers, ideas families may have about what a good school looks like, and families’ use of proxy measures to judge the level of quality education that a school does or does not provide.

With regard to indicators of quality commonly used by researchers, I explore both consensus and dissent amongst researchers about their accuracy and effectiveness, as families may be informed by these. I describe a number of commonly employed measures of school quality as well as describing the position of some researchers who believe such measures are flawed. In their view, the major flaw lies in the existence of racial and socioeconomic biases in frequently used measures of school quality. These researchers argue the presence of such bias prevents rather than facilitates accurate measures and/or definitions of school quality.

Having described the current research perspective on what constitutes school quality, I then turn to perceptions of school quality at the family level. While indicators of school quality employed by researchers provide some insight into what school quality is, they are often used to measure outcomes of schools designated as either high quality or low quality. Further, research employing these indicators rarely gives direct attention to how individual families perceive or define school quality. Therefore, I describe a theoretical debate about the best way to educate children: “traditional” education versus “progressive” education. The two sides of this debate provide a foundation for exploring in greater detail the ideas families may have about what high quality or “good” school looks like based on specific features of schools. I also describe research employing dichotomies similar to the traditional versus progressive binary as it highlights variation along the lines of race and class regarding families’ preferences for the type of education they want for their children as well as the ways in which families of different backgrounds foster their children’s educational development (Delpit 1995; Lareau 2003).

Finally, I turn to studies that examine more specifically family level perceptions of school quality. Most often, researchers infer what families believe school quality is based upon the school choices they make for their children. Therefore, the studies in my review place their investigations of families' perceptions of quality within the context of school choice; this is a less than ideal scenario for the purposes of my research as I argue one must first recognize ways in which school quality and school choice are conceptually distinct before exploring how the two overlap. However, evidence from these studies provides some insight into how families define school quality and helps to unpack some of the complexity involved in the construction of such definitions. In reviewing these studies, I highlight any evidence suggesting variation in families' perceptions of school quality along the lines of race and socioeconomic status.

From the research perspective, the 2000 US Department of Education Report "Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report," provides some insight into what school characteristics designate a school as providing quality education to its students. In this report, researchers from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) review current literature about school quality and available data on characteristics of schools and teachers to identify school characteristics with the most positive effects on student learning, i.e., school quality. NCES identifies 13 such indicators; however, it is important to note throughout the report NCES makes it clear these 13 indicators are "...time sensitive and part of an iterative process. The status of [quality] schools as identified by indicators with quality data is changing rapidly and will need to be continually updated" (US Department of Education 2000: vii). Not only does research addressing school quality need to be performed routinely to ensure the current data reflect

what is taking place within US schools, but the data themselves must be of high quality: reliable and applicable to the current landscape of US education.

The 13 indicators are broken down into three distinct groups based on evidence from current research indicating that school quality affects student learning within three specific realms: the ability of the current teaching force, the day to day activities within the classroom, and the overall context of a school itself (US Department of Education 2000). To demonstrate researchers' perceptions of quality education, I will describe briefly each of these groups and the specific indicators included in them.

In terms of teachers, the NCES identifies the following four indicators of school quality: teachers' academic skills, teaching assignment [i.e., are teachers placed in courses they are qualified to teach?], teachers' experience, and professional development. This last indicator involves regularly scheduled programs for teachers providing opportunities to learn about key advances within education since they began in the profession, to understand changes within student populations, and how to effectively implement new technologies such as the Internet into their classroom environment (Choy and Ross 1998; National Education Goals Panel 1995, National Foundation for the Improvement of Education 1996).

For a comprehensive understanding of the interactions that take place within US classrooms, researchers argue it is imperative for one to understand the following four quality indicators: the curriculum being taught, the way in which the teacher conveys course content to students (i.e., pedagogy), the use and availability of the latest technologies in classrooms, and the number of students in a classroom (i.e., class size). Making sure that the curriculum is intellectually challenging, that teachers are innovative

and effective in conveying course content to their students, that classrooms have access to and make effective use of the latest technologies, and that the number of students within one classroom are kept to a minimum are all ways researchers believe schools can provide higher quality education to their students.

The final group of quality indicators centers upon the context of a school and involves five specific school characteristics: school leadership, school goals, the professional community amongst school faculties and administrations, ways in which schools enforce discipline, and the academic environments of schools. According to the NCES,

...researchers have...begun to develop a literature on school-level characteristics that appear to play key roles in adding value to a school's quality. How schools approach these aspects [the five indicators listed above] establishes the context for effective instruction and quality learning... (US Department of Education 2000)

Unlike the two previous groups of indicators, the school context indicators of quality pose a greater challenge to researchers simply because it is more difficult to measure things such as school goals, school leadership, or levels of professional community within a school. These indicators are influenced by the individual actors within a school, presenting researchers with a new challenge of how to measure these indicators successfully and accurately across all schools.

While these 13 indicators of quality provide more insight into defining school quality, they represent only one perspective. Debate exists amongst school quality researchers regarding whether "conventional" measures of school quality such as the NCES indicators accurately represent what school quality means for individuals or families from diverse backgrounds (Wells and Crain 1992; Delpit 1995; Hirsch, Jr. 1996). For example, Wells and Crain (1992) argue measures of school quality often

used by researchers do not actually measure *school* quality, but instead what they term *student* quality (Wells and Crain 1992). They write,

Unfortunately, in American society, “school quality” is often a misnomer for “student quality,” which is measured by heavily biased principles...the true delineation between desirable and undesirable schools is frequently drawn along racial and social class lines...the quality of a school is too often defined by the color, and less distinctly, the class of the students who attend [the school] rather than by any objective measure of the teaching and learning that goes on there. (Wells and Crain 1992: 67)

As evidence for this position, Wells and Crain (1992) describe two central themes within existing school quality literature. The first involves two measures of school quality (standardized test scores and a school’s rate of college attendance) frequently employed as indicative of the level of quality education a school provides. Wells and Crain (1992) argue use of these measures to indicate school quality is problematic for the following reasons. First, on average, white students from families with higher socioeconomic status tend to perform better on standardized tests than their lower-income non-white counterparts. Second, on average, wealthier white students are also more likely to attend college than poorer, non-white students (Wells and Crain 1992).

This serves to reinforce the common conception within US society that “...whiter, wealthier schools do a better job of teaching students than school serving darker, lower-income students” (Wells and Crain 1992: 67). Further, they argue these quality measures are tied more to features of students’ family background than to what actually takes place within a school. Wells and Crain (1992) suggest alternatives such as documenting yearly improvement in students’ test scores or the number of students who are the first person in their family to either graduate from high school and/or continue on to college as more accurate measures of how schools foster students’ learning and provide higher levels of quality education.

The second central theme addresses a more abstract, but equally common way many people designate a school as either “good” (i.e., high quality) or “bad.” Wells and Crain (1992) term this criterion the “social climate of a school” which is based upon “...the achievement ideology of the students, their educational and occupational aspirations, their cultural capital and so on...” (68). School social climate has potential for informing researchers and families about the level of quality provided by a particular school. For example, the value systems and cultural mores of students in a specific school heavily influence their school’s social climate; therefore, knowledge of this climate can provide insight into what it would be like for one to attend that school. However, Wells and Crain (1992) argue most people do not recognize a crucial feature of school climates: how the values and mores influencing school climates “...vary radically between different racial and socioeconomic groups and are shaped by the perceived opportunity structure for members of each [group]” (68; Willis 1977; Fordham and Ogbu 1986). This oversight reinforces the racial and socioeconomic biases described above; US society often assumes schools with whiter, wealthier students are inherently of higher quality than schools serving larger proportions of lower-income, non-white students.

If biases such as these exist in evaluations of school quality, Wells and Crain (1992) believe schools serving mostly white, upper-income students have a decided advantage in receiving the designation of being a “quality school” over schools serving more racially and economically diverse student populations. Further, this advantage does not necessarily reflect the actual level of educational quality within a school and may mislead researchers, families, and society as a whole in their perceptions of schools of “high quality”. This study addresses this issue by looking for variation in how families

from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds arrive at their definitions of quality education. Further, while researchers' attempts to measure school quality (and their flaws) are certainly important, their perspective alone does not provide a comprehensive understanding of school quality. Another group equally concerned with issues of school quality is families. Families, while perhaps influenced by definitions of quality proposed by researchers, may also have their own distinct notions of what constitutes a "quality" school.

To begin to understand more fully what families believe constitutes school quality, I turn to a long running theoretical debate amongst educational researchers regarding the most effective way to educate students. On one side of this debate are educators who believe in a "traditional" approach to education in which children are "...given a strong foundation, rich in content, in a structured environment by teachers trained in their disciplines" (Commonwealth Education Organization 2009). Their opposition comes from those who take a "progressive" approach to education, defined by Dewey (1938) as a curriculum emphasizing student expression and creativity through the use of classroom experiences that help students engage with their subject matter in a way they can relate to their daily lives (Dewey 1938).

Both the traditional and progressive approaches to education are defined by specific characteristics of both the school environment and a student's experiences within that environment. These characteristics are unique to each approach and often oppose one another. This allows one to evaluate a school as adhering to either a traditional or progressive educational approach on the basis of which characteristics he/she finds in practice within a given school. For example, two significant ways in which a traditional

education differs from a progressive education are the ways in which each approach organizes classrooms and the role students play in each competing educational philosophy. (See Appendix A for a full comparison between “traditional” and “progressive” approaches to education.)

With regard to classroom organization, a traditional school is likely to have students’ desks in rows, facing the blackboard at the front of the room. The teacher will instruct students at the front of the room, facing the orderly rows desks, from which students rarely leave to move about the room (Cunningham 2004). The traditional classroom also tends to employ a consistent schedule of the school day; therefore, students learn quickly the routine of their classroom and follow that routine for the duration of the school year. However, in a progressive classroom students’ desks are likely to be arranged in clusters or desks may even be replaced by tables at which groups of students sit together to learn. Arranging students in groups allows them students to work together, to engage in discussion with one another, and the atmosphere of the classroom allows for students to move more freely around the room than students in a traditional classroom (Cunningham 2004).

The role of the students also differs greatly in a traditional classroom than in a progressive classroom. Traditional education requires students to be attentive and receptive to their teacher’s instructions. These students often work from textbooks and workbooks in “core” subjects such as math and reading; proponents of the progressive view tend to describe the learning in traditional classrooms as “rote learning.” Students are responsible for listening to their teacher to understand their lessons and are evaluated on their ability to demonstrate this understanding during class-wide examinations. A

progressive classroom, on the other hand, identifies the role of the student as a self-motivated learner, an individual who can work cooperatively with his/her teacher and classmates to learn the curriculum (Cunningham 2004). Rather than focus independently on “core” subjects, a progressive classroom employs an interdisciplinary curricular approach to facilitate experiential learning: learning facilitated using group projects in which students attempt to be able to apply what they have learned in the classroom to their everyday experiences (Cunningham 2004).

In terms of my research, determining whether families believe a features associated with “traditional” education or “progressive” education designate a school as being of high quality allows for a more nuanced understanding of families perceptions of school quality than is possible using only the indicators of quality commonly employed by researchers. Existing research has employed dichotomies similar to that of the “traditional” versus “progressive” binary and found variation among families’ desires for a specific educational approach as well as in how they foster their children’s educational development (Delpit 1995; Lareau 2003).

In her work, Delpit (1995) focuses specifically upon the most effective instructional methodology to both enhance students’ literacy and teach them to write (Delpit 1995). She describes two competing methodologies: the “process” approach and “traditional” teaching. The process approach posits “...teachers should focus on the larger cognitive processes of writing than solely on correcting the products” (Delpit 1995: 7). “Traditional” teaching, on the other hand, focuses more upon the skills and mechanics necessary for effective writing such as having students practice handwriting and requiring teachers to correct the grammar within students’ writing (Delpit 1995).

Delpit (1995) does not specifically advocate either instructional approach in her work, but instead highlights a concept she terms “the culture of power” and its effect upon the desires families of different social backgrounds have for the content of their children’s education (24). In other words, Delpit’s (1995) description of differences in the level of “culture of power” diverse families possess may influence whether a family desires a more “progressive” approach in their children’s education or a more “traditional” approach.

Delpit (1995) states that a families’ social position designates the level of “culture of power” they possess (24). Therefore, if a family belongs to the dominant racial class (white) and is of a higher socioeconomic status, then they possess the culture of power reflected within major social institutions such as education. These families, she argues, are more likely to see the “process approach” and similar educational methodologies as a reasonable educational expectation and possibly even a preference for their children’s education (Delpit 1995). On the other hand, families whose social position does not provide them with this type of culture of power but creates a different cultural context in which they live may not disagree with features of the “process approach” in education. However, by virtue of their families’ social position, they may have a stronger desire for their children’s education to emphasize core subjects and practical skills that will allow their children to achieve future success in overall society (Delpit 1995). This differential possession of the culture of power indicates variation along the lines of race and class in the ways different families perceive the purpose of education in their children’s lives which may affect their definitions of what constitutes a quality school for their children.

In her study of ways in which a child's family background influences their educational development, Lareau (2003) found a marked difference along the lines of social class. In middle-class families, Lareau (2003) describes child-rearing practices as "concerted cultivation," in which parents expose their children to many experiences such as organized sports teams and private music lessons. This type of child-rearing seems to ally with a more progressive approach to education. Further, the relationship these families have with their children results in

...a robust sense of entitlement in [middle-class] children. This sense of entitlement plays an especially important role in institutional settings, where middle class children learn to question adults and address them as relative equals. (Lareau 2003: 2)

On the other hand, in working-class families, relationships between parents and children are quite different, and Lareau (2003) terms their child-rearing practices as "accomplishment of natural growth," which allies more with a traditional approach to education. A primary feature of this style of child-rearing is a clear boundary between adults and children; in working-class families, Lareau (2003) found

...the crucial responsibilities of parenthood do not lie in eliciting their children's feelings, opinions, and thoughts...Parents tend to use directives: they tell their children what to do rather than persuading them with reason. (Lareau 2003: 3)

While Lareau's (2003) focus is upon the effect family background has upon children's educational development, one could argue the two different forms of child-rearing she found may influence the ways in which families of different social classes define school quality. If social class influences the way in which families approach their children's educational development, it is possible social class may affect the criteria families of different social classes initially define what school quality means to them. The "traditional" vs. "progressive" binary and the work of both Delpit (1995) and Lareau

(2003) suggests variation may exist in how different families arrive at their definitions of school quality. Perhaps now it is best to turn to research focused upon families' perceptions of school quality and whether or not they demonstrate variation in these perceptions along the lines of race and class.

Within existing literature addressing school quality, researchers often infer what families believe a quality school is based upon the school choices they make for their children. Perhaps this is the case because, much like the school context indicators described above, accurate measures of families' perceptions of school quality are more difficult to achieve. Further, such inferences are based on evidence in which issues of choice and issues of quality are interwoven and not conceptually distinct. Therefore, researchers may assume a family's school choice automatically provides insight into how they define school quality. This assumption, however, overlooks the complexity involved in the school choice decision process, the number of factors families consider when facing school choices, and the level of importance families give to issues of school quality in their ultimate selection of a school for their children. To forge an automatic connection between families' perceptions of quality and their school choices neglects important ways perceptions of school quality differ from school choice decisions. Family definitions of school quality seem more idealistic in nature when compared to the reality of the actual school choice decisions families make. It seems current research fails to recognize this essential difference between school quality and school choice because rarely are school quality and school choice examined at the level of individual families.

At the family level, perceptions of school quality may embody families' educational value systems: specific preferences they have (or do not have) for their

children's education. In other words, school quality is an "ideal" that may reflect individual families' desires for their children's education. However, these desires may or may not be tied to their ability to send their children to such a school. The idealistic nature of families' perceptions of school quality presents a significant challenge to researchers. If families do not always connect "ideal" perceptions of school quality to the reality of their ability to enroll their children in a school embodying such ideals, is it possible for researchers to arrive at some understanding of how families define school quality? Recent research suggests the tentative answer to this question is yes; the answer is "tentative" because most existing empirical evidence about families' perceptions of school quality comes from research with a primary focus upon the issue of school choice. Rarely have researchers examined families' perceptions of school quality independent from specific school choices families make for their children's education. Despite this limitation, findings from current literature can help to shed light on what families believe school quality is.

In their study of the Detroit metropolitan area, Lee, Croninger, and Smith (1994) include a specific measure of how families from different demographic backgrounds rate their local schools on the basis of the quality education they provide. Using an annual, large scale survey of households in Detroit and its surrounding suburbs, Lee, Croninger and Smith (1994) measure family level perceptions of school quality using the following question:

Students are given grades for their work, often A as the highest grade, B, C, D, and F for fail. Suppose the public schools in your community were graded in the same way. What grade would you give to your public schools: A, B, C, D, or F? (Use + or - if you wish).
(455)

Applying numerical values to families' rating of their public schools in which A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1 and F = 0, the mean rating for all families was 2.5, which can be interpreted as falling somewhere between a grade of B and C. However, a comparison of the mean school ratings reported by families from diverse demographic backgrounds demonstrates variation along the lines of geographic residence (i.e., urban vs. suburban), socioeconomic status, and race.

For families living in Detroit, the mean rating of their local schools was 1.91 compared to 2.67 for families living outside Detroit in suburban environments, a difference that is significant at the $p < .001$ level. This difference based on geographic location implies variation in family ratings of local schools along the basis of class as well. Lee, Croninger, and Smith (1994) report, "Using data from the 1990 Census, the Children's Defense Fund (1992) reported that of the nation's 100 largest cities, Detroit ranked at the very top in the proportion of children living in poverty—46.2%" (438). Given this statistic, one can reasonably assume the urban/suburban difference in families' ratings of local schools also implies families of lower socioeconomic status rate their local schools lower than families from higher socioeconomic positions. In terms of variation by race, minority families reported a mean rating of 2.17 for their local schools compared to the 2.63 rating given by white families, a difference that is also significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Lee, Croninger, and Smith (1994) contribute to the conversation about families' perceptions of school quality by demonstrating that different types of families have different perceptions of the level of educational quality to which they have greatest access: the schools within their community. Further, more recent studies of school quality

replicate Lee, Croninger, and Smith's (1994) finding of variation among families' perceptions of school quality along the lines of race and class (Schneider, Marschall, Teske, and Roch 1998; Schneider and Buckley 2002). However, measures of school quality used in these studies seem limited as they rarely provide specific details about how families construct their definitions of school quality. A complete understanding of family level perceptions of school quality requires more attention be given to such details.

Holme (2000) and Johnson (2006) are two researchers who give attention to details of families' definitions of school quality. Their work is similar to that of Lee, Croninger, and Smith (1994) as they also examine family level perceptions of school quality within the overall context of ultimate school choice decisions families make. However, the methodological approach Holme (2000) and Johnson (2006) use to understand better how families arrive at their definitions of what constitutes a quality school is markedly different. They use qualitative interviews with families in order to gain more detailed information about how families arrive at their own definitions of school quality.

While a qualitative approach limits the generalizability of their findings to the overall population, their studies reveal a feature of families' perceptions of school quality overlooked in previous studies. Both Holme (2000) and Johnson (2006) find that when families are probed to describe more explicitly the criteria used in assessing "quality" schools, they employ what I term "proxy" measures of quality. In other words, rather than relying on indicators of school quality emphasized by researchers, families judged schools to be "good" or "bad" using factors such as information gathered from social

networks of other families in similar socioeconomic positions, a school's geographic location, and the racial composition of a school's student body.

In her study, Holme (2000) specifically targets mostly white, upper-income families because she argues they represent families who have the financial resources to participate in what she calls "the 'unofficial' choice market" (178). She believes within the many debates over issues of school quality and school choice, researchers have overlooked an important difference between families of higher socioeconomic status and their lower status counterparts, "...high income parents' [have the] ability to buy a home that gives them access to good public schools" (178). Therefore, all forty-two families interviewed in this study used their financial resources to purchase a home located in the best school district they could afford (Holme 2000).

An important goal of Holme's (2000) research is understanding the beliefs high-status families have regarding judging schools as either "good" (i.e., quality) or "bad." Her findings demonstrate families rarely sought out specific information about schools they judged as bad as well as the schools and districts to which they relocated for good or better schools. Holme (2000) reports

The vast majority [81 percent]...of the parents I interviewed had not obtained test-score data for the schools in their old neighborhood, or for other schools or school districts...they determined were 'bad' and consequently avoided...less than one-fourth [of the respondents] actually visited the school they eventually chose before buying their home...And finally, twenty-five parents had not obtained test score-data for their chosen school before they decided to move to that area for the schools. (179)

The driving force behind these high-status families' perceptions of school quality represents a proxy measure of school quality. Holme (2000) finds families in her study relied heavily upon information received from social networks comprised of other high-status families. Further, the information passed through these networks is not focused

upon specific features of schools such as the quality of instruction in a school or the academic courses offered to students (Holme 2000). Instead, the information included opinions about school reputations and whether or not other high-status families enroll their children in specific schools.

Families' own words during their interviews highlight the salience of social networking with other high-status parents in families' construction of their perceptions of school quality. Below are two excerpts demonstrating the influence the opinions and information from families of similar social status has upon Holme's (2000) respondents' perceptions of school quality. The first excerpt comes from Betsy Anderson whose family left their original neighborhood, Westland, because they believed the local school there was unacceptable. Betsy describes how her family arrived at this judgment of the Westland school,

I don't even know that there was anything specific that somebody said [about the Westland school]. It was just that...its reputation was not good, and I know that there were these neighbors of mine...both of them were very knowledgeable about education and [they] had said 'naaaahhh, not very good. (Holme 2000: 187)

Another parent, Susan Murray describes how interacting with parents at her children's private preschool provided her family with information about school quality.

There's a lot of buzz amongst parents. We see each other all the time in different situations...You hear from people how things are going, what schools are having trouble...I could keep you here another hour talking about all the rumors about the schools [laughs]. So, information really flows. (Holme 2000: 188)

From these excerpts, it seems clear the families in this study arrive at their definitions of school quality based less on specific information about schools and more on reputations schools receive from networking with families in similar high-status social positions.

Holme's (2000) study does not provide evidence of variation in families' perceptions of school quality because her sample of families is very homogeneous in

terms of race and class. However, an important implication of her findings is the perpetuation of status ideologies which are

...seemingly commonsense beliefs held by dominant status groups to explain why other groups seem to fail disproportionately in a society where opportunity is theoretically open to anyone with the will and drive to achieve. (Holme 2000: 179)

The reinforcement of such status ideologies serves to uphold and potentially exacerbate any existing inequality within US schools. If white, high-status families judge school quality on the basis of whether other white, high-status families believe a school is good or whether they send their children to a specific school, the outcome is a number of predominantly white, upper-class student bodies in school districts requiring significant financial resources to access. One consequence of this is increased concentration of poor, minority students in those schools higher-status families judge as unacceptable.

Evidence from Holme's (2002) study suggests families' perceptions of school quality appear to be social constructions influenced by the social environment in which families live. While she did not interview lower-status, minority families, I anticipate these families will also judge school quality through proxy measures constructed within the context of their social positions as well as the social networks to which they have access. Since their social position and the social networks to which they belong are likely to be different from those of white, high-status families, variation in the ways families of diverse social backgrounds construct proxy measures of quality *may* exist. However, Holme's (2000) study is unable to provide evidence of any such variation.

In her study, Johnson (2006) interviews both black and white families as well as families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, providing a more heterogeneous sample allowing for comparisons between diverse families' perceptions of school quality. At the beginning of the interviews, Johnson (2006) finds families often referred to

specific features of schools such as updated facilities, dedicated teachers, and small class size as indicative of a school's level of quality (Johnson 2006). However, similar to Holme (2000), when probed further, families reported they rarely investigated these features of schools when evaluating a potential school for their children (Johnson 2006). Instead, two additional proxy measures families use to judge the quality of schools emerged from the interviews, and both measures are heavily influenced by a confluence of race and class.

According to Johnson (2006) the primary way families in her study judge a school as either good or bad is based upon the school's location. She writes,

What was remarkable was that parents' perspectives on what makes a school's location a good one were so consistent. They all seemed to dictate the same basic formula: a good school is in a good neighborhood, and a good neighborhood is a wealthier and whiter neighborhood. (Johnson 2006: 41)

Johnson (2006) reports black families often expressed a desire for racial diversity in the school their children attend, but the belief that "whiter and wealthier" schools automatically means higher quality education often trumped that desire in the ways these families judged school quality through the proxy measure of location. This suggests the reinforcement of status ideologies found among Holme's (2000) predominantly white, high-status families is not unrecognized by lower status, minority families. Not only do they recognize it, but it seems to influence their own perceptions of school quality in spite of other factors they value for their child's education. For poorer, minority families, however, access to the "whiter, wealthier, quality" schools comes with a price they may not be in the position to afford. For these families, reconciling what they believe quality education is and their ability to provide it for their children becomes a more difficult task than it is for white, high-status parents.

Based on the literature reviewed above, it is clear a comprehensive understanding of families' perceptions of school quality has yet to be achieved. Current studies begin to unpack the complexity involved in ascertaining how families determine what constitutes a quality school, but more work is necessary to comprehend more completely how parents define school quality. Not only is such an understanding of quality necessary in its own right, but it is also crucial when families' perceptions of school quality are considered alongside their school choice behavior. In my literature review of school choice below, debates rage around the salience of school quality as a factor families consider during the school choice decision process. Without a more complete understanding of how parents' define school quality, conclusions about the importance families give to school quality when selecting a school for their children will be incomplete at best.

School Choice

Within literature examining school choice, significant disagreement exists regarding whether school choice programs will serve to improve the US educational system or to further stratify an already highly stratified system. In the pages that follow, I first describe a more theoretical debate over the issue of school choice. This debate centers on the motivations for and the behaviors involved in families' school choice decisions. Having laid out both sides of this debate, I then address empirical studies of school choice.

Proponents of school choice often operate from a market theory perspective (Chubb and Moe 1990; Young and Clinchy 1992). In other words, their advocacy of school choice programs is based on a desire to create an "educational marketplace"

involving a transition of US education from the public sector to the private sector. Chubb and Moe (1990) argue such a transition benefits families and children because “...markets work to ensure that parents and students play a much more central and influential role in private sector education...” (Chubb and Moe 1990: 32). If families are dissatisfied with the school their children currently attend, the educational marketplace allows them to pick up and leave in search of an alternative school that is a better fit for their educational needs. One result of a market system of education is competition amongst schools. Within the “educational marketplace” schools compete to retain their student bodies and/or attract new families to the education they provide; further, this competition forces schools to become more responsive to the needs of families and their children (Young and Clinchy 1992). If a particular school falls short in this competition, the decreasing size of the student body will ultimately lead to closure of the school (Chubb and Moe 1990). According to its advocates, a marketplace system of education not only provides families with greater agency in school choice decisions but also fosters higher levels of quality education as only the “better” schools will survive marketplace competition. Another positive outcome proponents of marketplace education suggest is that family involvement in children’s education increases, serving to enhance the relationship between schools and families.

Researchers such as Chubb and Moe (1990) and Young and Clinchy (1992) who advocate the use of marketplace ideology in education often employ rational choice theory as the explanation for how such a marketplace will both operate and produce the positive outcomes described above. In addition, choice advocates also use the rational choice framework to either predict or explain school choice decision making behavior.

While researchers from various disciplines employ this theoretical framework to further understand decision making processes, the foundation of the theory seems primarily rooted within economics. It seems necessary to address the economic principles underlying rational choice theory to understand better its application to families' school choice decision processes.

In an examination of a “behavioral model of rational choice” economist Simon (1955) provides a description of traditional economic theory with clear ties to contemporary uses of rational choice theory. In this description, Simon writes man is simultaneously “economic” and “rational”. To explain the co-existence of these characteristics, he writes

This man is assumed to have knowledge of...relevant aspects of his environment...He is assumed also to have a well-organized and stable system of preferences, and a skill in computation that enables him to calculate, for the alternative courses of action [i.e., decisions]...available to him, which of these [decisions] will permit him to reach the highest point on his preference scale. (Simon 1955:99)

In a similar way, Becker (1976) argues economic principles, or “the economic approach,” provide a very effective foundation from which one can explain all human behavior.

Becker's (1976) economic approach involves a “goal-oriented, self-maximizing rational theory” of human behavior which he believes is as applicable to educational decisions as it is to the choice of what film to see or what car to purchase (Wells and Crain 1992).

Another important feature of the economic approach to decision making involves individual preferences; Becker (1976) posits individual preferences “are assumed not to change substantially over time, nor to be very different between wealthy and poor persons, or even between persons in different societies” (Becker 1976).

Keeping in mind the assumptions described by both Simon (1955) and Becker (1976), rational choice theory seems rather applicable to explanations of human decision

making behavior, including decisions of school choice. From a rational choice perspective, any family facing a school choice decision will arrange the features of a school they most desire for their children in order of importance, evaluate available schooling options to determine which best fulfills the maximum number of these desired features, and finally select that school for their children. Further, rational choice explanations of school choices argue the most important guiding factors families will consider during the choice process are issues of school quality such as the strength of a school's academics or curriculum. However, a number of researchers question whether a rational choice theoretical framework is an appropriate and realistic explanation of the decision making process involved in school choice. It is to these critiques that I now turn.

High on the list of critiques of rational choice theory as an appropriate framework for understanding school choice is the number of assumptions one must make in order to accurately predict the decision behavior of different families engaged in this process (Bosetti 2004; Wells and Crain 1992). For example, Bosetti (2004) details three specific assumptions inherent in rational choice theory as it applies to school choice. First, it assumes all families will use a cost/benefit analysis incorporating the probability of attaining the school choice they most desire during their decision making process. Second, the theory assumes all families will be equally effective during the decision making process in terms of accessing and receiving information about schools. Finally, rational choice theory assumes every family will act in the absolute best interest of its children's education. For Bosetti (2004) and others, these assumptions serve to oversimplify the school choice process. In an ideal world, all of these assumptions would be the reality. However, Bosetti (2004) and fellow critics of rational choice recognize the

school choice decision making process is far more complex. School choice decisions often involve external social and cultural influences exerting varying levels of constraint upon different families making these decisions; use of rational choice theories of school choice can lead one to overlook this important aspect of the decision making process.

Rational choice theory is also criticized as providing empirically unsupported justification for a marketplace system of education. While rational choice theories may provide *theoretical* justification for transitioning education from the public sector to the private sector, some researchers point out a lack of sufficient empirical evidence about how people make decisions about schools. For example, Wells and Crain (1992) do not believe the promise of the market ideology school choice advocates who argue

...when families are given tuition vouchers to spend at...schools of their choice, they will act rationally, in a goal-oriented fashion, to maximize their educational utility by finding the 'best school' for their children. (Wells and Crain 1992:66)

Similar to Bosetti (2004) these researchers see this view of school choice as not only too economically deterministic, but ignorant of other important factors involved in families' educational decision making. However, Wells and Crain (1992) are more specific in their critique. They narrow their focus on another assumption of rational choice theory: the argument that the strength of a school's academic program will be the primary guiding factor in every family's school choice decision. The assumption of many proponents of school choice is parents are primarily concerned about issues of school quality when faced with a school choice decision. My research demonstrates the extent to which this claim is true within my sample, but researchers such as Wells and Crain (1992) already contend this is a much too narrow lens through which to view the school choice decision making process.

While academic strength or issues of school quality may be the paramount criteria in some families' school choices, such a claim minimizes the other factors families may view as equally important during their consideration of what they desire most for their children's education. Further, Wells and Crain (1992) argue families do not make school choice decisions in either an economic or a social vacuum. Instead, families make school decisions within the context of their economic and social position within the larger society, a crucial feature of school choice decision making overlooked when operating from an economic, or market-based, perspective of this process.

In contrast to the rational choice theoretical foundation for school choice, researchers like Bosetti (2004) and Wells and Crain (1992) seem to employ what Fuller, Elmore, and Orfield (1996) have termed a "cultural logic of families" perspective of family participation in school choice decisions. This competing theoretical framework highlights the roles human agency and culture play in how families from different socio-demographic backgrounds engage in the school choice decision making process. In other words, the "cultural logic of families" framework allows for consideration of other important social and cultural influences that may affect the choices families ultimately make for their children's education.

Goyette (2008) seems to employ this ideology when she indicts other researchers for viewing families' school choice decisions as "a one step process in which a single choice is made by considering every characteristic of all possible choices" or a "discrete phenomena with two options—enroll or not enroll in a particular magnet school or choice program" (Goyette 2008: 115). Instead, Goyette (2008) posits school choice decisions should be seen as an on-going process that may involve a multitude of options families

must consider before rendering a final decision. Lending more support to the culture of family logic ideology, Bulman (2004) takes issue with school choice advocates who argue or assume the process of selecting a school is similar, if not identical, to the process of any other consumable good in society. Bulman (2004) completely disagrees with this position arguing selection of one's school is, in fact, the selection of the locale for a social process: the social process of education. It is within a particular school that a child receives both socialization and preparation for life as an adult member of society.

Similarly, within schools, other social processes take place that carry with them serious implications for a child's future, such as cultural capital reproduction and reproduction of inequality. Therefore, to parallel the process of selecting a school for a child's education with the process of selecting a much simpler "consumable good" like a car or a home, is just as irrational as conceiving of a school choice decision as a one-step, catch-all process. Bulman (2004) bolsters his position by listing a number of additional factors that may influence families facing a school choice decision such as the parents' worldview on education, the families' previous experience with the education system, religious beliefs, and aspects of their specific cultural backgrounds.

While Wells and Crain (1992) argue the marketplace ideology, and by extension the rational choice theory, of school choice lacks empirical support, current studies of school choice lend significant support to the competing perspective of the cultural logic of families. Researchers whose work allies more with the "cultural logic of families" theoretical framework of school choice demonstrate that in addition to issues of school quality, families also consider other school characteristics and social influences when making school choice decisions. These studies do not discount the role school quality

plays in families' school choices; they simply recognize quality as one factor among many families consider when engaged in school choice decision making. Below I review two studies whose findings demonstrate that, in addition to considerations of school quality or strength of academics, issues of race and socioeconomic status have significant influence upon families' school choice decision making process (Saporito and Lareau 1999; Reay and Ball 1998). Evidence from these studies suggests the school choice process is far more complex than researchers employing rational choice theory assert.

Saporito and Lareau (1999) examine the ways in which white families and African American families make school choices. Some similarity in choice behavior along racial lines exists in that families of both races engage in what the authors describe as a two-step decision-making process. The two steps of this process are a "first order decision" followed by a "second order decision" (Saporito and Lareau 1999). During a first order decision, families exclude some schooling options from any further consideration as a schooling option. Families then move to the second order decision "where parents [families] consider a variety of factors and select a school" (Saporito and Lareau 1999: 431). Despite this similarity, Saporito and Lareau report "compelling evidence that race is a very powerful force in guiding family [school] choices" (Saporito and Lareau 1999: 419). Significant difference exists between the choice processes of white families and African American families with regard to the level of consideration they give to issues of race, especially the racial composition of a school's student body, during the two-step choice process.

When white families engage in choice decisions, issues of race play a role in both the first and second order decisions. However, the influence of race is most salient in

white families' first order decision because schools with predominantly African American student bodies are eliminated at this point "regardless of their positive attributes on other criteria" (Saporito and Lareau 1999). Further, white families exclude schools during the first order decision even when predominantly African American schools perform better than predominantly white schools on measures often used to indicate a school's level of quality such as SAT scores and attendance rates (Saporito and Lareau 1999). During their second order decision, white families consider a variety of other factors such as school location and curriculum, which they use to make a final school choice. White parents consider racial composition of a school's student body in this step of the process, but it does not carry the same salience as it did during the first order decision.

As mentioned previously, African American families also engage in a two-step school choice decision making process. However, the strong influence that a school's racial composition exerted on white families decisions is absent from African American families' choice behavior. In fact, "African American families did not appear, as a group, to eliminate schools from consideration using a single criterion" (Saporito and Lareau 1999:433). What they did find, though, is a modest pattern in which African American parents tend to avoid schools with student bodies comprised of large numbers of poor children. Yet, this pattern involving a school's level of poverty is not nearly as strong as the relationship found between racial composition of a school and white parent's selection processes.

In terms of my research, what is most striking in Saporito and Lareau's (1999) study is the choice behavior of white families. In white families, issues of school quality

are sometimes given less consideration than issues of race or schools' racial compositions. This contradicts the claims of some researchers that school quality is the primary factor in all families' school choices. Therefore, further investigation of a relationship between families' perceptions of school quality and their actual school choice decisions seems necessary to unpack further the complexity involved in how different families make school choices. Further, while Saporito and Lareau (1999) find only a modest pattern for the influence of socioeconomic status upon African American families' choice behavior, other studies of families' school choice processes demonstrate significant differences in how the process operates for families in different socioeconomic classes.

Reay and Ball (1998) are two researchers who illustrate the effect of class upon the school choice process. Based on their research, it is clear that class differences among families making school choices result in rather different experiences along class lines. For example they report, "In working class families, children tend to hold greater power to influence school choice" (Reay and Ball 1998:443). This seems to imply the choice process is more egalitarian within working class families. Reay and Ball (1998) argue this increased parent/child equality in school choice decisions results from the social position working class families occupy within the educational market. The working class family experiences a number of constraints unique to their social position (i.e., available finances, limited access to a wide range of school options, limited access to transportation, and other child care responsibilities) that lead working class parents to see their child as the resident "expert" on school choice. Therefore, in working class families

children provide more input into the decision making process than children from middle class families.

Another class difference within the choice process involves what Reay and Ball (1998) term the “temporal orientation” of the school choice process. In middle class families, school choice decisions tend to be oriented toward implications for the child’s happiness in the future, perhaps in preparation for higher levels of education, which can lead to a fulfilling career for the child. Working class families, on the other hand, employ a more “here and now,” or present-oriented, perspective during the school choice process; their desire in selecting a school focuses more upon their children’s present happiness and does not necessarily involve consideration of future happiness.

In an attempt to explain this difference, Reay and Ball (1998) first cite the work of Basil Bernstein. Bernstein (1971, 1996) describes middle class families involved in school choice decisions as desiring what he terms “invidious insulation”; in other words, middle class parents are aware of the need to preserve their children’s social status and believe choosing a school is an important step in this process. Therefore, this desire leads middle class parents to aspire to a school setting in which their children will be surrounded by other children of similar social status and academic ability (Bernstein 1971; Bernstein 1996). With Bernstein’s “invidious insulation” as a foundation, Reay and Ball summarize the effect class differences have upon school choice when they write,

Choice is socially embedded for both middle- and working class families but in different ways. Put crudely, for the middle classes, it [choice] is embedded in their strategies of social reproduction, for the working classes in the limits of ‘necessity.’ (Reay and Ball 1998:439)

This does not suggest working class families desire less for their children’s education or are simply more willing to “settle” for a school than find the “best” (i.e., highest quality)

school for their children. In fact, working class families tend to have the same desires middle class families have when it comes to school choice; the main difference lies in the ability of families from different classes to translate their desires for their children's education into the reality of where their children attend school. For families of more limited financial means, that translation is more difficult.

Reay and Ball's (1998) evidence suggests a complex relationship between the saliency of school quality as a factor in the school choice behavior of families from different socioeconomic positions. Working class families may want school quality to be the primary factor in their school choice decision, but lack financial or other practical means to do so. Middle class families, on the other hand, seem to exhibit choice behavior similar to that of white families in Saporito and Lareau's (1999) study; white families and middle class families want their children to attend schools in which the other students are from similar backgrounds, either of the same race or from the same social class as their children.

Findings from both Saporito and Lareau (1999) and Reay and Ball (1998) are extremely helpful both for their demonstration of the influence of factors other than school quality in families' school choice processes and for highlighting race and class as significant examples of such factors. Further, their research demonstrates the complexity of the school choice process and how the experience of this process is not uniform across all families. For example, while families consider issues of school quality during school choices, it is not the only factor influencing families' ultimate decisions. My research builds upon their work to achieve both a more complete understanding of school choice decision making at the family level and a solid foundation from which to explore my

primary research question: is there a relationship between families' perceptions of school quality and the ultimate school choices they make?

How People Make Choices

Thus far, I have addressed literature that speaks directly to choice as it relates to schools. Understanding the process of decision-making, or how people make choices, is equally important for any investigation of how families make school choices. More general literature examining how people engage in decision-making processes provides a necessary foundation for understanding the process in which families engage when faced with a school choice decision. In the proceeding paragraphs, I address a broader array of existing literature examining choice and decision-making. The findings of this research help one understand better how people make choices in general and have connections to concepts found within more school choice centered literature.

Existing literature examining how people make choices lends support to the argument against the use of rational choice theory as the most appropriate explanation for how families make school choices. Instead, many researchers examining choice within diverse contexts provide evidence supporting Fuller, Elmore, and Orfield's (1996) "cultural logic of families" perspective regarding the process families undergo when selecting a school for their children. When one makes a choice, she engages in a much more complex process than a simple cost/benefit analysis. Involved in this complexity are issues such as how the human brain operates during decision-making, external socio-structural variables shaping how people make decisions, and other individuals who exert influence over a person making a choice.

Within existing literature on choice and decision-making, researchers focus on a diverse range of topics. For example, Lehrer (2009) examines the ways in which parts of the brain affect how people make decisions in an attempt to understand how people can make better decisions. Tallman and Gray (1990) review traditional perspectives of choice behavior to reach a more comprehensive and sociological understanding of decision-making while Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) study the influence of mass media upon the choices people make. Despite these differences, however, a common thread exists in their work; all of these researchers emphasize making a choice or a decision is a more complex undertaking than much conventional thought about the subject suggests.

In particular, this emphasis on the complexity of making choices highlights a common critique of rational choice theory's ability to explain how families make school choices for their children: the many assumptions under which this theory operates are flawed. Perhaps the most important assumption existing literature on choice and decision-making takes to task is that all families will use a cost/benefit analysis incorporating the probability of attaining the school choice they most desire during their decision making process (Bosetti 2004). The works of Lehrer (2009), Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), and Tallman and Gray (1990) clearly demonstrate that a simple cost/benefit analysis as the foundation for decision-making behavior provides a limited view of a more intricate process.

Unlike Tallman and Gray (1990) and Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955), who approach the subjects of choice and decision-making from the fields of sociology and communications respectively, Lehrer (2009) takes a unique approach to understanding how people make choices. He employs findings from the field of neuroscience and most

recent findings from brain mapping to explain how the human brain operates when confronted with a decision. Much of his work is beyond the scope of this research, but he provides some evidence relevant to the debate over the most appropriate approach one should take in any effort to understand choice behavior. From the outset of his work, Lehrer calls into question a feature of human beings that has been widely accepted for centuries, dating back to the works of the philosopher Plato. This feature is that humans are inherently rational beings, and this rationality separates humans from other animal life (Lehrer 2009: xv).

Lehrer provides a good description of the conventional wisdom supporting the idea that human beings are inherently rational when he discusses Descartes' philosophy, rooted firmly in faith in human reason. He writes, "Rationality was like a scalpel, able to dissect reality into its necessary parts. Emotions, on the other hand, were crude and primitive" (Lehrer 2009: 11). While recognizing cognitive reasoning is a crucial component in decision-making, Lehrer argues it represents only one half of the process in which humans engage when making a choice. An equally important aspect of this process involves parts of the brain associated with emotions. The orbitofrontal cortex (OFC) is an example of such a part of the brain. The OFC is responsible for "...integrating visceral emotions into the decision-making process" (Lehrer 2009: 18).

To support his claim of the necessity for the OFC in human decision-making, Lehrer recounts the story of Eliot who, after brain surgery to remove a small tumor from the frontal lobe of his brain, was unable to make even the simplest of decisions. (Lehrer 2009:14). Eliot's neurologist, Dr. Antonio Damasio, concerned for the chaos resulting

from Eliot's inability to make a simple decision and intrigued by the neurological implications of this pathology, attempted to discern why his patient had this symptom.

Damasio noticed Eliot seemed unperturbed despite that fact that his inability to decide was ruining his life: Eliot recently lost his job, his wife left him, and he filed for bankruptcy. Eliot rarely expressed any emotion about his situation: he never became angry, sad, or frustrated. In short, it appeared Eliot had no emotions. In testing this theory, Damasio achieved his first insight into what happened to Eliot. Damasio ran a test in which he connected Eliot to a machine measuring "...the activity of the sweat glands in his palms. (When a person experiences strong emotions, the skin is literally aroused and the hands begin to perspire...)" (Lehrer 2009: 15). Damasio then showed Eliot pictures "...that normally trigger an immediate emotional response: a severed foot, a naked woman, a house on fire, a handgun" (15). The results clearly demonstrated Eliot felt nothing; his palms never became sweaty despite the photograph placed in front of him. Damasio continued his research with other patients who also had damage to their orbitofrontal cortex and found they too could not make decisions.

Lehrer's point from this example is simple: "A brain that can't feel can't make up its mind" (15, *ibid*). Without access to our emotions, human beings are unable to make a decision; this finding contradicts the long held ideas that the ability to reason makes humans unique and is responsible for helping us make decisions. Recent neuroscience has shown areas of the brain associated with emotions, like the orbitofrontal cortex, are significantly larger in humans than other primates (18). For centuries, humans have believed our ability to reason is what set us apart from other species; Lehrer's work suggests our emotions are an equally distinctive human feature. Lehrer's work suggests

that a simple cost/benefit approach to decision-making is incomplete. To truly understand how people make choices, the rationality in such an approach engages only a few parts of the human brain that assist in decision-making. To ignore the influence human emotion has upon the process of decision-making means ignoring important brain activities that influence how people decide.

Tallman and Gray (1990) present a review of existing choice and decision-making theories in order to develop a more comprehensive theory that explains better the process involved in making a choice. In their review, they examine features of choice and decision-making that connect to the work of Lehrer (2009), connections I will address at a later point. Tallman and Gray (1990) begin their review with a description of what they term two distinct traditions in theories about choice and decision-making (407). The first tradition is the subjective/cognitive tradition which includes rational choice theory. The primary characteristics of theories following this tradition are an empirical focus and a predictive nature.

On the other hand, there is the objective/behaviorist tradition in which theories of choice focus upon the effects of reward and punishment and are concerned with “...objective probabilities in the form of events that directly influence behavioral responses” (Tallman and Gray 1990: 415). What the authors find remarkable about these two traditions is they are usually treated as opposed to one another despite the fact that both “...employ virtually the same variables to explain the same types of behaviors; yet rarely do their practitioners refer to each other’s work” (Tallman and Gray 1990: 407). Tallman and Gray (1990) believe this lack of communication among researchers working in either tradition prevents them from recognizing conditions in which one tradition or

the other is better suited as a theory to explain the processes of choice and decision-making (419).

Perhaps more important for this research is Tallman and Gray's assessment of the social contexts in which people make choices and decisions. They argue three temporal or developmental stages exist whenever one makes a choice: 1) a given period within history, 2) a given point in society (i.e. the development of social organizations and institutions within the society in which the "chooser" lives), and 3) a particular stage of personal development for the individual making a decision (Tallman and Gray 1990: 418). While the salience of the three stages can vary for individuals making a choice, the authors believe all three stages exist in some form for any individual confronted with a decision. They write, "...no choice can take place free of constraints of the historical events, situational demands, and individual capacity" (418).

In addition to the existence of the three stages involved with making a choice, Tallman and Gray (1990) suggest that cumulative influences also exist during the decision-making process. Further, they argue these cumulative influences upon an individual making a choice often are "...not brought to bear by conscious calculations" (418). Here one finds a connection to Lehrer's (2009) work; the influences Tallman and Gray describe affect the decision-making process in that an individual "chooser" may automatically eliminate possible choice alternatives without giving these choices much thought at all, let alone deliberate and rational thought.

For example, when making a choice, a person may eliminate a possible choice because such an option has "...never existed in [her] milieu," the individual may find an option morally repugnant, or the individual may not believe a choice option is accessible

to them in the reality of their social position (Tallman and Gray 1990: 418). The authors describe this facet of decision-making in great detail when they write

...actors [people making a choice] accept, internalize, and act in accordance with a set of maxims, beliefs, moral values, attributions, and interpretations of reality not only because they have learned these (and other) knowledge systems, but also because their perception that adopting alternative course of action has a high probability of leading to costly outcomes. (Tallman and Gray 1990: 419)

These features of decision-making echo Lehrer's (2009) suggestion that influences other than rationality, such as emotions, have an important place within any theory of choice and decision-making. A person making a choice is influenced by features of his/her socialization process: values, beliefs, and knowledge systems; further, the effect of these influences during the decision-making process may operate in a way that at one extreme, the "chooser" may not even recognize as influences or to a lesser extreme, do not require him/her to think too much about how these influences affect the choice he/she makes.

Tallman and Gray (1990) succinctly describe this aspect of decision-making in a concept they term "the moment of choice." (406). The moment of choice is not a straight forward, rational, single point in time as described within the subjective/cognitive tradition of theories of choice and decision-making. Rather, this moment is much more complex and involves more than an individual assessing all possible options and selecting the one option that maximizes the utility of his/her choice. Rather, the authors believe the moment of choice is "...a microcosm within which all forces that affect human and social behavior combine to influence the course of collective or individual action" (406). They, like Lehrer, believe decision-making is an intricate process; it is a process influenced by more

than the subjective/cognitive tradition of choice theory, emphasizing only rational choices maximizing a “chooser’s” gains, suggests.

In addition to reviewing research based upon the two distinct theoretical traditions of choice and decision-making, Tallman and Gray (1990) also alert their readers to some important lacunae within this body of literature. For the purposes of this research, the most relevant issue here is that of the dimension of time as it relates to the process of decision making. A school choice decision is limited in terms of time by a number of factors. First, there is the school year calendar during which most schools typically begin a new year in September and end that year in June. Second, a family faces the time constraint of the age of their children; this research focuses upon school aged children beginning with those in kindergarten, which in Pennsylvania a child usually attends at the age of five. Finally, in some instances, a family may face a very constrained time period for a school choice decision such as the case of a child or family very unhappy with the school the child currently attends, beginning a search for a new school to which a family may want to transfer their child as soon as possible.

Tallman & Gray (1990) argue existing theories of choice and decision making fail to consider the issue of time in a systematic way (419). This oversight is important to remedy as “...it appears time pressures force actors to simplify their decision tasks and to make more cautious decisions” (Tallman and Gray 1990: 419; Abelson and Levi 1985; Wright, 1974). Wright (1974) found when making a decision people tend to give additional weight to negative information

under the constraint of a certain amount of time after which they must decide (Wright 1974). Further, Janis and Mann (1977) determined

...under severe time pressures...actors become...‘hypervigilant’; in essence, they become transfixed and do not use the limited time available for optimal processing of alternatives (Janis and Mann 1977: 59-64).

Therefore, the school choice process can vary significantly for families facing tighter time constraints than for families without such limitations. For example, a family that has long anticipated their child’s entry into kindergarten may begin their school search years before their child is actually age-ready for school. On the other hand, there are some families in which the school their toddler child will attend for kindergarten is lower on their list of priorities. The latter family in the above scenario will have a more limited time period during which they search for and ultimately choose a school for their child.

In addition to the effects the pressure of time has upon choices, another aspect of time crucial to the decision-making process is the amount of time a person needs to process information. Existing choice literature often does not explore this facet of the process of choice. Tallman and Gray (1990) believe that context, specifically the structural context and the cultural context in which one lives, has a significant effect on how she makes that choice. They describe two specific ways in which context affects choice. First, a person’s choice can vary based on the way in which the task of making a choice is presented (Tversky and Kahneman 1981). If one has prior knowledge of the choice that she must make or previous experience making a similar choice, then as a “chooser,” Tallman and Gray (1990) argue this person is “primed” to make that decision (420). A

“primed” chooser, with previous knowledge about the choice she must make, is in a better position to make a choice than one without such knowledge.

Second, if a choice is presented to an individual in moral terms, “...there is little information that requires processing: one either behaves morally or immorally” (Tallman and Gray 1990: 420). The authors liken moral decisions to a situation imbued with high levels of emotion; again, one can connect this to the work of Lehrer (2009) who highlights the importance that parts of the brain associated with emotions have upon decision-making processes. If moral decisions do, in fact, require little information processing and are very similar in nature to highly emotional situation, then the parts of the brain responsible for emotions will function to assist one in making such a decision, even if the “chooser” is unaware of these influences. This lends further support to the argument that reason and rationality are not the sole driving forces behind choices people make.

Another set of researchers whose work supports the claim that rational choice theory is less than appropriate for understanding families’ processes of school choice are Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). While their research belongs to the discipline of communications, many of Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955) findings are important for understanding people’s decision-making behavior, especially as it relates to the influence others have upon the choices people make. In particular, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) highlight ways in which communications research has misunderstood the influence person-to-person communication has upon people’s attitudes and behaviors as well as the influence specific individuals within one’s milieu has upon the choices she makes.

The findings Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) report from communications studies of ways in which the mass media influences people's attitudes and behaviors reveals what they term a "rediscovery" of two important concepts influencing how people make choices. They begin with a description of what they call the "organizing formula" for mass communications research (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955: 1). The formula begins with the question, "Who says what to whom, and with what effect?" indicating mass communications (i.e. newspapers and radio) operate similarly to ways in which communication flows from person to person. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), however, argue this formula needs revision. They find person-to-person communication is different from the way information is transmitted to people via mass media. They write,

It now has become increasingly clear that the individual person who reads something and talks about it with other people cannot be taken simply as a simile for social entities like newspapers or magazines. He himself needs to be studied in his two-fold capacity as a communicator and as a relay point in the network of mass communications. (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955: 1)

Using findings from a 1940s study of the effects radio and print had on developing voter decisions during that year's US Presidential campaign led Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) to develop further conventional understanding of how person-to-person communications can influence the attitudes, behaviors, and choices people make.

The 1940 presidential campaign study "...indicated...the effect of the mass media was small as compared to the role of personal influences" (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955: 3). Voters made their decisions in a way that "...conformed closely to the political climate of their social environment" (3). Rather than basing their vote decisions on information received via mass communication such as the newspaper or radio, voters in this study demonstrated that personal

communications with others in their surrounding environments had greater influence on the ultimate vote they cast in the election. Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) suggest these findings call into question a general assumption in mass communications research at the time: "...that opinions were formed by the elite of the community and then percolated down from one social stratum to the next" (3). They term this organization of opinion transmission "vertical opinion leadership." The 1940 campaign study findings, though, illustrate a "horizontal opinion leadership" structure, which more accurately describes how voters made up their minds about the candidate for whom they cast their vote.

The "discovery" of the importance of the horizontal opinion leadership structure led Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and other communications researchers to investigate further how this form of opinion transmission operates. What they found is each social stratum in a society generates its own opinion leadership, and this leadership emerges in the form of what Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) term "opinion leaders". Opinion leaders are individuals who exert disproportionate influence on the opinions and attitudes of their friends, families, and co-workers (33). Further, opinion leaders are a varied group: they come from diverse occupations, and they exist in every level of a society's economic and social strata. Given the variation found in opinion leaders, there is great potential for variation in the attitudes and behaviors of people who follow their leadership as well as variation in choices these people make.

In terms of families making school choice decisions, one can liken opinion leaders to individuals to whom families may turn for guidance during the

decision-making process. Such individuals may be school administrators or teachers, but if Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) findings are correct, it is more likely families making school choice decisions will be influenced by opinion leaders found within their immediate social surroundings: family members, other families with children in schools they are considering, or friends at work who also have school aged children. In short, families facing school choice decisions will make use of the social networks to which they belong if they are in need of the assistance of an opinion leader for their final school decision. This echoes the work of Holme (2000) that demonstrated the strong influence information gleaned from networking with families similar to them had on wealthy, white families' perceptions of what makes a school "good" as well as whether they would consider specific schools for their children.

Once researchers understood better the influence wielded by opinion leaders, their quest to understand the operation of horizontal opinion leadership structures led to another "rediscovery" of an important facet of the flow of communication amongst people and the implications it has for how people make choices. This rediscovery involves the salience of the "primary group" in social science research (33). The "primary group" consists of families, friends, informal work teams and more formal groups of clubs and organizations within which individuals are likely to form sociometric connections (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955: 48). Sociometric connections operate within the primary group as "...mutual attractions for each other as personalities" (48). Further, the primary group

consists of features helpful to a person confronted with a choice: they are small in size, informal, and primarily involve face-to-face contact. (48).

In their research, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) confirm the hypothesis that “Primary groups actively influence and support most of an individual’s opinions, attitudes and actions” (48). They do so by reviewing three specific studies; the first study is the now famous Hawthorne studies of the effects changes in working conditions have upon productivity; the second assesses soldier attitudes during WWII; while the third study examines life within urban communities (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939; Stouffer et al. 1949; Warner and Lunt 1941). Each study’s findings reveal the strength of a primary group’s influence upon individuals and that the strength of this influence can help develop an understanding of how people form opinions, behave, and make choices.

Further, based on their review of these studies, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) conclude

...interpersonal relationships are *relevant* to an understanding of a problem in social research...the problem is to understand the working of the status system of a community and the criteria by which people assign prestige to one another and themselves. (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955: 39)

With regard to my research, it is important to recognize families’ interpersonal relationships and the primary groups to which they belong may influence their opinions regarding the quality of schools considered during the school choice process. As Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) make clear, interpersonal relationships in the form of primary groups have significant influence upon some in terms of how they form opinions and make choices. Therefore, such relationships may influence criteria by which people not only assign prestige to

one another, but assign prestige to some schools, labeling them “high quality” while not assigning this description to other schools. This labeling may influence families’ perceptions of school quality and may influence them during their school choice decision process.

The research of Lehrer (2009), Tallman and Gray (1990), and Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) all highlight the complex nature of how people make choices. Rather than reducing decision-making to a simple cost/benefit analysis in which a person selects the option maximizing the gains one receives from that choice, these researchers demonstrate the decision-making process involves many more variables. From specific parts of the brain that influence decision-making, the influence of the contexts within which one makes a choice, and ways in which opinion leaders have the ability to shape the opinions of other members of their primary groups, one recognizes reason and rational thinking are only part of this process. To achieve a more complete understanding of the decision-making process, it is imperative one take into consideration the additional features Lehrer (2009), Tallman and Gray (1990), and Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) highlight in their work.

The reviews of the three bodies of literature on school quality, school choice, and how people make decisions provide me with both a solid theoretical and empirical foundation upon which I built this study. The findings and theories found in existing literature allowed me to construct specific conceptual hypotheses, which I describe below, that guide my research and allow me to find answers to the research questions this study aims to answer.

CONCEPTUAL HYPOTHESES:

In this study, I address the primary question, “Is there a relationship between families’ perceptions of quality education and the school choices they ultimately make?” through the three sets of hypotheses. These hypotheses will assist in unpacking any possible relationship between families’ perceptions of school quality and their eventual school choice decisions. Using survey data collected at the family level, I employ multivariate analyses comprised of multiple statistical models employing both binary and linear regression techniques. The first of these models examines families’ perceptions of school quality and here I test whether families from diverse social backgrounds are more likely to exhibit “traditional” or “progressive” perceptions of high quality schools based on the school features they believe are characteristic of a high quality school.

H1a: As suggested by the work of Lareau (2003) and Delpit (1995), white families, families with higher incomes, and families with higher levels of education will be more likely to exhibit “progressive” perceptions of high quality schools based on school features they believe are characteristic of such schools. Families of color, families with lower incomes and lower levels of education will be more likely to exhibit “traditional” perceptions of high quality schools based on school features they believe are characteristic of such schools. These effects of race and class will remain even after controlling for additional family demographic variables such as area of residence (i.e., urban, suburban, or rural) and the number of school aged children within the household.

H1b: Alternatively, there will be no variation amongst the view of education (traditional or progressive) families of different races and social classes exhibit in terms of the school characteristics they believe are characteristic of a high quality school. Any effects of race and class on families’ perceptions of school quality will disappear after controlling for additional family demographic variables.

My second models examine the number of school choice options families considered when making their school choices and here I test whether families of diverse social

backgrounds considered less (i.e., < 2) school choice options or more (i.e., > 2) school choice options during their search for their eventual school choice.

H2a: Variation along the lines of race and class will exist in terms of the number of school choice options families considered during the search for their eventual school choice. On the basis of Holme's (2000) and Johnson's (2006) research, white families, families with higher incomes, and families with higher levels of education will be more likely to consider fewer (i.e., < 2) school choice options than families of color, families with lower incomes and with lower levels of education. These effects of race and class will remain even after controlling for additional family demographic variables such as area of residence and the number of school aged children within the household.

H2a1: Families' "traditional" or "progressive" perceptions of high quality schools will mediate the relationship between the number of school choice options families considered during their search for their eventual school choice and any variation along the lines of race and class.

H2b: Alternatively, there will be no variation amongst the number of school choice options families consider during the search for their eventual school choice. Any effects of race and class on the number of school choice options considered will disappear after controlling for additional family demographic variables.

H2b1: Families' "traditional" or "progressive" perceptions of high quality schools will not mediate the relationship between the number of school choice options families considered during their search for their eventual school choice and any variation along the lines of race and class.

My third models examine the probability that families will select a specific factor, "The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as the most important factor for their school choice decisions. Here I test whether diverse families vary in the importance they give to this specific factor that may or may not influence them during the school choice decision-making process.

H3a: Variation along the lines of race and class will exist in terms of the Probability that families will select "The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as most important for their school choice decisions. On the basis of the work of Tallman and Gray's (1990), families with more traditional orientations toward school quality will be

more likely to select “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for their school choice decisions. Referring back to conceptual hypothesis H1a, families of color, families with lower incomes, and families with lower levels of education are more likely to exhibit traditional orientations toward school quality than white families; therefore, families of color will also be more likely to select “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for their school choice decisions.

H3a1: Families’ “traditional” or “progressive” perceptions of high quality schools will mediate the relationship between the probability a family will select “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for school choice decisions and any variation along the lines of race and class.

H3b: Alternatively, there will be no variation amongst families in terms of their probability of selecting “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as most important for school choice decisions. Any effects of race and class on the number of school choice options considered will disappear after controlling for additional family demographic variables.

H3b1: Families’ “traditional” or “progressive” perceptions of high quality schools will not mediate the relationship between the probability a family will select “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” and any variation along the lines of race and class.

The final set of models in my analysis examines the specific school choices families made for their children’s education. Here I test whether families of diverse social backgrounds choose similar or different school environments for their children.

H4a: Based upon findings from Saporito and Lareau (1999) and Reay and Ball (1998) there will be variation along the lines of race and class with regard to the actual school choices families of diverse social backgrounds make for their children’s education. For example, white families, families with higher incomes, and families with higher levels of education will be more likely to choose private schools, charter schools, and magnet schools for their children than families of color, families with lower incomes and families with lower levels of education. These families will be more likely to choose their neighborhood public school as the location for their children’s education. These effects of race and class will remain even

after controlling for additional family demographic variables such as area of residence and the number of school aged children within the household.

H4a1: Families' "traditional" or "progressive" perceptions of high quality schools will mediate the relationship between their actual school choice for their children's education and any variation along the lines of race and class.

H4b: Alternatively, there will be no variation in the types of school choices families of diverse social backgrounds make for their children's education. Any effects of race and class on families' perceptions of school quality will disappear after controlling for additional family demographic variables.

H4b1: Families' "traditional" or "progressive" perceptions of high quality schools will not mediate the relationship between their actual school choice for their children's education and any variation along the lines of race and class.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the data used to conduct the analyses described above. I also provide a brief overview of both the variables and statistical techniques I use within each of my three analytical chapters. The overview is brief because each analytical chapter provides a more in-depth description of the specific methodology and research strategies I employ in each respective chapter. In short, the next chapter describes the ways in which I designed this study and utilized the data to answer the research questions presented at the start of this introductory chapter.

CHAPTER 2

DATA AND METHODS

Introduction

Previous research on issues of school quality and family's school choices are limited in that few studies analyze these issues at the family level. Studies of school quality tend to focus upon individual schools and specific features of schools that researchers identify as either signifying high quality education or education lacking this level of quality. Rarely do researchers examine what school quality means for an important group of stakeholders in the provision of quality education: families facing school choice decisions regarding where they wish their children to attend school. Studies of school choice have examined specific choices families make for their children, but often fail to link these choices to what families believe constitutes school quality and how their perceptions of school quality may or may not affect their ultimate choice of a school for their children.

The data I describe below allowed me to address these limitations in that they enabled me to examine families' perceptions of school quality as well as the actual school choices families make for their children. Further, the data enabled me to carry out this investigation in stages. I first explore what families believe constitutes a "quality" education, then move to examine how families behave during the school choice search process, and finally analyze the actual school choices families make for their children.

This methodological strategy for studying both school quality and school choice represents a new way of understanding both school quality and school choice. The two issues are conceptually distinct, requiring me to examine the two issues separately at first.

However, there exists the possibility that while conceptually distinct, issues of school quality and school choice also function together at the family level. Therefore, I designed my study to also explore whether the possibility of a relationship exists between families' perceptions of school quality and the final school choices they make for their children's education. In so doing, this study adds to existing literature on both school quality and school choice by exploring these two issues first as separate entities and then as two issues related to one another, particularly at the family level.

Data Source

Pennsylvania and Metropolitan Philadelphia Survey

The Pennsylvania and Metropolitan Philadelphia Survey (PMP) asks a random sample of households their opinions about a number of aspects of community life both in Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia metropolitan region. The survey is a telephone survey of heads of households in Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia metropolitan region. This region includes five Pennsylvania counties (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia) and four New Jersey counties (Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem). Administered in the fall of 2005, the survey employed random digit dial technology to select the sample of households. The sample selected is representative of all households in Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia metropolitan region that have a residential telephone number.

The survey was approximately 40 minutes in length, and respondents were compensated \$10 for their participation. The survey's response rate was 22.1% for the

Metropolitan sample and 22.8% for the State sample². While these response rates are lower than that of previous telephone surveys and are less than ideal, they are similar to response rates from a number of telephone surveys conducted in recent years (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2005). Further, recent research on low response rates for telephone surveys indicates a less than ideal response rate does not necessarily lead to biased results (Curtin, Presser & Singer, 2000; Keeter, Miller, Kohut, Groves, & Presser, 2000).

Based upon a comparison of the demographic profile of survey respondents to census data for the region, respondents do not differ significantly in race, median income, and educational attainment for the overall population from which the sample was drawn, the population of Pennsylvania as a whole and the Philadelphia metropolitan region.

The PMP included one section that specifically addressed the topic of schools in the Philadelphia Metropolitan region. This section consisted of approximately 30 questions and is the primary source of data for my research. The overall unweighted sample size of the 2005 regional PMP is 1,031 households.

Existing literature on quality in education and the process of choosing schools often fails to address households with school aged children directly despite the fact this group has a vested interest in both of these issues. Households including school aged children are vitally important when examining issues of school quality and choice because they evaluate schools in terms of the quality of their education as well as engage in the school choice decision making process. Oftentimes researchers come to conclusions about what families believe a quality school is or how a family makes a specific school choice decision without providing a comprehensive description of the

²These response rates were calculated using the formula for the standard Response Rate 5 as defined by The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR 2010; See “Response Rate Calculator” at <http://www.aapor.com/Home.htm>).

families they study. For example, are the families they study all from the same social background? In other words, are the families similar in terms of race, socioeconomic status, level of education, and other important descriptive characteristics?

For this reason, I decided to restrict my sample to include only those households including children under the age of 18 who are currently enrolled in school or home schooled in grades kindergarten through 12th grade. One variable in the survey allowed me to do this and was a follow up question to “How many children under age 18 live in your household?” A total of 589 households reported having at least one child under age 18 living in their household. Therefore, the sample size for my analysis is $N = 589$, representing those households currently including school aged children.

Variables and Measurement

All of the analyses in this study build upon analyses from the preceding chapter. In other words, variables used as dependent variables in the first analytic chapter, Chapter 3, are used as independent variables in both Chapters 4 and 5, and dependent variables in Chapter 4 are used as independent variables in Chapter 5. Each analytical chapter (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) contain a detailed description of all variables used in the analyses for the respective chapter as well as a specific research strategy for the chapter. Therefore, I present below a brief outline of each chapter’s variables and the statistical techniques used in the analyses contained within the respective chapter.

Chapter 3: Predicting Families’ Perceptions of School Quality

The analyses in Chapter 3 were designed to identify families’ perceptions of school quality. I conducted one ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to determine whether families’ hold a progressive or traditional orientation toward school quality and

three logistic regressions to predict the probability a family will select one of three specific features of schools as the most important indicator of school quality. These three school features represent what I call the “indicator variables” in my descriptions below. Therefore, in Chapter 3 I employ a total of four dependent variables.

Dependent Variables

Progressive vs. Traditional Index Measure of Families’ Orientation toward School Quality

This dependent variable, which I term the “quality index,” measures families’ orientations toward school quality along an index anchored at 0 = *Most progressive* and 5 = *Most traditional*. The OLS regression in which this index measure served as the dependent variable produced unique scores along this index representing whether families’ possessed a more progressive or more traditional orientation toward school quality. Please see both Chapter 3 and Appendix B for a more detailed description of how I constructed this index measure.

Indicator Variables: School features families may have reported as the most important indicator of school quality

Proportion of a School’s Students who will Eventually go on to a Four Year College

This dichotomous dependent variable measures whether families’ reported that the proportion of students in a school who eventually attend a four year college is the most important indicator of school quality. The response options for this variable are 0 = *Family did not select the proportion of students who will go on to a four year college as the most important indicator of school quality* and 1 = *Family selected the proportion of*

students who will go on to a four year college as the most important indicator of school quality.

Small Class Size

This dichotomous dependent variable measures whether families reported that small class size is the most important indicator of school quality. The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select small class size as the most important indicator of school quality}$ and $1 = \textit{Family selected small class size as the most important indicator of school quality}$.

Up-to-Date Resources like Textbooks and Computers

This dichotomous dependent variable measures whether families reported that up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers are the most important indicator of school quality. The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers as the most important indicator of school quality}$ and $1 = \textit{Family selected up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers as the most important indicator of school quality}$.

Independent Variables

I used three independent variables in the analyses described in Chapter 3 as well as in all subsequent analyses in Chapters 4 and 5. I chose these three variables to serve as independent variables in all of my analyses because of my focus on the existence of any variation in families' perceptions of school quality, their behavior during the school choice process, and their actual school choice decisions along the lines of race and class. Therefore, my three independent variables are race, income, and level of education.

*Race*³

Race is measured as dichotomous variable based upon the family respondent's self-report of his/her families' race or ethnic identity. There are two categories in my measure of race, $0 = \textit{Families of color}$ and $1 = \textit{White families}$. White families serve as the reference category for all multivariate analyses.

Income

Income is measured as a continuous-like variable based on the household's total income during the last 12 months. This variable is continuous-like in that responses include 13 categories ranging from an annual household income of \$5,000 to an annual household income of \$120,000. Each category represents the median income from the original income range response categories the PMP survey employed when collecting data on families' annual household income.

Level of Education

Level of education is measured as a dichotomous variable based upon the highest degree earned by a member of the families' household. Response categories for this variable are $0 = \textit{Less than a bachelor's degree}$ and $1 = \textit{More than a bachelor's degree}$. The response category "More than a bachelor's degree" serves as the excluded category in all multivariate analyses.

³My sample did not include a significant number of Hispanic or Asian families to allow additional racial categories to be included in my measure of families' race or ethnic identity.

Control variables⁴

To determine if any variation by race and class in families' perceptions of school quality operate independently of other sociodemographic characteristics of families in my sample, I control for the following variables.

Gender

This is a dichotomous measure of the self-reported gender of the family respondent. This variable has two categories: *0 = Female* and *1 = Male*. The male category serves as the reference category in all multivariate analyses.

Age

This variable refers to the age of the family respondent and is measured continuously in years.

Number of school aged children living in the household

This is a continuous measure of the number of children currently living in the household enrolled in school or homeschooled in grades kindergarten through 12th grade.

Area of Residence

Three variables were used to determine the area of residence in which families in my sample currently live: urban areas, suburban areas, or rural areas. The variable for suburban area of residence has two response categories: *0 = Family does not reside in a suburban area* and *1 = Family resides in a suburban area*. The variable for rural area of

⁴To preserve sample size, all multivariate models also include dummy variables representing missing cases in all independent variables and control variables. The response categories for these dummy variables are *0 = Family respondent reported data for this variable* and *1 = Family respondent did not report data for this variable*. The latter response category serves as the reference category for all multivariate analyses. Multivariate models in all three analytical chapters include these dummy variables representing missing cases in all independent variables and control variables used in the analyses contained within each respective chapter.

residence also has two response categories: $0 = \textit{Family does not reside in a rural area}$ and $1 = \textit{Family resides in a rural area}$. I did not include a variable measuring urban area of residence as families living in urban areas serve as the reference category in all multivariate analyses.

Housing Tenure

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families currently own the home in which they live or currently rents their home. There are two response categories for this variable: $0 = \textit{Family rents their home}$ and $1 = \textit{Family owns their home}$. Families who own their home serve as the reference category in all multivariate analyses.

Chapter 4: Families' Search Behavior during School Choice Decision-Making

To understand better the way families behave as they participate in the process of making school choice decisions, Chapter 4 includes an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to determine the number of schooling options families considered seriously during their search for their children's school. The chapter also includes a logistic regression predicting the probability a family selected "The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as the most important factor for their school choice decisions. Initially, I planned to conduct additional logistic regression models in which other factors families reported as most important for their school choice decisions served as the dependent variable. However, the data illustrates that more than one-third of the families in my sample reported "The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn" is the most important factor for their school choice decisions.⁵ For

⁵The next three factors families most frequently reported as most important for their school choice decisions are included as independent variables in Chapter 5 despite their absence from the multivariate

clarity's sake, I refer to this factor as "Factor 1." The presence of the "moral and ethical" component of "Factor 1" led me to include additional control variables only in the logistic regression analyses in Chapter 4; these variables do not appear in any other analyses in my study. I call these variables the "private school variables," and I describe them below with all of the other variables involved in Chapter 4's analyses.

In addition to these multivariate analyses, Chapter 4 includes additional bivariate analyses involving another factor some families reported as most important for their school choices, "School has convenient hours." I include these analyses because I suspected this factor might reveal significant variation along racial and class lines. My suspicion is based upon the work of Goyette (2008) that describes research demonstrating lower-income families and families of color often have more concerns about the ability to safely transport their children to school than their wealthier, white counterparts. Transportation concerns connect to a school with convenient hours in that families with less flexible work schedules or who rely upon mass transit as their primary mode of transportation may desire a school with hours allowing them to participate in things such as after school activities or parent/teacher conferences. Therefore, Chapter 4's analyses includes three cross tabulations involving "School has convenient hours" by each of my three independent variables of race, income, and level of education.

Dependent Variables

Number of school choice options families considered seriously during their school choice search

analyses in Chapter 4. These three factors are: "The school is conveniently located"; "My child/children will fit in at the school"; and "Children in the school are from families like mine."

This is a continuous measure of the total number of school choice options families considered seriously during the school choice decision-making process. The minimum number of options a family could consider is 0 schooling options while the maximum number of schooling options families in my sample reported considering seriously is 5. Please see Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of how I constructed this variable.

Factor 1: “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for families’ school choice decisions

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions. The response options for this variable are *0 = Family did not select Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions* and *1 = Family selected Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions*.

Independent Variables

The same independent variables used in the analyses in Chapter 3 are used in all analyses in Chapter 4.

Control Variables

The control variables listed under the description of Chapter 3’s analyses are also used in Chapter 4’s analyses: gender, age of family respondent, number of school aged children currently living in the household, suburban area of residence, rural area of residence, and families’ status regarding housing tenure. In addition to these control variables, there are two additions to control variables used in Chapter 4. The first addition involves including all four dependent variables from Chapter 3 as control variables in

Chapter 4. These variables are the progressive vs. traditional index measure of families' orientation toward school quality and the three indicator variables representing school features families reported as most indicative of school quality: the proportion of a school's students who will eventually go on to a four year college, small class size, and up-to-date resources like computers and textbooks. These new control variables are included in all of the multivariate analyses included in Chapter 4.

I briefly mentioned the second addition to the control variables in Chapter 4's analyses a few paragraphs above; however, unlike the first group of additional control variables just described, these control variables are included only in the logistic regression analyses in which Factor 1 serves as the dependent variable. I call these variables the "private school control variables" and they measure whether children from families in my sample currently attend private school.⁶ There are three private school control variables as well as a variable measuring public school attendance which is not included in the logistic regression, but serves as the reference category in these models.

Attendance at Private, Catholic School

This is a dichotomous measure of families who currently send their children to private, Catholic school. The response categories for this variable are $0 = \textit{Children do not attend private, Catholic school}$ and $1 = \textit{Children attend private, Catholic school}$.

Attendance at Private, Other religious school

This is a dichotomous measure of families who currently have children enrolled in a non-Catholic, but another religiously affiliated private school. The response categories

⁶Please see Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of the way in which I constructed the "private school control variables."

for this variable are $0 = \textit{Children do not attend private, other religious school}$ and $1 = \textit{Children attend private, other religious school}$.

Attendance at Private, Non-religious school

This is a dichotomous measure of families in which children currently attend a private, but non-religiously affiliated school. The response categories for this variable are $0 = \textit{Children do not attend private, non-religious school}$ and $1 = \textit{Children attend private, non-religious school}$.

Chapter 5: Factors Influencing Families' Ultimate School Choice Decisions

The final analytical chapter of this study involves an important change regarding the unit of analysis in the sample size used in the analyses. In Chapters 3 and 4, the unit of analysis for my sample was families, with my total sample size equal to 589 families in which at least one school age child currently lives within the household. The mean number of children for the families in my sample is 1.82; therefore, there are a number of families in which more than one school aged child currently lives in the household. Since Chapter 5's analyses examine the actual school choice decisions the 589 families in my sample made, I wanted to include every choice made by each family. In other words, if a family reported that they have more than one school aged child in the household, I wanted to be sure to capture all of the school choices this family made. For example, a family with two school aged children may have chosen a neighborhood public school for one child, but selected a private school for their other child. Therefore, the unit of analysis for the sample used in Chapter 5's analyses is the total number of school choices

made by the 589 families. This sample size is $N = 655$ choices for the 589 families in my study.⁷

The analyses in Chapter 5 are all logistic regressions predicting the probability that a family will select a specific school choice for their children's education. There are seven separate school choices that families in my sample could have reported as their ultimate school choice decisions, and these seven schooling options represent the seven dependent variables used in the logistic regression analyses.

Dependent Variables

All of the seven dependent variables below are dichotomous measures of specific school choices families made for their children's education. I list the seven dependent variables below along with the response options for each variable

None of the school choice options

The response categories for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family chose a school choice option presented in the PMP survey}$ and $1 = \textit{Family did not chose a school choice option presented in the PMP survey}$.

Neighborhood public school

The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not choose a neighborhood public school for their child/children}$ and $1 = \textit{Family chose a neighborhood public school for their child/children}$.

⁷Some families with only one school-aged child within their household reported they currently use more than one type of school choice. The majority of these cases involved reports of using two public school options such as public school and magnet school or public school and charter school. In such cases, I coded the families' school choice as the more specific public school choice (i.e., either magnet school or charter school). However, some families with only one child reported currently using two school choices that could not be coded accurately (i.e., public school and private school). I excluded these "mismatch" cases from my overall sample of $N = 655$ school choices used in the analyses in this chapter.

Private school

The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not choose a private school for their child/children}$ and $1 = \textit{Family chose a private school for their child/children}$.

Magnet school

The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not choose a magnet school for their child/children}$ and $1 = \textit{Family chose a magnet school for their child/children}$.

Charter school

The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not choose a charter school for their child/children}$ and $1 = \textit{Family chose a charter school for their child/children}$.

Non-Neighborhood Public school

The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not choose a non-neighborhood public school for their child/children}$ and $1 = \textit{Family chose a non-neighborhood public school for their child/children}$.

Home school

The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family does not home school their child/children}$ and $1 = \textit{Family home schools their child/children}$.

Independent Variables

The same independent variables used in the analyses in Chapter 5 are used in all analyses in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Control Variables

The control variables listed under the description of Chapter 3's analyses are also used in Chapter 5's analyses: gender, age of family respondent, number of school aged children currently living in the household, suburban area of residence, rural area of residence, and families' status regarding housing tenure. In addition to these control variables, Chapter 5's analyses also include four of the additional control variables used in Chapter 4: the progressive vs. traditional index measure of families' orientation toward school quality and the three indicator variables representing school features families reported as most indicative of school quality: the proportion of a school's students who will eventually go on to a four year college, small class size, and up-to-date resources like computers and textbooks. These new control variables are included in all of the logistic regression analyses in Chapter 5. Finally, five additional control variables are added to the analyses in Chapter 5. Two of these variables served as dependent variables in Chapter 4's regression models; however, they are now included as control variables in Chapter 5's logistic regression analyses. The remaining three control variables included in this chapter's analyses represent additional factors that may influence families' school choice decisions.

Number of school choice options families considered seriously during their school choice search

This is a continuous measure of the total number of school choice options families considered seriously during the school choice decision-making process. The minimum number of options a family could consider is 0 schooling options while the maximum

number of schooling options families in my sample reported considering seriously is 5. Please see Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of how I constructed this variable.

Factor 1: “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for families’ school choice decisions

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions. The response options for this variable are $0 = \text{Family did not select Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions}$ and $1 = \text{Family selected Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions}$.

Factor 2: “The school is conveniently located” as the most important factor for families’ school choice decisions

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected this factor as most important for their school choice decisions. The response options for this variable are $0 = \text{Family did not select Factor 2 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions}$ and $1 = \text{Family selected Factor 2 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions}$.

Factor 3: “My children will fit in at the school” as the most important factor for families’ school choice decisions

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected this factor as most important for their school choice decisions. The response options for this variable are $0 = \text{Family did not select Factor 3 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions}$ and $1 = \text{Family selected Factor 3 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions}$.

Factor 4: “Children in the school are from families like mine” as the most important factor for families’ school choice decisions

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected this factor as most important for their school choice decisions. The response options for this variable are $0 =$ *Family did not select Factor 4 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions* and $1 =$ *Family selected Factor 4 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions*.

The above description of the variables and methodology I employ in this study is only a brief overview of the ways in which I carried out this research. The following three chapters explain in greater detail the methodology described above for each chapter. These chapters also present the findings from the analyses described above and include a discussion of all significant findings and the ways in which they help to answer the research questions posed in this study.

CHAPTER 3

PREDICTING FAMILIES' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL QUALITY

Introduction

Existing research attempting to define what constitutes quality in education often uses the outcomes of students as proxies for quality. While that is often how academics define school quality, rarely do studies examine the issue of school quality from the perspective of individual families. How families perceive school quality is important to understand because families represent “consumers” of school quality: the people who benefit directly from a particular school. In this analysis I model families’ preferences for two separate measures of school quality. The first measure describes families’ orientation toward education on a six point index ranging from a most progressive orientation to education to a most traditional orientation. The second measure of school quality involves three specific school characteristics families may perceive as most indicative of quality education.

Existing Literature on Definitions and Perceptions of School Quality

Accurately defining something as “quality” presents one with an a priori challenge. “Quality” is ambiguous. Assessments of school quality are not shielded from this challenge. Many research efforts attempt to explain why some schools in the United States are described as quality when other schools fail to achieve this distinction (Purkey and Smith 1983; Hanushek, 1986; Ferguson 1991; Byrk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Hedges, Laine, and Greenwald, 1994; Ehrenberg and Brewer 1994; 1995; Ballou 1996; Lee and Smith, 1996; U.S. Department of Education 2000). Despite such efforts, assessments of

school quality remain a challenge for both researchers and families; the U.S. Department of Education made this point very clear in 2003,

In more than 30 years of research and study of schooling and the educational process...a conclusive understanding of the definitive features of quality schools has yet to be found. However, it is apparent that no single factor guarantees school quality...school quality depends on a multiple, interdependent elements. (U.S. Department of Education 2000: 3)

Indeed, school quality is multi-dimensional and those dimensions generally can be represented by two different categories: indicators of school quality employed by researchers and ideas families may have about what constitutes a quality or “good” school.

Examining the indicators researchers commonly employ in an effort to define school quality is a good starting point for understanding school quality. Within this literature, a reasonable amount of consensus exists with regard to specific school characteristics indicative of quality education. A U.S. Department of Education report carried out by researchers from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) presents three distinct groups of quality indicators comprised of 13 specific school characteristics (U.S. Department of Education 2000). The three groups of indicators are the ability of the current teaching force, day to day activities within the classroom, and the overall context of a school. Within each group are specific measures of school quality such as amount of teacher experience, the type of curriculum taught within a school, and the type of school leadership found amongst administration and faculty (U.S. Department of Education 2000).

The NCES researchers recognize the dynamic nature of the 13 indicators in that they describe them as “...time sensitive and part of an iterative process” (50). In other words, they recognize definitions of school quality are likely to change over time and,

therefore, require continual research efforts to capture these changes (U.S. Department of Education 2000).

In addition to the dynamic nature of measurements of school quality, some researchers critique these measures because they fail to take into account the ways in which families may use proxy indicators to judge school quality, particularly the racial and socioeconomic composition of schools (Wells and Crain 1992). In other words, researchers' measures of quality do not account for how families may perceive schools based on these school characteristics. Wells and Crain's (1992) critique specifically focuses on how particular school characteristics that may or may not be related to student learning or performance (like race or class composition of the school) influence people's perceptions of school quality. This issue is not directly addressed in this research. However, their critique is relevant to this research because it demonstrates that relying solely upon researchers' conventional measures of quality creates an incomplete picture of how families perceive of school quality.

While existing school quality literature provides much information regarding researchers' definitions of quality, there is little written about families' perceptions. Indicators of quality that researchers employ may capture family perceptions of school quality, or it could be that families have different views when it comes to assessing quality in education. Therefore, further exploration into how families define school quality is needed.

A theoretical debate amongst educational researchers over the most effective approach to educating students suggests that there may be variation in families' perceptions of a quality school. The focus of this debate is whether educators should use

a “traditional” or “progressive” approach to education. The traditional approach emphasizes education in which students receive “...a strong foundation, rich in content, in a structured environment by teachers trained in their disciplines” (Commonwealth Education Organization 2008: 2). On the other hand, a “progressive” education as defined by Dewey (1938) involves curricula emphasizing student expression and creativity through classroom activities that allow students to engage with course content as well as connect it more directly to daily life (Dewey 1938).

Are families more likely to consider the schools associated with a “traditional” approach higher quality than those with a “progressive approach”? Is there racial or class variation in which approach families see as constituting higher “quality”? Evidence for variation by race and socioeconomic status also exists within the literature describing the traditional versus progressive debate over the most effective way to educate students.

Delpit (1995) explored dichotomies similar to that of the “traditional” and “progressive” binary and found families from diverse social backgrounds have different preferences for a specific approach to education (Delpit 1995). She examines two competing methodologies for enhancing student literacy and teaching writing. First is the “process” approach which posits “...teachers should focus on the larger cognitive processes of writing than solely on correcting the products [of student writing]” (Delpit 1995: 7). This methodology aligns more with a progressive approach for effectively teaching students. On the other hand, “traditional” teaching puts a greater focus upon necessary skills and the mechanics of reading and writing. In this methodology, students practice handwriting skills, and teachers correct grammar and mechanics within students’ writing before it is considered a finished product (Delpit 1995).

In her research, Delpit (1995) highlights a concept she terms “the culture of power” and its effects upon what families of diverse social backgrounds desire in terms of the content of their children’s education (24). More specifically, differences in the level of “the culture of power” families possess may influence whether a family believes a more “progressive” approach to education signifies school quality or a more “traditional” approach better represents quality education. Delpit (1995) argues a family’s social position dictates the level of “culture of power” they possess (24).

If a family belongs to the dominant racial group and is of a higher socioeconomic status, then it possesses the culture of power one sees reflected within many major social institutions such as education. These families, therefore, are more likely to favor the “process,” and by extension, a “progressive” approach to education (Delpit 1995). However, if a family’s social position does not imbue them with an equal level of “culture of power,” it creates for them a different cultural context that may influence their desires for their children’s education. Such families may have a stronger desire for a “traditional” approach in their children’s education. While families with lower levels of “culture of power” may not necessarily disagree with the “process” or “progressive” approach to education, their social position influences them to recognize an education emphasizing core subjects and practical skills may more readily ensure their children’s future success in society (Delpit 1995).

These analyses add to the current literature by examining how families perceive school quality. Families’ perceptions of quality schooling are measured in two ways: first, by predicting whether families are more likely to exhibit “traditional” or “progressive” beliefs about school quality on the basis of school features they associate

as characteristic of a “high quality” school; second, by predicting whether or not families believe three distinct school features are the “most important” indicator of school quality. In both analyses, particular attention is paid to variation in families perceptions of school quality along racial or socioeconomic lines.

Data and Methods

The data used in this analysis are from the Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Metropolitan Survey (PMP). Data from the PMP are restricted to households in the Philadelphia metropolitan area with at least one school-aged child (N = 589). Sample size for Models 1 and 2 (N = 547) reflects missing cases in the dependent variable used in these models. Sample size for Models 3 through 8 (N = 544) reflects missing cases in the dependent variables used in these models.

Dependent Variables

To identify families’ perceptions of school quality based on school characteristics they associate with a high quality school, I examine a dependent variable measuring families’ orientation toward perceptions of school quality along an index measure anchored at 0 = *Most progressive* and 5 = *Most traditional*. I constructed this index measure using a series of questions in which families were presented with two features of schools and then asked, “Which [of the two school features] would you consider to be a higher quality school?”⁸ I list below the school features presented to family respondents in the five survey questions from the PMP used to construct this index measure.

⁸ I conducted factor analyses using the series of questions asking families to select one of two school features they considered to be a higher quality school. Small sample size prevented further use of factor analyses; however, results from the factor analyses assisted in assigning each school feature to either a “progressive” or “traditional” perception of school quality. See Appendix B for more explanation.

School features from survey questions

1. A school that emphasizes strict discipline or flexibility
2. A school where children are required to wear uniforms or where children choose their own clothes
3. A school that offers education focused on core subjects or a school that offers a choice of a wide variety of courses
4. A school that encourages a particular strong moral or ethical viewpoint or a school that encourages a wide variety of viewpoints
5. A school that emphasizes teaching all children in the school what is required to pass city and state standardized tests or a school that emphasizes teaching that is individualized for children

Please see Appendix B for a more detailed description of how I created the “progressive” vs. “traditional” index variable.

To identify families’ perceptions of the most important indicator of school quality, I examine three dependent variables measuring families’ selection of school features they believe are most indicative of school quality. After responding to a series of “Yes” or “No” questions involving possible indicators of school quality, families answered a follow up question asking, “Of the factors we’ve talked about, which would you say is the most important indicator of school quality?” Using this question, I selected the three most frequently reported indicators of school quality families said were most important when assessing quality schooling: the proportion of students [in a school] who will eventually go on to a four year college, a school with small class sizes, and a school with up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers. I created three dichotomous dependent variables for each of these three indicators with response options being $0 =$ *Family did not select indicator as most important indicator of school quality* and $1 =$ *Family did select indicator as most important indicator of school quality*.

Independent Variables

Race

Race is measured as a dichotomous variable based upon the families' self-report of their race or ethnic identity with response categories being $0 = \textit{People of Color}$ and $1 = \textit{White}$.⁹

Income

Income is measured as a continuous-like variable based on the household's total income during the last 12 months. This variable is continuous-like in that responses include 13 categories ranging from \$5000 to \$120,000. Each category represents the median income from original income range response categories the PMP survey employed when collecting data on families' household income.

Level of Education

Level of education is measured as a dichotomous variable based upon the highest degree earned by a member of the families' household. Response categories include $0 = \textit{Less than a bachelor's degree}$ and $1 = \textit{More than a bachelor's degree}$.

Controls

Previous research indicates variation along racial and socioeconomic lines exists in families' perceptions of what constitutes school quality (Delpit 1995). To determine if variation by race and class operates independently of other sociodemographic characteristics of families in my sample, I control for the

⁹ My sample did not include a significant number of Hispanics or Asians to allow additional racial categories to be included in my measure of families' race or ethnic identity.

following variables: gender of family respondent, age of family respondent, number of school aged children (grades K through 12) living in the household, marital status (not married, married), area of residence (urban, suburban, rural), and family housing tenure (rent home, own home).

Research Strategy

This research explores race and class variation in families' perceptions of school quality after controlling for other sociodemographic characteristics of families. For Models 1 and 2, I use ordinal least squares regression (OLS) to analyze whether families exhibit a "progressive" or "traditional" orientation in developing their perceptions of high quality schools. The analysis uses nested models in which the first model includes only the independent variables of families' race, income, and level of education. The second model adds my control variables to determine if any variation by race or class in Model 1 holds up after the inclusion of these controls to the model.

For Models 3 through 8, I use logistic regression techniques to predict whether families select a specific school feature as the most important indicator of school quality. Three school features: proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college, small class size, and up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers serve as separate dependent variables for three sets of logistic regression models. For example, whether or not the proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college is the most important indicator of school quality for a family is the dependent variable for Models 3 and 4. Models 3 and 4 are nested in that Model 3 includes only the independent variables of race,

income, and level of education. Model 4 adds the control variables to determine if any variation by race or class from Model 3 holds up after the addition of these variables. Small class size serves as the dependent variable for Models 5 and 6 and up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers serves as the dependent variable for Models 7 and 8; both Models 5 and 6 as well as Models 7 and 8 are nested in the same manner as Models 3 and 4.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 3.1 presents descriptive statistics of the sample of households including at least one school aged child. 26.8 percent of families selected the proportion of a school's students who will eventually go on to a four year college as the most important indicator of school quality. 22.4 percent of families selected small class size as the most important indicator of quality schools. Finally, 18.7 percent of families in my sample selected schools with up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers as the most important signifier of quality.

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics on Measurements of School Quality and Respondents' Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics

<i>Most Important Indicator of School Quality¹</i>	
Proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college	26.8
Small class size	22.4
Up-to date resources like textbooks and computers	18.7
Missing	7.6
<i>Progressive vs. Traditional perceptions of high quality school index* (0 = most progressive; 5 = most traditional)</i>	3.2
(SD)	(1.2)

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics on Measurements of School Quality and Respondents' Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics (*continued*)

<i>Race</i>		
	White	64.9
	People of Color	24.4
	Missing	10.7
<i>Income*</i>		\$63,550
(SD)		(\$36,033)
<i>Education</i>		
	Less than Bachelor's degree	56.4
	More than Bachelor's degree	33.4
	Missing	10.6
<i>Gender</i>		
	Female	63.5
	Male	27.7
	Missing	8.8
<i>Age*</i>		42.0
(SD)		(9.0)
<i>Number of school aged children in household*</i>		1.8
(SD)		(0.99)
<i>Marital Status</i>		
	Not Married	29.5
	Married	61.3
	Missing	9.20
<i>Area of Residence</i>		
	Urban	26.1
	Suburban	47.9
	Rural	24.6
	Missing	1.4
<i>Housing Tenure</i>		
	Rent home	18.3
	Own home	81.2
	Missing	0.5
<i>N</i>		589

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics on Measurements of School Quality and Respondents' Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics (*continued*)

¹Percentages for most important indicator of school quality dependent variables do not add up to 100 percent because they represent the three most frequently reported responses to the question, "Of the factors we've talked about, which would you say is the most important indicator of school quality?" There were eight response categories for this question; the other five categories constitute the remaining 24.4 percent.

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes means, not percentages as in the rest of the table. Missing values are excluded for calculation of means.

For the independent variables of race, income, and level of education the sample is predominantly white, 64.9 percent, with a little over one-half of families, 56.4 percent, holding less than a Bachelor's degree. Families' mean household income over the past 12 months is \$63,550. Since the PMP data were collected in 2005, calculating this mean household income into inflation-adjusted 2008 dollars equals \$73,059.¹⁰

To determine if this adjusted mean household income is reflective of incomes within the nine counties of the Philadelphia metropolitan area included in the PMP, I calculated the average of median household incomes for each county using U.S. Census data from 2008.¹¹ While not a perfect comparison, it provides some basis for determining if the mean household income for families in my sample is somewhat representative of incomes in the nine counties surveyed for the PMP.

For the area's five Pennsylvania counties, the average median household income in 2008 inflation-adjusted dollars is \$67,035 while in the area's four New Jersey counties it is \$67,672. The Pennsylvania counties' average median household income is \$6,402 greater than the sample's median household income. In the New Jersey counties, the

¹⁰(CPI Inflation Calculator, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010)

¹¹For my sample, the median household income over the past 12 months is \$55,000 which equals \$60.633 in 2008 inflation-adjusted dollars. (CPI Inflation Calculator, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010)

average median household income is \$7,039 greater than its median.¹² It appears that the sample for this analysis is slightly less well-off than the overall population in these counties.

With respect to the control variables, family respondents in my sample are more than half female, 63.5 percent, with a mean age of 42.0 years and a mean of 1.8 school aged children within the household. A little less than two thirds of families, 61.3 percent, involve married couples, and 81.2 percent of families in my sample own their home rather than rent. In terms of area of residence, almost half of the families live in a suburban area, 47.9 percent, with the remaining families living almost equally in urban and rural areas at 26.1 percent and 24.6 percent, respectively.

Multivariate Analyses

Families' Perceptions of School Quality: Progressive or Traditional Views of Quality

I employed ordinary least squares regression (OLS) in the analyses represented by Models 1 and 2. To interpret the significant findings from these models, I used the process of means substitution. Models 1 and 2 (see table 3.2) examine whether families exhibit a “progressive” or “traditional” orientation in developing their perceptions of high school quality. For these models, my sample size is $N = 547$, and the mean score on the progressive versus traditional index measure is 3.2011.¹³

¹²All dollar amounts reported in this paragraph are in inflation-adjusted 2008 dollars (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009).

¹³ Models 1 and 2 were also run using the log of the progressive versus traditional index as the dependent variable because the mean index score, 3.2011, is slightly skewed toward the progressive end of the index scale. Using the log of the index measure as the dependent variable in Models 1 and 2 did not produce results different from models using the original index measure as the dependent variable.

Table 3.2 Estimated Coefficients of Linear Regression Models Predicting Progressive or Traditional Orientation toward Education

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	1.642***	1.049***
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	0.420**	0.409**
<i>Income</i>		
	0.008**	0.006**
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	-0.202	-0.25
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		0.274*
<i>Age</i>		
		0.011
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		
		0.06
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		0.064
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban ¹		-0.163
Rural		-0.331*
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		0.285
R^2	0.028	0.047

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is 547. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

¹Dummy variable denoting missing cases for the independent variable suburban area of residence was excluded from Model 2 as a result of collinearity. (Tolerance = 0.000)

Model 1 demonstrates that both race and income have a significant effect on families' orientations toward school features they believe constitute high quality schools. The progressive versus traditional index score for white families is 1.6048 and 2.0248 for families of color; therefore, families of color are significantly more traditional in their

orientation toward school quality than whites. Controlling for income and education, families of color score 0.420 points higher on the index scale.

In terms of income, for every \$1000 increase in a families' household income over the past 12 months, a families' progressive versus traditional index score increases by 0.008. In other words, as families' household income increases, they exhibit a more traditional orientation toward school features indicative of quality education.

In Model 2, the effect of race on families' orientation toward perceptions of school quality remains significant with only slight changes in the index scores for families of different races. White families score 1.7174 on the index measure while families of color score 2.1268. In this model, families of color score 0.490 points higher than white families on the progressive vs. traditional orientation index. Based on these findings, it is clear significant variation exists in the ways families of different races or ethnicity define school quality, validating the claims of Delpit (1995). Any attempt at defining school quality at the family level must recognize this variation and the consequences it has for understanding how different families perceive quality schooling.

The effect of income also holds up in Model 2, but at a less significant level ($p < 0.05$) than the income effect in Model 1 ($p < 0.001$). For every \$1000 increase in a family's household income from the previous year, a family's score on the progressive versus traditional index increases by 0.006. Once again, as a family's income increases, their orientation toward school quality becomes slightly more traditional. Therefore, families in my sample with very high incomes (i.e., \$80,000 or more) will have more traditional orientations toward school features they associate with high quality schools compared to families with lower incomes (i.e., \$40,000 or less).

Model 2 also reveals significant effects of gender and for families living in a rural area. The gender effect demonstrates male family respondents have an index score of 2.0548 while the female score is lower at 1.7808. Controlling for all other factors in the model, male family respondents score 0.274 points higher on the progressive vs. traditional index than females. Therefore, male family respondents, exhibit a more traditional orientation toward school features they associate with high quality schools while female family respondents have a more progressive orientation.

With regard to families living in rural areas, rural residents have an index score of 1.6645 while urban residents score 1.9953 on the index scale. Controlling for all other factors in the model, urban residents score 0.331 points higher on the progressive vs. traditional scale than rural residents. Therefore, families living in rural areas demonstrate a more progressive orientation towards school quality than families living in urban areas.¹⁴ To explain this effect, perhaps families who live in or who have moved to rural areas do so because they are looking for more freedom from urban and suburban life. Rural areas tend to have smaller populations than urban and suburban areas, meaning children in rural areas are more likely to attend smaller schools. In smaller schools, it is more likely that the “traditional” feature of discipline within schools is less of a problem than one might find in suburban or urban schools. If families in rural areas have less concern over the “traditional” school characteristic of schools emphasizing strong discipline, then the finding that rural families exhibit a more progressive orientation toward school quality than urban families seems plausible.

¹⁴I ran a second version of Model 2 to determine if any interaction effects existed between race and area of residence. I included three interaction terms (race*suburban area of residence, race*rural area of residence, and race*urban area of residence) in this model, but none of these interaction terms produced significant effects on families’ progressive versus traditional orientations toward school quality.

Models 1 and 2 demonstrate whether families differ according to key demographic characteristics in whether they have a progressive or traditional orientation toward features of schools they believe represent high quality. To further explore families' perceptions of school quality, the following six logistic regression models have a narrower focus, and predict whether a family is more or less likely to select a specific school characteristic as the *most* important indicator of quality. The three school characteristics are the proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college, small class size, and up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers. The findings reveal families' perceptions of school quality are more difficult to predict when families are faced with a more concrete measure of school quality such as the specific "most important indicator of quality" dependent variables in Models 3 through 8.

Models 3 and 4 (see Table 3.3) predict the likelihood a family will select the proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college as the most important indicator of school quality. Model 3 includes only the independent variables of race, income, and level of education as well as dummy variables to represent the missing cases within the aforementioned variables. All control variables as well as dummy variables representing missing cases within each control variable are added to Model 4; the same method of model building is followed for Models 5 and 6, as well as Models 7 and 8. The only significant finding from Model 3 involves the dummy variable for the missing cases (N = 96) of family's yearly household income. Family respondents who did not report income are 0.02 times as likely as respondents who did report their income to select the proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college as the

most important indicator of school quality. Since this variable represents 96 cases for which I have no income data, I cannot speculate much further with regard to this finding;

Table 3.3 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Proportion of Students Who Will Eventually Go to a Four Year College as the Most Important Indicator of School Quality

	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	1.200***	2.009*
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	-0.181	-0.191
<i>Income</i>	0.007	0.008
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	0.460	0.569*
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		-0.337
<i>Age</i>		-0.020*
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		0.065
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		0.322
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		-0.466
Rural ²		-0.0148
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		0.196
Model χ^2	10.64	34.20**
df	6	18
Chi-Square		
Block/df		34.20/18
Chi-Square		
Model/df	10.64/6	34.20/18
-2 Log Likelihood	644.94	621.37
Nagelkerke R ²	0.03	0.09

Table 3.3 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Proportion of Students Who Will Eventually Go to a Four Year College as the Most Important Indicator of School Quality (*continued*)

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is 544. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

²Dummy variable denoting missing cases for the independent variable rural area of residence was excluded from Model 2 as a result of collinearity. (Tolerance = 0.000)

I can only state families who did not report their income are significantly different from those who did when it comes to the likelihood of selecting this first school characteristic as most indicative of quality.

Model 4 improves upon the previous model in that it demonstrates an effect of level of education on whether a family is likely to select future attendance at a four year college as the most important indicator of quality. Family respondents with more than a Bachelor's degree are 1.77 times as likely as those with less than a Bachelor's degree to select this school features as the most important indicator of school quality. This finding is rather straightforward in that one can argue individuals with at least a Bachelor's degree will most likely consider a school's college attendance rate an important factor in evaluations of schools' level of quality. Finally, just as in Model 3, the dummy variable for missing cases in income is significant; however, the effect increases in Model 4.

Models 5 and 6 (see Table 3.4) predict the likelihood families will select small class size as the most important gauge of school quality. None of the independent measures are significant in either Model 5 or Model 6. Only the dummy variables for missing cases in race ($N = 63$) and for missing cases in education ($N = 59$) are significant in Model 5.

Since I have no further information about the missing cases in the race variable, I can only report that Model 5 demonstrates family respondents who did not report their race differ significantly from family respondents who did report their race in terms of selecting small class size as the most important indicator of school quality.

Table 3.4 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Small Class Size as the Most Important Indicator of School Quality

	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	1.439***	1.753**
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	0.303	0.209
<i>Income</i>		
	0.002	0.003
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	-0.432	-0.454
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		0.178
<i>Age</i>		
		-0.004
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		
		-0.087
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		-0.159
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		0.160
Rural ³		-0.122
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		0.044
Model χ^2	16.84**	33.01*
df	6	18
Chi-Square		
Block/df		33.01/18
Chi-Square	16.84/	
Model/df	6	33.01/18

Table 3.4 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Small Class Size as the Most Important Indicator of School Quality (*continued*)

-2 Log Likelihood	586.03	569.86
Nagelkerke R ²	0.05	0.09

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is 544. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

³Dummy variable denoting missing cases for the independent variable rural area of residence was excluded from Model 2 as a result of collinearity. (Tolerance = 0.000)

Models predicting if families will select schools with up-to-date resources as the most important factor in defining school quality reveal the greatest number of significant findings in the independent and control variables (see Table 3.5). While Model 7 itself is not significant, the independent variable of income within this model is statistically significant. However, the odds a family respondent will select this quality indicator as most important in terms of quality is 1.000. Therefore, an increase of \$1,000 in annual family household income leads to about the same odds of choosing up-to-date resources as the most important signifier of quality. However, this finding is significant, and as income differences between families become larger (i.e., families with incomes of \$100,000 versus those with \$10,000) the difference between families in the likelihood of choosing this indicator grows.

Table 3.5 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Up-to-Date Resources like Computers and Textbooks as the Most Important Indicator of School Quality

	Model 7	Model 8
Constant	0.719**	-1.094
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	-0.066	0.045
<i>Income</i>	0.012**	0.013**

Table 3.5 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Up-to-Date Resources like Computers and Textbooks as the Most Important Indicator of School Quality (continued)

<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	-0.169	-0.243
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		0.663*
<i>Age</i>		
		0.042**
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		
		0.085
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		-0.146
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		-0.132
Rural ⁴		0.406
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		-0.300
Model χ^2	11.47 [†]	35.01**
df	6	18
Chi-Square Block/df		35.01/18
Chi-Square Model/df	11.47/6	35.01/18
-2 Log Likelihood	536.28	512.74
Nagelkerke R ²	0.03	0.10

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is 544. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

[†]Not significant ($p = 0.075$)

⁴Dummy variable denoting missing cases for the independent variable rural area of residence was excluded from Model 2 as a result of collinearity. (Tolerance = 0.000)

The addition of the control variables in Model 8 results in a new, statistically significant model. The income effect remains significant in Model 8, but the increase in odds of a family selecting up-to-date resources with every \$1,000 increase in income remains 1.000. However, the significance of the income effect in Model 8 is the same as reported

for the effect in Model 7: as disparities increase amongst families' annual household incomes, the magnitude of the difference in likelihood of selecting this indicator increases.

Model 8 also demonstrates a significant effect of both gender and age. Male family respondents are 1.941 times as likely as female respondents to choose a school with new resources as the most important indicator of school quality. The age effect demonstrates that for every one year increase in the age of the family respondent, he/she is 1.0429 times as likely as a younger respondent to select up-to-date resources as the most important indicator of quality education. The income effect demonstrates variation along class lines in how different families perceive school quality, a finding with important implications for understanding both family perceptions and perhaps for school choices they make for their children. Further, Model 8's significant findings for gender and age suggest variation exists in these variables as well with regard to family perceptions of quality. While the primary focus of my research is on variation in perceptions of quality and school choices along racial and class lines, Model 8's findings demonstrate the existence of additional forms of variation in how families define quality.

Discussion

Definitions of school quality are ambiguous, dynamic, and filled with potential for significant variation along both racial and socioeconomic lines. Researchers often use a standard set of indicators to measure school quality, but as Wells and Crain (1992) point out, this set of indicators fails to take into account aspects of quality that may influence how families judge school quality. Further, the research perspective on what constitutes school quality tells only one half of the story; the other half of the story

involves information gathered at the family level regarding individual families' perceptions of school quality. Families from diverse backgrounds may define school quality in different ways. What one family believes constitutes a "quality" school may not mirror the beliefs of another family in a markedly different social position.

Models 1 and 2 examining families' progressive or traditional orientations toward school quality reveal significant findings that help one begin to understand how families perceive quality schooling. Findings from Models 1 and 2 reveal variation exists in families' orientations toward school quality along racial and socioeconomic lines; therefore, families from different sociodemographic backgrounds have significantly different perceptions of school quality. White families exhibit more progressive orientations toward school quality, while families of color are more traditional in their views. Families with higher incomes are more traditional, as well, a finding that contradicts Delpit's (1995) concept of culture of power and its influence on the type of cultural environment families face in many social institutions, including schools.

According to Delpit (1995), families with higher levels of "culture of power," a group including families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, tend to see the values inherent in their amount of "culture of power" reflected in many social institutions, including education. If this is the case, one could argue higher income families are likely to have more progressive orientations toward quality as their higher incomes may be indicative of higher levels of education that may also influence their orientation toward school quality to lean toward a more progressive view. However, the finding that such families are more traditional in their orientation toward school features they associate with high quality dispels such a theory. However, what this finding does confirm is that

variation in perceptions of school quality exists along class lines, just not in the way Delpit (1995) would predict using the “culture of power” concept.

Therefore, further investigation is needed to explain why families with higher incomes exhibit more traditional orientations toward school quality than families with fewer financial means. Subsequent analytical chapters 4 and 5 seek such explanations by examining family perceptions of school quality, families’ school choice behavior, and actual school choices families make for the existence of any racial or class-based variation. However, the analyses in this chapter clearly demonstrate the existence of racial and class variation suggests any efforts to understand how families define quality education first must recognize families of diverse social backgrounds perceive school quality differently

The logistic regression models predicting the likelihood families will select specific school features as the most important indicator of school quality seem to reveal fewer significant findings with regard to variation by race and class. However, Model 4 demonstrates an effect of level of education on whether a family is likely to select the proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college as the most important signifier of quality. Family respondents holding more than a Bachelor’s degree are significantly more likely to select this school characteristic as the most important aspect of school quality. This is a rather straightforward finding, as one can argue families in which college education has been a reality are more likely to desire a school with good college attendance rates when evaluating a school’s level of quality. However, this finding suggests variation along class lines exists, as level of educational attainment is often a variable included in measures of families’ socioeconomic position.

Models 7 and 8 reveal a significant effect of family household income upon the likelihood a family will select up-to-date resources as the most important signifier of quality schooling. One can reach a more nuanced understanding of this finding by interpreting it using the odds that a family is likely to select resources as the most important indicator of school quality. As a family's annual household income increases by \$1,000, the odds a family will select up-to-date resources as the school feature most indicative of quality is 1.000. While this may not seem significant, if one considers families at the extreme ends of the income measure, one can argue families at the lower end of the income scale and those with much higher incomes demonstrate variation with regard to the level of importance they are likely to give to the quality indicator of up-to-date resources. Again variation along class lines exists, suggesting family perceptions of school quality must be examined carefully to understand how different families perceive quality schooling. Reaching such an understanding would provide more information on how families define school quality, allowing educators and researchers to work toward creating schools that meet families' expectations for schools they believe to be "high quality."

The significant effects of gender and rural area of residence found in Model 2 and in Model 8 suggest further attention is needed when assessing variation in family perceptions of school quality. In Model 2, male family respondents exhibit more traditional orientations towards quality than female family respondents and in Model 8. In terms of families living in rural areas, Model 2 reveals their orientation toward school features they associate with high quality schooling is more progressive than families living in urban areas.

One can explain this effect in light of the significant effect living in a rural area may have on families' type of orientation toward quality in Model 2. It could be that families who chose to live in rural areas made such a decision because they wanted more freedom from urban and suburban life. With smaller populations than urban and suburban areas, rural areas are more likely to have smaller schools as well. In smaller schools, it is more likely the "traditional" feature of discipline is less of a problem than one might find in suburban or urban schools. If families in rural areas are less concerned about a school that emphasizes strong discipline, then the finding that rural families exhibit a more progressive orientation toward school quality than urban families seems plausible. The significant effects of gender in both Models 2 and 8 and that of rural area of residence in Model 2 suggest one should consider these variables in any attempt to understand these perceptions more completely.

The analyses in this chapter suggest examinations of family perceptions of school quality reveal a greater number of findings when attempting to discern a family's progressive or traditional orientation toward school quality than when predicting specific school features families believe are most important when evaluating school quality. This suggests one can gauge better family perceptions of school quality when the issue of quality is more abstract, as it is in the progressive versus traditional index, than when one confronts families with more concrete measures of school quality and asks them to identify the most important indicator of school quality. This suggests measures of school features families believe represent quality education involve much more than just one aspect of schools. Perhaps the reality is families incorporate a number of school characteristics when assessing quality.

While my research focuses primarily upon variation in perceptions of quality and school choices along racial and class lines, findings from this chapter demonstrate additional types of variation exist in families' perceptions of school quality. For example, gender and age had significant effects on the probability that families selected up-to-date resources as the most important indicator of school quality. The existence of additional forms of variation in how families define school quality suggests it is possible that, in addition to variation along racial and class lines, families' school choices may vary by other factors as well. The following chapters attempt to delve more deeply into family perceptions of school quality first by examining the families' search behavior when confronted with a school choice decision and later with an examination of factors affecting school choice decisions. The dependent measures of school quality employed in the analyses within this chapter will be used as independent measures in the following chapters' analyses. In this way, the issue of perceptions of school quality will be linked with school choice decision-making in an effort to understand more completely family perceptions of school quality and whether or not such perceptions have an effect on actual school choices families make for their children's education.

CHAPTER 4

FAMILIES' SEARCH BEHAVIOR DURING SCHOOL CHOICE DECISION- MAKING

Introduction

Understanding families' perceptions of school quality is a necessary first step in any attempt to determine if such perceptions have an effect upon the ultimate school choice families make for their children's education. A second step in determining the existence of a relationship between families' perceptions of quality and their school choice decisions requires an understanding of the early stages of families' processes of school choice decision-making. Families often begin the school choice process by surveying the number of viable school choice options available to them. Once aware of schooling options at their disposal, families then decide how many of these options they will consider seriously during the search for their children's school.

In an ideal world, families would have the ability to consider all available schooling options. In fact, proponents of rational choice theory assume this as part of the framework for understanding school choice decisions (Young and Clinchy 1992). However, critics target this assumption because it often does not reflect accurately the reality families confront when making school choices. Families may place realistic limitations on the number of school options they will consider as they begin their decision-making process (Bosetti 2004).¹⁵

¹⁵ In literature on organizations, researchers point out that organizations often choose the first satisfactory option they come to, rather than the absolute best option after an exhaustive search of all possible options. In this literature, researchers distinguish this process with the terms "satisficing" versus "maximizing." E.g., see Parker, Andrew M., Wändi Bruine de Bruin, and Baruch Fischhoff. 2007. "Maximizers versus Satisficers: Decision-Making Styles, Competence, and Outcomes." *Judgment and Decision Making*, 2(6) 342 – 350 at p. 342; Simon, Herbert A. 1957. *Models of Man: Social and Rational*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. at pp. 204-205.

The analyses in this chapter first examine the total number of school choice options families consider during their school choice decision-making process. The dependent variable in these models is a continuous measure of school options families consider during their search for a school ranging from “Did not consider any school options” to “Considered five school options.” Next, I address factors that may influence families as they make school choice decisions. A second set of models predicts the likelihood families selected the factor “The school supports the moral and ethical values they want children to learn” as the most important factor influencing their school choice decisions. This particular factor serves as the dependent variable in these models because over one-third (33.7 percent) of the families in my sample reported this factor is most important for their school choices. Other factors families reported as most important for their school choices had frequencies much lower than “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn.” Finally, I examine additional factors that may influence families’ choices to explore whether some of these factors vary by race and class.

Existing Literature on How People Make Choices

In starting the search for their children’s schools, families simultaneously begin a process of decision-making. In the literature I review below, I begin with an examination of more general research into how individuals make choices. This research describes features of decision-making characteristic of any choice an individual makes. These findings serve as a foundation for understanding more completely a current debate within school choice literature regarding how the process of school choice operates for families undergoing this process. Next, I describe the competing perspectives in this debate over

how families begin their search for schools to which they will send their children. Finally, I highlight two studies demonstrating variation along racial and class lines as families from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds conduct a search for their children's school.

Research describing how people make choices demonstrates choice making is much more complex than existing theories of choice, such as rational choice theory, suggest. Rational choice theorists argue choice making is a primarily cognitive, rationally driven process. From this perspective, the process of choice involves a person with a set of specific preferences who surveys all possible options, and ultimately selects the one option that fulfills the maximum number of his/her preferences. In an effort to replace what he saw as naïve paradigms of rational choice theory, economist Herbert Simon (1955) highlights ways in which traditional rational choice theories explain how people make a choice based on the assumption that people are both economical and rational. He writes,

...man is assumed to have knowledge of...relevant aspects of his environment...He is assumed also to have a well-organized and stable system of preferences, and a skill in computation that enables him to calculate, for the alternative courses of action [i.e., decisions]...available to him, which of these [decisions] will permit him to reach the highest point on his preference scale. (Simon 1955:99)

Like Simon (1955), other researchers recognize the limitations of traditional rational choice theories and assert the choice making process operates quite differently. Tallman and Gray (1990) highlight the existence and importance of the social context in which one makes a choice, and describe three specific temporal/developmental contexts that exist whenever one makes a choice. The three contexts are: 1) a given period within history, 2) a given point in society determined by the level of development in social organizations and institutions of the society in which one lives, and 3) a particular stage of personal development

for the individual chooser (Tallman and Gray 1990: 418). The authors recognize each of these contexts may vary in salience depending on the individual “chooser,” but still assert all three exist for anyone making a choice. Further, the three contexts impose constraints and exert influence upon anyone making a choice. Clearly, for Tallman and Gray (1990) how people make a choice is a multilayered process quite unlike the streamlined, rational process of choice described by Simon (1955).

Further, Tallman and Gray (1990) assert anyone confronted with a choice is exposed to cumulative influences affecting him/her of which the individual may not even be aware. These influences serve to affect one’s process of choice in that one may eliminate possible choice options without giving them much deliberate or rational thought. Examples of this include the fact that a particular option is foreign to the social position of the individual (i.e., such an option does not exist within his/her social milieu), one may find a particular option morally repugnant, or the individual may not believe a choice option is practical in terms of the reality of his/her social position (Tallman and Gray 1990: 419). Similar to the existence of the three contexts involved in any choice, the existence of such cumulative influences calls into question the likelihood that people confronted with a choice will act in the economical and rational way described by Simon (1955).

Tallman and Gray (1990) describe another unique feature of decision-making, a concept they term the “moment of choice.” This moment is “...a microcosm within which all forces that affect human and social behavior combine

to influence the course of collective or individual action” (Tallman and Gray 1990: 406). Further, this moment of choice does not constitute a single point in time; the moment of choice may take place over a period of time during which one makes his/her ultimate choice. While they describe more general issues of choice, Tallman and Gray’s (1990) research serves as a strong foundation for understanding a significant debate within literature specifically examining school choice and how families engaged in school choice decision-making participate in this process.

On one side of this debate, researchers assert the principles of rational choice theory serve to influence how families begin the process of making a school choice (Chubb and Moe 1990; Young and Clinchy 1992). Their position echoes the description of choice making Simon (1955) proposes. According to this perspective, rational thought and a predominantly economic cost/benefit analysis serve to guide families through the school choice process. In other words, researchers explaining school choice decisions from a rational choice theoretical framework believe the school choice process operates in this manner: a family surveys all available school options, finds the one school fulfilling the maximum number of their educational preferences, and selects that school for their child/children.

The rational choice perspective asserts issues of school quality are paramount amongst families’ educational preferences; however, critics of this perspective point out while some families may regard issues of quality as most important, families may consider other school features as equally, if not more

important, than issues of quality when engaged in school choice decision-making (Wells and Crain 1992). However, as my findings from Chapter 3 demonstrate, families in my sample did not report schools' standardized test scores or similar conventional measures of school quality (i.e., NCES measures of school quality) as most indicative of a school's level of quality. In addition to this criticism, opponents of the rational choice perspective argue that, as an explanation of school choice, this theoretical framework oversimplifies the complexities involved in how families make school choices within the context of their social and cultural realities (Bosetti 2004; Wells and Crain 1992; Goyette 2008).

Researchers opposed to the rational choice framework of school choice decision-making employ the perspective "cultural logic of families" coined by Fuller, Elmore, and Orfield (1996). This view of how families participate in school choice decision-making allows one to consider other important social and cultural influences that may affect families as they participate in school choice decision-making. For example, Goyette's (2008) description of school choice is reminiscent of Tallman and Gray's (1990) concept of the "moment of choice." Goyette (2008) questions researchers who view school choice decision-making as "a one step process in which a single choice is made...considering every characteristic of all possible choices" (Goyette 2008). In her view, a more accurate description of school choice is that of an on-going process during which families consider a host of factors both during their search and when rendering a final decision for their child or children's school.

Similarly, Wells and Crain (1992) point out that rational choice driven theories of school choice assume issues of school quality are primary in families' search behavior and final decision-making. While issues of quality may be salient for some families engaged in school choice, Wells and Crain (1992) believe rational choice theory's assumption of the primacy of quality in families' choice process minimizes other factors families may view as equally important for what they desire from their children's school. Further, the authors echo Tallman and Gray's (1990) point regarding cumulative influences upon one making a choice. Wells and Crain (1992) assert families do not make school choice decisions within either an economic or social vacuum. The reality for families engaged in school choice involves the social and cultural contexts in which they participate in this decision-making process. Rational choice driven explanations of school choice overlook the role of social context in school choice processes, further limiting its ability to explain fully the process in which families making school choices participate.

An additional critique researchers aligned with the culture of family logic perspective have of the rational choice perspective is the lack of empirical evidence supporting the theoretical claims of rational choice. This critique is important for any attempt to understand what families face during their school choice decision-making, as empirical evidence supporting various claims can demonstrate potential variation in how the process of school choice operates for families from diverse social backgrounds. Without such evidence, a rational choice based explanation of the process of school choice seems incomplete.

Below I review two studies demonstrating the existence of variation by race and class in how diverse families navigate the school choice process. In particular, I focus upon the findings most relevant to the earliest stages of a family's school choice process: how families behave during the "search" portion of school choice; in other words, how families decide on the number of school choice options they will consider in their search for their children's school as well as external factors exerting influence over families as they conduct this search.

Saporito and Lareau (1999) examine how white families and African-American families navigate the process of school choice. Their research demonstrates families of both races behave similarly by engaging in what the authors describe as a two-step decision-making process. The two steps in this process involve a "first order decision" followed by a "second order decision" (Saporito and Lareau 1999). At the point of the "first order decision," families narrow down the number of school options they plan to consider in the search for their children's school by excluding specific schools from further consideration. During the "second order decision," families consider a number of external factors affecting their ability to select schooling options and make their ultimate choice of a particular school. While families of both races participate in this two-step process, the similarities in their school choice behavior end here.

Saporito and Lareau report "compelling evidence that race is a very powerful force in guiding family [school] choices (Saporito and Lareau 1999: 419). For white families, issues of race (i.e., racial composition of a school's student body) influence both first and second order decisions. However, this

influence is more salient in white families' first order decision; at the first order decision, white families in Saporito and Lareau's (1999) study exclude from further consideration schools with predominantly African-American student bodies "regardless of their positive attributes on other criteria" (Saporito and Lareau 1999). White families' second order decision involves consideration of additional factors such as schools' location and curricula with issues of race having some influence over their final decision; however, the effect of race on their second order decision is significantly less compared to the first order decision.

African American families in Saporito and Lareau's (1999) study also make school choice decisions using the two step process of a first order and second order decision. However, the strong influence issues of race have upon white families' first order decisions do not appear in the choice behavior of African American families in this study. In fact, issues of race such as the racial composition of a school's student body do not affect either the first or second order decisions African American families make. The authors write, "African American families did not appear, as a group, to eliminate schools from consideration using a single criterion" (Saporito and Lareau 1999: 433).

For the African American families in their study, Saporito and Lareau (1999) report a pattern of choice behavior related more to issues of class than race. These families tend to avoid schools in which the student body primarily consists of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The authors do not report whether this pattern existed during African American families' first or

second order decisions. However, Saporito and Lareau (1999) make it clear that the relationship between African American families' school choice decisions and a school's level of poverty is much weaker than the relationship between white families' decisions and a school's racial composition.

Saporito and Lareau's (1999) research examining the school choice decisions of white and African American families demonstrates significant variation along racial lines. For families of different races, different factors (i.e., racial composition of student body and socioeconomic composition of student body) exert varying levels of influence upon the first and second order decisions that, taken together, constitute families' school choice processes. Further, these findings appear to align more with the "culture of family logic" perspective of school choice rather than the rational choice perspective. Saporito and Lareau's (1999) research demonstrates families faced with school choice decisions consider important social and cultural factors as they engage in this process. While issues of school quality may factor into families' decisions, Saporito and Lareau's (1999) research highlights other factors families appear to consider as equally, if not more, important for the choices they make in their search for their children's school.

Additional support for the "cultural of family logic" perspective exists in the work of Holme (2000). This research highlights significant variation along class lines in families' school choice decision-making. It is important to note Holme's (2000) research employs qualitative methods (specifically in-depth

interviews with families), and has a very small sample size ($N = 42$), which limits generalizability to a larger population.

For her study, Holme (2000) specifically targeted 42 mostly white, upper-income families because they participate in what Holme (2000) terms “the ‘unofficial’ choice market” (Holme 2000:178). This “unofficial” choice market involves white, upper-income families because these families “... [have the] ability to buy a home that gives them access to good public schools” (Holme 2000: 178). Holme (2000) argues that this ability creates a significant distinction along class lines. In terms of school choice, higher income families have an advantage over families lacking adequate resources that would allow them to move to a new neighborhood to gain access to its schools.

The high income levels of families in Holme’s (2000) study suggest it is likely these families also possess a higher level of education than families with lower incomes. Rational choice theories of families choice behavior assumes all families engage in school choice decisions in similar ways. However, the combination of high income and high levels of education found amongst families’ in Holme’s (2000) study leads one to predict such families may have a greater ability to turn educational preferences into reality for their children based on their ability to send their children to the school they most desire. Therefore, there is potential for variation in how families in a higher social position may engage in school choice making compared to families in a lower social position. Holme’s (2000) research reveals that when engaged in school choice decision-making,

mostly white, upper-income families employ techniques that contradict rational choice theory's "one-size-fits-all" approach to school choice at the family level.

A consistent finding in Holme's (2000) research involves the use of social networks as a means for families in her study to learn about schools in their neighborhood and surrounding areas. The social networks Holme (2000) describes consist of other high income, high status families that circulate information about schools that do not focus directly upon specific school features such as quality of instruction or students' performance on standardized tests. Rather, the shared information amongst the mostly white, high income families Holme (2000) interviewed focuses primarily upon schools' "reputations" within these networks. A quote from Susan Murray, a parent Holme (2000) interviewed for her study, reveals the way in which these social networks operate.

There's a lot of buzz amongst parents. We see each other all the time in different situations... You hear from people how things are going, what schools are having trouble... I could keep you here another hour talking about all the rumors about the schools [laughs]. So, information really flows. (Holme 2000: 188)

Another interesting feature of these social networks of mostly white, higher income families involves the ways in which such families decide to eliminate potential schools from further consideration in their school searches. School features that researchers commonly cite as factors families use during this part of the decision-making process such as issues of school quality and levels of teacher experience do not seem to influence families' choice behavior in the way researchers suggest. For example, Betsy Anderson, another parent from Holme's (2000) study, explains how her family arrived at their opinion of Westland School. This opinion led her family to relocate to a new

neighborhood to gain access to schools considered “better” than Westland within the social networks of families’ similar to Betsy’s.

I don’t even know that there was anything specific that somebody said [about the Westland school]. It was just that...its reputation was not good, and I know that there were these neighbors of mine...both of them were very knowledgeable about education and [they] had said ‘naaaahhh, not very good. (Holme 2000: 187)

Betsy’s words demonstrate some factors influencing some families’ school choice behavior that researchers overlook. While some families may use school features researchers highlight as important for school choice, Holme’s (2000) research reveals additional factors one must consider for a more complete understanding of how the school choice process operates at the family level. While Holme’s (2000) findings are limited by small sample size and a homogeneous pool of mostly white, high income families, her findings suggest that further research of non-white families from various socioeconomic backgrounds is necessary to determine if the influence of social networks and word of mouth information from families in similar social positions exists amongst a more heterogeneous sample of families from diverse backgrounds.

The research of both Saporito and Lareau (1999) and Holme (2000) highlight ways in which families from diverse social backgrounds participate in the process of school choice decision-making. Their findings lend further support to the position of researchers opposed to the use of rational choice theory as an effective explanation of the school choice process. While the ideology behind the rational choice perspective of school choice seems to be an ideal description of how families might navigate school choices, the reality of the process as described by these researchers reveals a complex, multilayered decision-making process. Additional research at the family level seems

necessary to reach a comprehensive understanding of how families make school choices, why they make those choices, and what factors influence their choices.

Data and Methods

Similar to Chapter 3, data used in these analyses are from the Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Metropolitan Survey (PMP). Data from the PMP are restricted to households in the Philadelphia metropolitan area with at least one school-aged child (N = 589).

Sample size for Models 1 and 2 (N = 589) includes all of the families in the total sample from the PMP survey. Sample size for Models 3 and 4 (N = 558) reflects missing cases in the dependent variables used in these models.

Dependent Variables

To determine the total number of school options families consider during their school choice process, I examine a continuous measure of the number of options households with school aged children considered for the education of their child or children. The PMP data includes five different school choice option variables households may have considered. Below, I list these five variables and the percentage of households who responded “Yes” to each individual variable:

1. Have you ever seriously considered a neighborhood public school for the education of your child/any of the children in your household? (Yes = 86.1%)
2. Have you ever seriously considered a private school for the education of your child/any of the children in your household? (Yes = 60.5%)
3. Have you ever seriously considered a magnet school for the education of your child/any of the children in your household? (Yes = 23.0%)
4. Have you ever seriously considered a charter school for the education of your child/any of the children in your household? (Yes = 24.4%)

5. Have you ever seriously considered transferring your child/any children in your household into a public school that isn't in your neighborhood? (Yes = 21.9%)

In addition to the above five school choice options, the data includes six households reporting they did not consider any of these school choice options. To include these households in my measure of this dependent variable, I constructed a new variable to include these households. Adding together data for these six variables, my dependent variable for the number of school choice options a household has considered is as follows:

0. Did not consider any of the school choice options
1. Considered one school choice option
2. Considered two school choice options
3. Considered three school choice options
4. Considered four school choice options
5. Considered five school choice options

To further explore families' search behavior during the process of school choice, I examined a series of factors that may influence a family's school choice.¹⁶ After responding to a series of "Yes" or "No" questions involving factors families seriously considered when deciding which schools their child/children should attend, families answered a follow up question asking, "Of the qualities [factors] we just spoke about,

¹⁶ In the PMP survey, we chose not to include "safety" as an option for family respondents to report as the most important factor for school choice for two reasons. First, research demonstrates families overwhelmingly choose safety as the most important concern about their children's schools. (See Ferrick, Jr., Tom and Laura Horowitz. 2010. "Philadelphia's Changing Schools and What Parents Want from Them." Philadelphia, PA: The PEW Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia Research Initiative Executive Summary at pp. 3 and 7) Second, our survey was interested in *additional* factors families consider most important for school choice decisions and did not include "safety" as a response due to its potential to prevent any variation in additional factors families feel are most important for school choice. However, while not a specific response category, family respondents were able to report "safety" as the most important factor for school choice if they so desired. In my sample, only 6 family respondents (1.1 percent) reported safety as the most important factor for school choice.

which would you consider to be the most important in the decision about which school your child/children should attend?” Using this question, I selected the four most frequently reported factors family respondents indicated as most important for their school choice decision: the school supports moral and ethical values I want children to learn, the school is conveniently located, my child/children would fit in at this school, and the children in this school are from families like mine.¹⁷ However, only the factor “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” produced significant results in the multivariate analysis. Therefore, the factor “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for school choice is dependent variable in the multivariate analyses examining factors influencing families’ school choice decisions.¹⁸ Factor 1 is a dichotomous variable with response options *0 = Family did not select Factor 1 as most important for their school choice decision* and *1 = Family did select Factor 1 as most important for their school choice decision*.

Independent Variables

The same independent variables from Chapter 3 are used in all analyses for Chapter 4. (Please see Chapter 3 for information on the independent variables).

Control Variables

I include all of the control variables used in Chapter 3’s analyses in the analyses for this chapter as well. (Please see Chapter 3 for information on the control variables).

¹⁷ Initially, I planned to select the top three most frequently reported responses; however, two factors (my child/children would fit in at this school and the children in this school are from families like mine) were reported with the same frequency (N = 47; 8.4 percent), placing both as the third most frequently reported response to this question.

¹⁸ For the sake of clarity, from this point forward in Chapter 4, I will refer to this factor as Factor 1.

However, I made two separate additions to the control variables included in the multivariate analyses I describe later in this chapter. First, I added four additional control variables to all multivariate analyses. Each of these control variables served as a dependent variable in the regression models described in Chapter 3; however, I now include these variables as control variables in the multivariate analyses exploring family's search behavior during school choice decision-making.

School Quality Control Variables (included in all multivariate analyses)

Progressive vs. Traditional Index Measure of Families' Orientations to Perceptions
School Quality

This control variable is an index variable measuring families' orientations to perceptions of school quality. The index is anchored at $0 = \textit{Most progressive}$ and $5 = \textit{Most traditional}$. (Please see Appendix A for a more detailed description of how I constructed this index measure.)

Proportion of Students Who Will Eventually Go On to a Four Year College

This control variable is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected a school's proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college as the most important indicator of school quality. The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select indicator as most important indicator of school quality}$ and $1 = \textit{Family did select indicator as most important indicator of school quality}$.

Small Class Size

This control variable is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected small class size as the most important indicator of school quality. The response options for this

variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select indicator as most important indicator of school quality}$ and $1 = \textit{Family did select indicator as most important indicator of school quality}$.

Up-to-Date Resources like textbooks and computers

This control variable is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected up-to-date resources as the most important indicator of school quality. The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select indicator as most important indicator of school quality}$ and $1 = \textit{Family did select indicator as most important indicator of school quality}$.

Attendance at Private School control variables (included only in Models 3 and 4)

I chose to include private school control variables in my analyses for the following reasons. In comparison to all other factors that families could have reported as the most important factor for their school choice decisions, Factor 1 is by far the most frequently reported response ($N = 193$; 32.8 percent). Given the “moral and ethical” component of Factor 1, including variables describing children’s attendance at private schools, particularly Catholic affiliated private schools, seemed a logical addition to my analyses. It is possible religious preference explains why lower-income, less educated, and/or minority families value moral and ethical aspects of schools.

I recognize I capture this imperfectly in these control variables with the choice of a particular religious school (i.e., Catholic school). In this case, the private school control variables mediate the relationships between the sociodemographic variables and the school choices involved in my analysis. However, my primary interest for including private school control variables in Models 3 and 4 involves their potential for operating

as an independent, explanatory factor. In addition to the sociodemographic variables in these models, I wanted to determine whether attendance at religious schools is related to those qualities which families report they value in schools.

I constructed the private school control variables from the open-ended PMP survey question, “What is the religious affiliation of the private school or schools that your children/child have/had attended?” Responses were coded into the following categories with responses of *0 = No* and *1 = Yes*.

1. Private school, non-religious
2. Private, Catholic school
3. Private, Jewish school
4. Private, Quaker school
5. Private, Islamic school
6. Private, Episcopalian school
7. Private, Evangelical Protestant school
8. Private, Protestant school
9. Private, other religious school

The language of this PMP survey question prevents one from ascertaining only those households in which children **currently** attend private school. The ideal question for constructing the private school control variables would involve the same question, but would be preceded by a skip pattern in which families who **ever** used private school, but not currently doing so, are not asked this question. The design of the PMP survey is such that both families in which children **ever** attended private school as well as families in which children **currently** attend private school answered this question about the religious affiliation of the private schools. Therefore, the responses regarding religious affiliation of children’s private schools could include: 1) the religious affiliation of the private school a child previously attended, but does not currently attend, 2) the religious affiliation of the private school a child currently attends, or 3) the religious affiliation of

the private school a child previously attended as well as the private school a child currently attends. While not the ideal measure of private school attendance, this question provided the best possible measure of families who made a choice of private school.^{19,20}

Further, the design of the PMP survey allowed families to report more than one religious affiliation for private schools (i.e., a family with more than one child with one child attending private, Catholic school and another child attending a private, non-religious school). Therefore, I constructed the private school control variables using a hierarchical method to create mutually exclusive private school control variables representing each household within my overall sample size of $N = 589$.²¹ Since private, Catholic school is the most frequently reported type of private school in my sample, this variable served as the foundation for the hierarchical construction of the remaining two private school variables.

Private, Catholic school ($N = 127$)

This is a dichotomous measure of families who made the choice of a private, Catholic school for their children. The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Does NOT attend private, Catholic school}$ $1 = \textit{Attends private, Catholic school}$.

¹⁹My unit of analyses for models including private school controls is number of families, not number of choices families have made. While families with more than one child can make more than one private school choice for their children, the PMP survey questions and the data they provided regarding attendance at specific types of private schools did not allow me to include multiple private school choices families made.

²⁰Multivariate analyses in Chapter 5 will address every **current** school choice each family in my sample has made for each of their children meaning the unit of analysis in Chapter 5 will be number of choices rather than number of families.

²¹The sum of responses coded $1 = \textit{Yes}$ from the variables 1) private, Catholic school ($N = 127$), 2) private, other religious school ($N = 46$), 3) private, non-religious school ($N = 38$), and 4) public school ($N = 378$) is $N = 589$, representing each family in my overall sample size. [$127 + 46 + 38 + 378 = 589$]

Private, Other religious school (N = 46)

As a result of a small number of cases in seven of the original response categories in the question regarding religious affiliation of private schools, I collapsed the following categories into one variable: 1) private, Jewish school, 2) private, Quaker school, 3) private, Islamic school, 4) private, Episcopalian school, 5) private, Evangelical Protestant school, 6) private, Protestant school, and 7) private, other religious school. This new variable is a dichotomous measure of families who made the choice of a private school with a religious affiliation other than Catholic. The response options for this variable are *0 = Does NOT attend private, other religious school* *1 = Attends private, other religious school*. The hierarchical way in which I created this variable excludes families who reported their children attend private, Catholic school.

Private, Non-Religious school (N = 38)

This is a dichotomous measure of families who made the choice of a private, non-religious school for their children. The response options for this variable are *0 = Does NOT attend private, non-religious school* *1 = Attends private, non-religious school*. The hierarchical way in which I created this variable excludes families who reported their children attend private, Catholic school as well as families who reported their children attend private, other religious schools.

Public school (N = 378); (*reference category*)

This is dichotomous measure of families who made the choice of public school for their children. The response options for this variable are *0 = Does NOT attend any private school* *1 = Attends public school*.

Research Strategy

Bivariate Analyses

To determine if variation along racial and class lines exists in the two dependent variables used in this chapter's multivariate analyses, I conducted a number of cross tabulations. First, I cross tabulated the dependent variable "Number of School Choice Options" by each independent variable of race, income, and level of education. Second, I ran cross tabulations of the dependent variable "The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as the most important factor for school choice [Factor 1] by each independent variable of race, income, and level of education.

Multivariate Analyses

This research explores race and class variation in the number of school choice options families consider during their school choice search process as well as in the likelihood families select the specific school feature I call Factor 1, "The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn," as the most important factor for their school choice decision. For Models 1 and 2, I employ ordinary least squares regression (OLS) to analyze the number of school choice options families considered during their search for their children's school. This analysis uses nested models in which the first model includes only the independent variables of families' race, income, and level of education as well as dummy variables representing missing cases in these three independent variables. The second model adds my original control variables from Chapter 3 as well as new control variables including families' progressive vs. traditional orientation toward school quality and three "most important indicator of quality"

variables including: 1) the proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college, 2) small class size, and 3) up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers.

Models 3 and 4 employ logistic regression techniques to predict whether families select Factor 1, “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn,” as the most important factor for their school choice decision. Models 3 and 4 are nested in that Model 3 includes only the independent variables of race, income, and level of education as well as dummy variables representing the missing cases in these three independent variables. Model 4 adds my original control variables, the new controls included in Model 2, as well as control variables describing whether families currently have their child or children attending private, religiously affiliated schools.

Finally, after performing the multivariate analyses described above, I suspected one additional school feature, “School has convenient hours,” might reveal significant variation along the lines of race and class. However, the total number of families who reported “School has convenient hours” as the most important factor for their school choice decision was very small ($N = 10$). Despite this small number of households, I ran cross tabulations of the factor “School has convenient hours” by each independent variable of race, income, and level of education to determine if this factor revealed any significant relationships with my independent variables.

Results

Bivariate Analyses

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below represent two bivariate analyses demonstrating a significant relationship between the variables in the analyses. Four additional bivariate analyses were performed, but none of these analyses demonstrated significant

relationships.²² Please see Appendix C for the bivariate analyses with non-significant relationships between the variables involved in these analyses.

	Race			Total
	White Families	Families of Color		
Number of School Options Families Considered During School Choice Search	Did not consider any school options	0.8% (3)	0.7% (1)	0.8% (4)
	Considered one school option	44.8% (171)	20.8% (30)	38.2% (201)
	Considered two school options	30.1% (115)	20.1% (29)	27.4% (144)
	Considered three school options	13.6% (52)	22.9% (33)	16.2% (85)
	Considered four school option	6.3% (24)	21.5% (31)	10.5% (55)
	Considered five school option	4.5% (17)	13.9% (20)	7.0% (37)
	Total	100.0% (382)	100.0% (144)	100.0% (526)

$\chi^2 = 61.570$; $\phi = 0.342$, $p < .001$. Sample size is 526.

Table 4.1 demonstrates a significant relationship between the number of school choice options families considered during their school choice search by race. The majority of white families (44.8 percent) consider only one school option compared to 20.8 percent of families of color who consider only one option during their school search. On the whole, this analysis reveals families of color consider a greater number of schooling options than their white counterparts. Almost two-thirds (64.5 percent) of

²² The four additional bivariate analyses are: 1) Number of school options families considered during school choice search by education, 2) School Supports the Moral and Ethical Values I want Children to Learn by race, 3) School Supports the Moral and Ethical Values I want Children to Learn by income, and 4) School Supports the Moral and Ethical Values I want Children to Learn by education.

families of color consider two or more schooling options compared to 54.5 percent of white families who consider two or more schooling options in the search for their children's school.

	Income			Total
		Low Income ¹	High Income ²	
Number of School Options Families Considered During School Choice Search	Did not consider any school options	1.5%	0.3%	0.8%
	Considered one school option	35.3%	39.4%	37.7%
	Considered two school options	21.9%	31.2%	27.4%
	Considered three school options	13.9%	18.2%	16.4%
	Considered four school option	15.4%	6.8%	10.3%
	Considered five school option	11.9%	4.1%	7.3%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 25.947$; $\phi = 0.229$, $p < .001$. Sample size is 493.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$45,000 over the past 12 months

²High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$55,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

Table 4.2 demonstrates a significant relationship between the number of school choice options families consider as they search for their children's school and families' annual household income. Bifurcating Table 4.2 at the point of considering zero to two schooling options compared to considering three or more schooling options demonstrates families with lower annual household incomes consider a greater number of schooling options than families with higher annual incomes. 58.7 percent of families with low incomes consider zero to two schooling options during their search compared to 70.2

percent of families with high incomes. Further, a much larger percentage of families with low incomes (41.2 percent) consider three or more schooling options compared to 29.1 percent of high income families who consider three or more schooling options during their school choice search.

Multivariate Analyses

Number of School Choice Options Families Considered During School Choice Search

I employed ordinary least squares regression (OLS) in the analyses represented by Models 1 and 2. To interpret the significant findings from these models, I used the process of means substitution. Models 1 and 2 (see Table 4.3) examine the total number of school choice options families consider during their search for their child or children's school. For these models, my sample size is N = 589.

Table 4.3 Estimated Coefficients of Linear Regression Models Predicting Number of School Options Families Considered During School Choice Search

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	2.021***	2.062***
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	0.896***	0.662***
<i>Income</i>		
	-0.001	0.002
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	-0.006	-0.054
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		0.046
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		0.181
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		0.077

Table 4.3 Estimated Coefficients of Linear Regression Models Predicting Number of School Options Families Considered During School Choice Search (*continued*)

Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		0.048
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		-0.229*
Male		
<i>Age</i>		-0.005
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		0.072
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		-0.103
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban ¹		-0.362**
Rural		-0.487**
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		-0.004
<i>R²</i>	<i>0.091</i>	<i>0.134</i>

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is 589. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

¹Dummy variable denoting missing cases for the independent variable suburban area of residence was excluded from Model 2 as a result of collinearity. (Tolerance = 0.000)

Model 1 demonstrates race has a significant effect on the number of school choice options families consider during their search process for their child or children's school. Families of color consider more school options than white families. On average, white families consider 1.80 school options while families of color, on average, consider 2.21 school options during their search for their children's school. Controlling for income and level of education, families of color consider an average of 0.41 more school options than white families do during their school choice search process.

Another significant variable in Model 1 is the variable representing missing cases in the independent variable of race. Controlling for income and level of education, family respondents who did not report their race or ethnicity, on average, consider 2.21 options while those who did report race or ethnicity consider 2.39 school options on average. Beyond observing the average difference of 0.18 more school options considered by family respondents who reported their race or ethnicity compared to family respondent who did not, I can state only these two groups differ significantly regarding the number of school options they consider during their school choice search.

Controlling for all other factors in the model, the race effect upon total number of school options families consider holds up in Model 2. On average, white families consider a total of 1.73 school options. On the other hand, families of color, on average, consider 2.03 school options. Just as in Model 1, families of color tend to consider more school options than white families when searching for their children's school. With all additional controls in place, families of color consider an average of 0.25 more school options than white families during their process of school choice.

Model 2 also reveals a significant effect of the area in which families live on the total number of school options they consider seriously during the search for their children's school.²³ Families who live in the suburbs, on average, consider 2.03 options while families residing in urban areas, on average, consider 2.21 school options. Similarly, families living in rural areas, on average, consider fewer school options than

²³ I ran a second version of Model 2 to determine if any interaction effects existed between race and area of residence. I included three interaction terms (race*suburban area of residence, race*rural area of residence, and race*urban area of residence) in this model, but none of these interaction terms produced significant effects on the number of school choice options families consider during their school choice search.

families in urban areas. For families residing in rural communities, they consider an average of 2.03 school options compared to an average of 2.16 school options families in urban communities consider during their school choice search process.

The gender of the family respondent has a significant effect on the number of school choice options families seriously consider as they search for their children's school. Male family respondents, on average, consider 2.03 school options while female family respondents, on average, consider 2.14 schooling options. 0.11 more school options than their male counterparts. With all additional controls in place, female family respondents consider an average of 0.11 more school options than male family respondents at this stage of families' searches for their children's schools.

Model 2 also demonstrates a significant effect in variables representing missing cases in age and rural area of residence. Family respondents who did not report their age, on average, consider 2.03 school options during their search process while those who reported their age, on average, consider 2.33 school options. In terms of missing cases for rural areas of residence, family respondents who did not report if they live in a rural area, on average, consider 2.03 school options during their school choice search process. Those who reported living in a rural area consider slightly fewer options with an average of 2.00 options seriously considered during their search process. Without additional data on the missing cases in education and gender, I can only report these significant differences in the number of school choice options between family respondents who reported their level of education and those who did not as well as family respondents who reported their gender and those who did not.

Models 1 and 2 examine how many schools families will consider seriously as they engage in the process of school choice decision-making. To further explore this process, Models 3 and 4 (see Table 4.4) examine the likelihood families select a specific school feature, Factor 1, “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn,” as the most important factor in school choice decision. This specific school feature serves as the dependent variables in the following logistic regression models because over one-third of families in my sample (34.6 percent) reported this factor is most important for their school choice decisions. Sample size for these models is N = 558.

Table 4.4 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting "School Supports Moral and Ethical Values I want children to Learn" as the Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision

	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	-0.647**	-1.299
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	-0.107	-0.194
<i>Income</i>		
	0.000	0.008*
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	0.038	0.184
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		0.237**
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		-0.250
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		0.218
Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		0.117
<i>Attendance at Private School</i>		
Private, Catholic school		1.103***

Table 4.4 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting "School Supports Moral and Ethical Values I want children to Learn" as the Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision (*continued*)

Private, Other religiously affiliated school		0.541
Private, Non-religious school		0.571
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		-0.356
<i>Age</i>		0.005
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		-0.097
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		0.625*
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		-0.170
Rural		-0.083
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		0.026
Model χ^2	2.04 [†]	62.57***
<i>df</i>	6	27
Chi-Square Block/df		62.57/27
Chi-Square Model/df	2.04/6	62.57/27
-2 Log Likelihood	717.62	657.09
Nagelkerke R ²	0.01	0.15

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .01$. Sample size is 558. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

[†]Not significant ($p = 0.916$)

Model 3 demonstrates no significant effects of any variable upon the likelihood families will select Factor 1 as the most important factor in their school choice decision. However, with the addition of all control variables from Model 2 and the nine private school control variables, Model 4 reveals the greatest number of significant findings in the independent and control variables. Five variables in Model 4 have a significant effect

upon the likelihood families will select Factor 1, “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn,” as the most important factor for their school choice decision. These variables are: 1) income, 2) families’ progressive versus traditional orientation towards school quality, 3) the dummy variable representing missing cases in the progressive versus traditional measure of school quality, 4) families with children currently enrolled in private, Catholic schools, and 5) marital status..

The significant effect of income in Model 4 demonstrates that as a family’s annual household income increased by \$1,000 increase they are 0.008 times as likely as a family with a lower income to select Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decision. While this appears to be a very small increase in probability, the importance of this finding resides in comparisons between families at the lower end of the income range with families at the much higher end of the income range. As discrepancies between families’ annual household incomes become greater (i.e., a family with a \$10,000 annual household income versus a family with a \$100,000 annual household income), the likelihood of selecting Factor 1 as most important for school choice increases.

With regard to families’ progressive versus traditional orientation toward school quality, as a family’s score on this index measure increases by 1 point (i.e., families’ orientation becoming more traditional), they are 1.256 times as likely as a family with a lower index score (i.e., more progressive orientation) to select Factor 1, as the most important factor for their school choice decision. In addition to the significant effect of families’ progressive versus traditional orientation toward school quality on the likelihood a family selects Factor 1 as the most important factor for school choice, the

dummy variable representing missing cases in the progressive versus traditional measure of school quality is significant within Model 4. Families without a score on the progressive versus traditional index measure are 1.267 times as likely as families with a score on this index measure to select Factor 1 as most important for school choice decision. However, without additional data on these missing cases, I can only report this significant difference in the likelihood of families without an index score to select Factor 1 as most important for school choice compared to families with scores on the progressive versus traditional index measure of school quality.

The final two significant effects in Model 4 involve attendance to private, Catholic school and marital status. The effect of attendance to private, Catholic schools demonstrates families currently sending their children to such schools are 3.013 times as likely to select Factor 1 as the most important factor in their school choice decision than families whose children attend public school. In terms of marital status, married households are 1.868 times as likely as unmarried households to select Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions.

Additional Bivariate Analyses

After conducting the multivariate analyses described above, I suspected the school feature, "School has convenient hours," which some families reported as the most important factor in their school choice decision, might reveal significant variation along racial and class lines. Goyette (2008) describes research demonstrating lower-income families and families of color often have more concerns about the ability to safely transport their children to school than their wealthier, white counterparts. She writes,

Smrekar and Goldring (1999) found that lower income parents and parents of color in Cincinnati and St. Louis were more concerned about transportation when choosing schools for their children than were middle-class, white parents. More advantaged

families may have cars that allow them to more conveniently transport children to schools further distances from home or work. Less advantaged families may have to rely on public transportation. They depend on the timetables of public transportation and the convenience of public transportation routes to their homes, schools, and workplaces. Lower income families may be less likely to afford to stay home to care for children and/or have less flexible work schedules to provide transportation for children's education and after school activities. (Goyette 2008)

Transportation concerns connect to a school with convenient hours in that families with less flexible work schedules or who rely upon mass transit as their primary mode of transportation may desire a school with hours allowing them to participate in things such as after school activities or parent/teacher conferences. To determine if such variation existed, I ran three cross tabulations involving this factor: "School has convenient hours" by families' race, "School has convenient hours" by families' annual household income²⁴, and "School has convenient hours by families' level of education. Only the cross tabulation between "School has convenient hours" and families' annual household income revealed a significant relationship.

The significant relationship in Table 4.5 suggests that a larger overall sample size may result in a greater number of families selecting "School has convenient hours" as most important in terms of their school choice decision, serving to increase the significance of this relationship. In my sample of 589 families, only 10 families selected this factor as most important for their school choice decision; despite this rather small number (N = 10), the results of Table 4.5 reveal significant variation by families' annual income for the 10 families who did select this factor as most important for their school choice.

²⁴ In this cross tabulation between "School has convenient hours" by income, my income measure is collapsed into two categories due to the small number of families (N = 10) who selected this school feature as the most important factor in their school choice. The collapsed income measure includes the following categories: Low income (\$5,000 to \$45,000) and High Income (\$55,000 to \$120, 000).

	Income			Total
	Low Income¹	High Income²		
School Has Convenient Hours	Family did NOT select "School Has Convenient Hours" as Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision	96.4%	98.9%	97.9%
	Family selected "School Has Convenient Hours" as Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision	3.6%	1.1%	2.1%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 3.687$; $\phi = -0.088$, $p < .10$. Sample size is 474.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$45,000 over the past 12 months

²High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$55,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

Considering only the 10 families who selected this factor as the most important in their school choice decision, 7 families (70 percent) have a household income categorized as "Low Income" (\$5,000 to \$45,000) while the remaining 3 families (30 percent) have a household income categorized as "High Income" (\$55,000 to \$75,000). These results warrant further examination of the influence the school characteristic "School has convenient hours" exerts upon the school choice decisions of families with diverse annual household incomes.

Discussion

A prominent element within existing literature on school choice and the decision-making involved in making such choices is the debate amongst researchers over which

theoretical framework best explains the process of school choice. Some researchers argue that rational choice theories accurately describe the reality of school choice decision-making for families facing school choice (Chubb and Moe 1990; Young and Clinchy 1992). This perspective takes as an assumption that all families will engage in school choice similarly. Families will consider issues of school quality most important during their search and their search will culminate in a school choice that fulfills the maximum number of educational desires a family has for their children's education. In contrast, other researchers employ a culture of family logic perspective in order to understand more completely the features of the school choice process (Fuller, Elmore and Orfield 1996; Bosetti 2004; Wells and Crain 1992; Goyette 2008). These researchers assert rational choice based explanations of school choice oversimplify the complexity involved in such decisions as well as overlook additional factors families consider important as they search for their children's school.

The analyses in Chapter 4 demonstrate variation exists in the experience of school choice at the family level. For example, my analyses reveal variation in the number of school options families consider seriously during the search for their children's school as well in the factors they consider most important for school choice decisions. The existence of such variation lends support to the culture of family logic perspective of school choice decision-making and calls into question the homogeneous nature of families' experiences during the process of school choice decision-making that rational choice based theories suggest.

Models 1 and 2 demonstrate a significant effect of race on the total number of school options families consider during their school choice search. Further, bivariate

analyses of the number of schooling options families consider as they search for their children's school demonstrate families of color consider more options than white families. One possible explanation for this significant difference is families of color living in urban areas need to consider more schooling options for their children as the quality of their neighborhood schools tend to be poorer than both whites who live in suburban areas as well as whites who have greater financial resources allowing them to more easily afford private schools either in urban areas or suburban areas.²⁵

Saporito and Lareau's (1999) research also suggests a possible explanation for variation by race in the number of school options families consider during their search for their children's school. In their study, the choice behavior of white families reveals a significant influence of issues of race primarily during their first order decision but also during second order decisions. In their first order decision, white families in Saporito and Lareau's (1999) study tend to eliminate from further consideration any school in which the racial composition of the student body is primarily non-white even if such a school has additional features these families may consider desirable. African American families, however, do not demonstrate this type of school choice behavior; further, the authors did not find any specific criteria African American families use during the first order decision to eliminate specific schools from further consideration. Considering both Saporito and Lareau's (1999) findings and my finding of the significant effect of race on the number of school options families from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds consider, it is clear

²⁵ (See Ferrick, Jr., Tom and Laura Horowitz. 2010. "Philadelphia's Changing Schools and What Parents Want from Them." Philadelphia, PA: The PEW Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia Research Initiative at p. 6). One finding from this study states, "Most of the parents we surveyed are not happy with the performance of [schools within] the School District of Philadelphia; 60 percent rated it "only fair" or "poor"... Twenty-eight percent of public school parents rated their children's schools as "only fair" or "poor". ...corresponding numbers were 8 percent for charter parents and 7 percent for parents with children in Catholic school."

family behavior in the beginning stages of school choice operates differently along racial lines. This finding contradicts the assumption of rational choice based explanations of school choice that suggests all families will consider all available school options during the search for their children's school.

Model 2 also reveals a significant effect of gender on the total number of school choice options families consider in their school choice search. Female family respondents consider more schooling options than male family respondents, and a possible explanation for this finding exists in a finding from Chapter 3. In Chapter 3, the OLS regression exploring families' progressive versus traditional orientations toward school quality demonstrated female family respondents exhibited a more progressive orientation toward school quality than male family respondents.²⁶ Perhaps this more progressive orientation toward school quality leads female family respondents to consider a greater number of schooling options as they search for their children's school in comparison to male respondents.

In addition to the significant effects of race and gender, Model 2 demonstrates a significant effect of a family's area of residence (i.e., suburban, rural, or urban) on the total number of school options families consider. The difference between rural families and urban families is likely attributed to the greater number of school options existing in urban areas compared to rural areas. Urban areas tend to have significantly more school options than rural areas where populations are much smaller leading to fewer school options.

For families residing in urban areas compared to families residing in suburban areas, it is likely suburban families fall into what Holme (2000) terms the "unofficial

²⁶ Please see Chapter 3, page 16, paragraph two.

choice market” (Holme 2000). Families in suburban areas may have moved to that area in order to gain access to the schools connected to those neighborhoods. Therefore, for suburban families, at least some of the school choice process may have occurred when they selected a place to purchase a home. Families residing in urban areas may not have the financial resources to make such a move. Further, Holme (2000) describes the social networks that the mostly white, higher income families in her study use in order to gather information about school “reputations” and information regarding where children from families from a similar socioeconomic background send their children.

The ability to relocate to suburban areas that tend to have schools with greater resources than schools within urban areas combined with the use of social networks to gather information about specific schools may serve to limit the number of school options families residing in suburban areas need to consider during the early stages of their search for their children’s school. However, Holme’s (2000) study did not include families with low incomes or families from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, one can only speculate whether such families participate in the type of social networking she describes as common amongst mostly white, higher income families. However, the fact that families residing in urban areas on average consider more school options than both families living in rural areas and those living in the suburbs demonstrates significant variation in the school choice behavior of families from diverse social backgrounds.

In addition to determining the number of school options families consider during their school search, analyses in this chapter also address factors families report as most important for their school choice decisions. Models 3 and 4 examine the probability families selected “The school supports the moral and ethical values I want my children to

learn” (Factor 1) as the most important factor for their school choices. While Model 3 did not produce any significant results, the addition of control variables to Model 4 yielded the greatest number of significant effects on the probability families selected Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice decisions.

A family’s annual household income has a significant effect on the likelihood the family believes Factor 1 is the most important factor for their school choice decision. Specifically, comparing families at the extreme ends of the income scale (i.e., an income of \$10,000 compared to an income of \$100,000) demonstrates the importance of this finding. As discrepancies amongst families’ annual household grow, the likelihood a family selects Factor 1 as most important for their school choice decision increases. The “moral and ethical” elements within Factor 1 may explain this significant difference. If families believe a school supporting the moral and ethical values they want children to learn is the most important component of their school choice decision, it is likely such families will consider private schools, most of which require tuition in order to attend. Families at the higher end of the income scale have greater financial resources at their disposal to actualize a desire for a school reflecting their moral and ethical values by enrolling their children in a private school. While families with fewer resources may want such a school for their children, the obstacle of making tuition payments for private school may prohibit their ability to turn this desire into reality.

Model 4 also demonstrates the progressive versus traditional index of families’ orientation toward school quality significantly affects the likelihood of a family selecting Factor 1 as most important for their school choice decisions. Therefore, families with a more traditional orientation toward school quality are more likely to want schools that

reflect their values compared to families with a more progressive orientation toward school quality. This relationship between families' different orientations toward school quality and the likelihood of selecting Factor 1 as most important for school choice suggests the importance of school quality in families' school choice decisions. Independent of race, income, and level of education, issues of school quality are important with regard to the criteria families select as most essential for their school choice decisions. Further, this result shows a connection between families' perceptions of quality and the characteristics they consider during the process of school choice decision-making. Evidence of such a connection rarely, if ever, appears in existing literature on either school quality or school choice; however, this connection does exist suggesting the need for further exploration of a relationship between school quality and school choice at the family level.

The remaining significant effects in Model 4 involve the marital status of the household and families whose children currently attend private, Catholic schools. Married households are more likely to select Factor 1 as most important for school choice compared to unmarried households. A possible explanation for this finding is by virtue of being married, a union often connected to a couple's religious beliefs, married households have a greater desire for their children's school reflect the moral and ethical values they want their children to learn. Families in which children currently attending private, Catholic school are more likely than families whose children attend public school to select Factor 1 as most important for their school choice decision. Once again, the moral and ethical component of Factor 1 may explain why families with children enrolled

in private, Catholic school place high value on a school that will teach their children the values connected to Catholicism.

Both of the above significant effects from Model 4 support the claim of Wells and Crain (1992) that families do not make school choice decisions within either a social or cultural vacuum (Wells and Crain 1992). The fact that married households and families in which children attend private, Catholic school significantly affect the probability a family will select Factor 1 as most important for their school choice decision highlights the influence that cultural factors, such as religion, can have upon the school choice behavior of many families in my sample. Further, these findings augment the position of researchers aligned with the culture of family logic perspective of school choice. While rational choice theorists suggest issues of school quality will exert primary influence over families engaged in school choice, the culture of family logic position holds that quality is one factor amongst many that families assess during their choice processes.

However, it is important to note that the significant effect of children's attendance at private, Catholic schools in Model 4 may result from the fact that the PMP survey includes households from the five counties comprising the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area. The national percentage of students attending private schools in the U.S. is 11 percent (Council for American Private Education 2010; Hussar and Bailey 2008: 41). For the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area, the 2006-2008 American Community Survey reports the three year statistic for children aged 5 to 19 enrolled in private school is 23.6 percent a significantly larger number than the 11 percent of private school students nationwide.²⁷

²⁷U.S. Census Bureau. *2006-2008 American Community Survey*. "S1401. School Enrollment: Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metropolitan Statistical Area." Retrieved May 2, 2010. (http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_S1401&-ds_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_&-state=st&-lang=en)

Further, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is the third largest Catholic Archdiocese in the nation following the Archdioceses of New York and Chicago respectively (National Catholic Education Association 2010). Therefore, it is likely that Philadelphia and its surrounding suburban counties have a larger number of Catholic schools available to families engaged in school choice processes.

These features of the geographic location of the PMP survey limit one's ability to generalize the significant effect of the private, Catholic school variable to areas of the nation with fewer students enrolled in private school in general as well as areas of the nation with fewer Catholic schools. However, while this effect may be stronger in areas with larger proportions of Catholic schools like Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago, it is possible that it may be true of Catholic school attendees in other areas. Further research should explore the effect attendance at private, Catholic schools has upon the likelihood families' from areas of the U.S. with fewer Catholic schools will select "The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as the most important factor for school choice decisions.

The analyses in this chapter reveal significant variation along racial and socioeconomic lines in the beginning stages of families' school choice searches. Families from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds vary in the number of school options they consider seriously as they search for their children's school as well as in what they believe is most important for their school choice decisions. A common thread amongst all of the findings is the support they lend to the culture of family logic perspective of school choice over explanations of school choice based upon theories of rational choice. This

does not mean families' school choice behaviors are "irrational"; certainly some families employ elements of rational choice theory as they engage in the school choice process.

However, it appears that when applied to school choice-making, some aspects of rational choice theory seem misguided given my data at this point. In particular, my findings question the assumptions that the school search process is uniform for families of diverse sociodemographic backgrounds as well as this theory's position that all families will consider the same school features as most important for their school choice decisions. Therefore, some assumptions of rational choice theories of the school choice process do not hold up to an examination of how this process operates in reality for families engaged in such decision-making. I will discuss the implications of these findings for the appropriateness of rational choice theory as an explanation of families' school choice processes in more depth in the conclusion of my study.

Further, the significant effect of the progressive versus traditional index measure of families' orientations toward school quality in Model 4 reveals a connection between families' perceptions of school quality and the school choices they make for their children. Such a connection fills a lacuna within existing literature examining school quality and school choice as both bodies of literature tend to consider quality and choice as separate concepts. Families' beliefs about what constitutes school quality are important as they determine which criteria they will use to evaluate schools during their search process. More exploration of the relationship between families' perceptions of school quality and their school choices is a necessary next step toward a more complete understanding of how issues of quality and school choice decisions operate at the family level.

In my final analytical chapter, I investigate this relationship further with multivariate analyses examining families' ultimate school choice decisions. These analyses include variables representing family perceptions of school quality as well as factors families believe are most important for their school choice decisions. Analyses in this chapter include these variables in addition to my sociodemographic variables in an attempt to further unpack the connection between families' perceptions of school quality and their school choice decisions.

CHAPTER 5
FACTORS INFLUENCING FAMILIES' ULTIMATE SCHOOL CHOICE
DECISIONS

Introduction

Thus far, this study has explored what families believe constitutes school quality, whether those beliefs affect the process of searching for a school, and specific factors that exert influence on families as they navigate their way through school choice decision-making. A third and final step in determining whether families' perceptions of school quality have an effect on the actual school choice decisions they make for their children involves an examination of their ultimate school choices. In other words, what types of schools do families ultimately select for their children's education? In answering this question, I focus upon two important aspects of families' school choices. First, does variation exist in the types of schools families from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds choose for their children? In particular, I focus upon variation along the lines of race and class in families' choices. Second, what factors, if any, serve to influence their final selection of a specific type of school?

The analyses in this chapter examine the probability that families in my sample select a specific type of school for their children. The dependent variables in the analyses are seven separate school choices; in other words, each dependent variable in my analyses represents a specific type of school choice families make for their children. The first dependent variable differs somewhat from the remaining six variables in that it represents families' choice of none of the school options included in the Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Metropolitan Survey (PMP). All of the other dependent variables

represent families' choice of a specific type of school: neighborhood public school, private school, magnet school, charter school, non-neighborhood public school, and home schooling. The types of schools families choose for their children serve as the final and necessary data one needs to determine whether a relationship exists between families' perceptions of school quality and the actual school choices they make.

Data and Methods

Once again, data in these analyses come from the Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Metropolitan Survey (PMP). Data from the PMP are restricted to households in the Philadelphia metropolitan area with at least one school-aged child (N = 589). However, analyses in this chapter differ from those of previous chapters because of the unit of analysis. The mean number of children in my sample of 589 families is 1.82 children; therefore, a number of the families include more than one child. For families with more than one child, it was not uncommon for family respondents to report they were currently using more than one school choice option for their children's education. To achieve the most accurate measure of school choice, it is necessary to include each reported school choice these 589 families currently use. Therefore, unlike previous dependent measures, my unit of analysis for measuring school choice is not families but school choices reported by each family. Thus, my total number of school choices for my sample of 589 families is N = 655 choices.²⁸

²⁸Some families with only one school-aged child within their household reported they currently use more than one type of school choice. The majority of these cases involved reports of using two public school options such as public school and magnet school or public school and charter school. In such cases, I coded the families' school choice as the more specific public school choice (i.e., either magnet school or charter school). However, some families with only one child reported currently using two school choices that could not be coded accurately (i.e., public school and private school). I excluded these "mismatch" cases from my overall sample of N = 655 school choices used in the analyses in this chapter.

As a result of this change my unit of analyses from my sample total of 589 families to the total number of school choices these families made in order to include all of the school choices families with more than one child currently use, I had to ensure that within my analyses the total number of choices within each model represented statistically independent observations. To do this, I performed the following two steps. For the bivariate analyses, I placed a frequency weight on the identifying case number for all of the families in my sample. For the multivariate analyses, I clustered the identifying case number for families in my sample to ensure that my analyses produced the correct the standard error within those families with more than one child who reported currently using more than one school choice option. Any variation in sample size within the multivariate models in this chapter results from missing cases in the specific dependent variable used in those models.

Dependent Variables

I examine seven dichotomous measures of specific school choices families with school aged children made for the education of their child or children. I describe the dependent variables below along with their respective response options:

1. None of the school choice options: $0 = \textit{Family chose a school choice option}$ and $1 = \textit{Family chose none of the school choice options}$
2. Neighborhood public school: $0 = \textit{Family did not choose a neighborhood public school}$ and $1 = \textit{Family chose a neighborhood public school}$
3. Private school: $0 = \textit{Family did not choose a private school}$ and $1 = \textit{Family chose a private school}$

4. Magnet school: $0 = \text{Family did not choose a magnet school}$ and $1 = \text{Family chose a magnet school}$
5. Charter school: $0 = \text{Family did not choose a charter school}$ and $1 = \text{Family chose a charter school}$
6. Non-neighborhood public school: $0 = \text{Family did not choose a non-neighborhood public school}$ and $1 = \text{Family chose a non-neighborhood public school}$
7. Home schooling: $0 = \text{Family did not choose home schooling}$ and $1 = \text{Family chose home schooling}$

Independent Variables

The same independent variables from Chapters 3 and 4 are used in all analyses for Chapter 5. (Please see Chapters 3 and 4 for information on the independent variables)

Control Variables

I include all of the control variables used in Chapter 4's analyses in the analyses for this chapter as well. (Please see Chapter 4 for information on the control variables). However, I added five additional control variables to the multivariate analyses I describe later in this chapter. Two of these control variables served as dependent variables in the Chapter 4's regression models; however, I now include these variables as control variables in the multivariate analyses exploring the ultimate school choices families made. The remaining three control variables represent additional factors that may influence families' school choices.

Number of School Choice Options Considered

This is a continuous measure of the number of schooling options families with school aged children considered for the education of their children.²⁹ The response categories for the number of school choice options families considered are:

6. Did not consider any of the school choice options
7. Considered one school choice option
8. Considered two school choice options
9. Considered three school choice options
10. Considered four school choice options
11. Considered five school choice options

*Factors Influencing School Choice*³⁰

In chapter 4, I further explored families' search behavior during the process of school choice by examining a series of factors that may influence a family's school choice. After responding to a series of "Yes" or "No" questions involving factors families seriously considered when deciding which schools their child/children should attend, families answered a follow up question asking, "Of the qualities [factors] we just spoke about, which would you consider to be the most important in the decision about which school your child/children should attend?" Using this question, I selected the four most frequently reported factors that family respondents indicated as most important for their school choice decision: the school supports moral and ethical values I want children to

²⁹Please see Chapter 4 pp. 14-15 for a more detailed description of how I constructed this variable.

³⁰Initially, I ran Chapter 5's multivariate models using "the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as the sole control variable for *Factors Influencing School Choice*. I did this because families in my sample reported this factor most frequently (N = 193; 32.8 percent) when asked about the most important factor for school choice. However, these models consistently resulted in both lower X² and Nagelkerke R² values compared to models including all four *Factors Influencing School Choice*. Therefore, I present multivariate models including all four of these factors as control variables.

learn, the school is conveniently located, my child/children would fit in at this school, and the children in this school are from families like mine.

The school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected “the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for school choice. The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select factor as most important for school choice}$ and $1 = \textit{Family did select factor as most important for school choice}$.

The school is conveniently located

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected “the school is conveniently located” as the most important factor for school choice. The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select factor as most important for school choice}$ and $1 = \textit{Family did select factor as most important for school choice}$.

My children will fit in at the school

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected “my children will fit in at the school” as the most important factor for school choice. The response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select factor as most important for school choice}$ and $1 = \textit{Family did select factor as most important for school choice}$.

Children in the school are from families like mine

This is a dichotomous measure of whether families selected “children in the school are from families like mine” as the most important factor for school choice. The

response options for this variable are $0 = \textit{Family did not select factor as most important for school choice}$ and $1 = \textit{Family did select factor as most important for school choice}$.

Research Strategy

Bivariate Analyses

To determine if variation along racial and class lines exists in the dependent variables used in this chapter's multivariate analyses, I cross tabulated each of the seven dependent variables used in this chapter by each independent variable of race, income, and level of education.³¹ In other words, I ran three separate cross tabulations for the following dependent variables: none of the school choice options, neighborhood public school, private school, magnet school, charter school, non-neighborhood public school, and home schooling. All 21 of my cross tabulations were significant at the $p < .001$ level; in the interest of time, I present below findings only for the nine cross tabulations demonstrating the strongest relationship between the two variables in the analysis as measured by the measure of association, ϕ (phi). Please see Appendix D for the remaining bivariate analyses that exhibited significant relationships between the variables involved, but had weaker ϕ (phi) values than the analyses I present within this chapter.

Multivariate Analyses

This research explores race and class variation in the types of schools families chose for their children's education. All of the multivariate models in this chapter (Models 1 through 14) employ logistic regression techniques to predict whether families

³¹Bivariate analyses in Chapter 4 employed a measure of annual household income with two categories: "Low Income" (\$5,000 to \$45,000) and "High Income" (\$55,000 to \$120,000). I did this in Chapter 4 because using more than two categories resulted in empty cells within the cross tabulations involving income. Since my unit of analysis in Chapter 5 is total number of choices that families in my sample made, the larger overall sample size ($N = 655$ school choices) allows me to use a measure of income with 3 categories in this chapter's bivariate analyses. The three income categories are: "Low Income" (\$5,000 to \$35,000), "Middle Income" (\$45,000 to \$75,000), and "High Income" (\$85,000 to \$120,000.) Using this income measure did not produce any cross tabulations with empty cells.

select the specific school type represented by each of the seven dependent variables described previously. For each dependent variable, the first model (odd numbered models) includes the independent variables of race, income, and level of education as well as dummy variables representing the missing cases in these three independent variables. To the second model for each dependent variable (even numbered models), I add the following control variables: original control variables from Chapter 3, controls added to the regression models from Chapter 4, and the five new control variables unique to the analyses in this chapter.

Results

*Bivariate Analyses*³²

	Race		Total	
	White Families	Families of Color		
Non-Neighborhood Public School Attendance	Family chose a school choice options for their children	97.5%	97.9%	97.6%
	Family chose none of the school choice options for their children	2.4%	2.1%	2.4%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 73.0$; $\phi = 0.119$, $p < .001$.

³²As a result of the frequency weights added to these bivariate analyses, I did not report sample size on the tables representing these analyses. The effect of the frequency weights increased my sample size to very large numbers; therefore, I did not report the very large sample sizes in these tables to avoid any confusion about the actual sample size used in this chapter, $N = 655$ school choices made by the 589 families in my overall sample.

Table 5.1 represents a significant relationship between families who reported they chose none of the school choice options presented in the PMP survey and families' racial background. Among families who did not chose none of the school choice options for their children, the percentage of white families and families of color making such a choice are very similar. For white families, 2.4 percent did not choose a school choice option listed in the PMP survey while for families of color this statistic is 2.1 percent.

Table 5.2 represents a significant relationship between families who chose neighborhood public schools for their children and the racial background of those families. Among those families who chose neighborhood public school, white families (79.9 percent) made this choice more than families of color (63.8 percent). This is a difference of 16.1 percentage points between white families choosing to send their children to neighborhood public school and families of color.

Table 5.2 Current Neighborhood Public School Attendance by Race				
Neighborhood Public School Attendance	Race			Total
		White Families	Families of Color	
	Family did NOT choose neighborhood public school for their children	20.1%	36.2%	24.0%
	Family chose neighborhood public school for their children	79.9%	63.8%	76.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$$\chi^2 = 18.0 \phi = 0.128, p < .001.$$

Table 5.3 demonstrates a significant relationship between families choosing private school for their children's education and families' annual household income. Among families who chose private school, only 8.6 percent have annual household incomes between \$5,000 and \$35,000. As annual household incomes increase, the percentage of families choosing to send their children to private schools also increases. 16.9 percent of families with an income between \$45,000 and \$75,000 chose private school for their children and 25.7 percent of families with incomes over \$75,000 make this particular school choice. Combining the latter two groups together, 42.6 percent of families with an annual household income greater than or equal to \$45,000 chose private schools for their families. This is 34.0 percentage points higher than families with "low" annual household incomes ranging between \$5,000 and \$35,000.

Table 5.3 Current Private School Attendance by Income					
Private School Attendance	Income				Total
		Low Income¹	Middle Income²	High Income³	
	Family did NOT choose private school for their children	91.4%	83.1%	71.3%	82.6%
	Family chose private school for their children	8.6%	16.9%	25.7%	17.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 21.0$; $\phi = 0.168$, $p < .001$.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000 over the past 12 months

²Middle income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$45,000 to \$75,000 over the past 12 months

³High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$85,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

Table 5.4 illustrates another significant relationship between families who choose private school and the level of education within the family. Among families choosing to send their children to private school, there is a 9.6 percentage point difference in the level of education within the family. For families choosing private school for their children, 14.1 percent have a less than a Bachelor's Degree compared to 23.7 percent who possess more than a Bachelor's Degree.

Table 5.4 Current Private School Attendance by Level of Education				
Private School Attendance	Level of Education			Total
	Less than B.A.		More than B.A.	
	Family did NOT choose private school for their children	85.9%	76.3%	82.4%
	Family chose private school for their children	14.1%	23.7%	17.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 10.0$; $\phi = 0.110$, $p < .001$.

The choice of a magnet school reveals two significant relationships: a relationship with the racial background of families making this choice as well as a relationship with the level of education of families choosing magnet schools for their children's education. Please see Tables 5.5 and 5.6. Among a total of 29 families choosing magnet school, 9.4 percent are families of color compared to 3.2 percent of white families. With regard to level of education, families selecting magnet schools tend to be less educated with 7.5 percent having less than a Bachelor's Degree compared to 2.6 percent of magnet school choosers who have more than a Bachelor's Degree.

Table 5.5 Current Magnet School Attendance by Race				
Magnet School Attendance	Race			Total
		White Families	Families of Color	
	Family did NOT choose magnet school for their children	96.9%	90.6%	95.4%
	Family chose magnet school for their children	3.2%	9.4%	4.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 11.0$; $\phi = 0.120$, $p < .001$.

Table 5.6 Current Magnet School Attendance by Level of Education				
Magnet School Attendance	Level of Education			Total
		Less than B.A.	More than B.A.	
	Family did NOT choose magnet school for their children	92.5%	97.4%	94.3%
	Family chose magnet school for their children	7.5%	2.6%	5.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 53.0$; $\phi = 0.102$, $p < .001$.

Similarly, the choice of a charter school also demonstrates two significant relationships; however, for families choosing charter schools, this choice is related to the independent variables of a family's racial background and a family's annual household income. Table 5.7 demonstrates families of color (11.4 percent) choose charter schools

more often than their white counterparts (2.2 percent). This is a difference of 9.2 percentage points between white families and families of color.

	Race		Total	
	White Families	Families of Color		
Charter School Attendance	Family did NOT choose charter school for their children	97.8%	88.6%	98.7%
	Family chose charter school for their children	2.2%	11.4%	4.3%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 24.0$; $\phi = 0.184$, $p < .001$.

In terms of families' annual household income (See Table 5.8), the relationship between choosing a charter school and income is the reverse of the relationship found between choice of private school and income. However, the differences amongst the income categories are much smaller with charter schools. Among families choosing charter schools for their children's education, 4.9 percent have "low" annual household incomes (between \$5,000 and \$35,000), 5.8 percent have "middle" annual household incomes (between \$45,000 and \$75,000), while families in the highest income category (between \$85,000 and \$120,000) represent only 1.0 percent of families making the choice of charter school for their children. Adding the "low" and "middle" categories together, 10.7 percent of families who choose charter schools have incomes less than or equal to \$75,000. This is a 9.7 percentage point difference compared to families choosing charter schools with incomes located within the highest income category.

	Income			Total	
	Low Income ¹	Middle Income ²	High Income ³		
Charter School Attendance	Family did NOT choose charter school for their children	95.1%	94.2%	99.0%	96.0%
	Family chose charter school for their children	4.9%	5.8%	1.0%	4.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 72.0$; $\phi = 0.133$, $p < .001$.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000 over the past 12 months

²Middle income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$45,000 to \$75,000 over the past 12 months

³High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$85,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

	Race		Total	
	White Families	Families of Color		
Non-Neighborhood Public School Attendance	Family did NOT choose non-neighborhood public school for their children	96.4%	92.3%	95.2%
	Family chose non-neighborhood public school for their children	3.6%	7.7%	4.8%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 97.0$; $\phi = 0.087$, $p < .001$.

The final significant bivariate relationship exists between families' choice of a non-neighborhood public school and the racial background of families making this choice. Table 5.9 illustrates that amongst a total of 28 families who chose non-neighborhood public school for their children's education, a higher percentage of these families are families of color (7.7 percent.) Among families making this specific school choice, only 3.6 percent of them are white families.

Multivariate Analysis^{33,34}

Choosing None of the Schooling Options

Models 1 and 2 (see Table 5.10) employ logistic regression and examine the likelihood families did not select any of the schooling options presented within the Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Metropolitan Survey (PMP) as the final choice for their children's education. Sample size for these models is $N = 655$. Neither Model 1 nor Model 2 are statistically significant and, therefore, do not demonstrate any significant variables within the models. A possible explanation for this is the relatively small number of families within my sample ($N = 13$) who reported choosing none of the schooling options within the PMP survey as their ultimate school choice for their children's education.

³³For all multivariate analyses in this chapter, the unit of analysis within the dependent variables is now total number of choices ($N = 655$) reported by the 589 families in my sample. This is a change from the unit of analysis, number of families ($N = 589$), employed in all previous multivariate analyses.

³⁴All multivariate models were run in both SPSS and STATA data analyses programs. The coefficients reported in both the tables in this section as well as in the text come from the SPSS analyses. The STATA models were run in order to ensure statistical independence for my sample of $N = 655$ school choices; the coefficients from the STATA models varied only slightly from the SPSS coefficients. The significance levels reported in the tables come from the STATA models.

Table 5.10 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of None of the Schooling Options

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	-3.329***	30.657
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	-0.380	-0.085
<i>Income</i>		
	-0.007	0.003
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	0.023	0.045
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		-0.246
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		-18.351
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		-17.550
Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		-18.153
<i>Number of school choice options considered</i>		-0.359
<i>Factors Influencing School Choice</i>		
School supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn		1.195
School is conveniently located		-0.037
My children will fit in at the school		1.380
Children in the school are from families like mine		1.026
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		0.425
<i>Age</i>		0.079**
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		0.118
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		-0.287

Table 5.10 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of None of the Schooling Options (*continued*)

<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		-1.543
Rural		0.480
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		-1.283
Model χ^2	1.77 [†]	34.57 ^{†*}
<i>df</i>	6	30
Chi-Square Block/ <i>df</i>		34.57/30
Chi-Square Model/ <i>df</i>	1.77/6	34.57/30
-2 Log Likelihood	125.88	93.08
Nagelkerke R ²	0.02	0.29

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is $N = 655$. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

[†]Not significant ($p = 0.940$); ^{†*}Not significant ($p = 0.259$)
Choosing a Neighborhood Public School

Models 3 and 4 (see Table 5.11) also employ logistic regression and examine the likelihood a family chooses a neighborhood public school as the ultimate choice for their children's education. Sample size for these models is $N = 590$. Race is the only significant variable in Model 3, which includes only three independent variables of race, income, and level of education along with dummy variables representing missing cases in each of these variables. However, the effect of race in Model 3 reveals that families of color are 0.459 times as likely, or about half as likely, as white families to make the choice of a neighborhood public school for their children. With the addition of the control variables, the effect of race seen in Model 3 does not hold up in Model 4. Therefore, the effect of race in Model 3 discussed above is mediated by the control variables.

Table 5.11 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Neighborhood Public School

	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	1.591***	4.453***
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	-0.778***	-0.120
<i>Income</i>		
	-0.006	-0.006
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	0.049	0.005
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		-0.340***
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		0.020
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		-0.404
Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		-0.155
<i>Number of school choice options considered</i>		-0.286***
<i>Factors Influencing School Choice</i>		
School supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn		-0.794***
School is conveniently located		0.659
My children will fit in at the school		-0.311
Children in the school are from families like mine		-0.458
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		0.516*
<i>Age</i>		
		-0.028*
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		
		-0.132
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		0.110

Table 5.11 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Neighborhood Public School (*continued*)

<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		0.958***
Rural		1.261***
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		-0.459
Model χ^2	12.39**	104.93***
<i>df</i>	6	30
Chi-Square Block/ <i>df</i>		104.93/30
Chi-Square Model/ <i>df</i>	12.39/6	104.93/30
-2 Log Likelihood	677.24	584.71
Nagelkerke R^2	0.03	0.24

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is $N = 590$. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

While there is no longer a significant race effect in Model 4, a number of other variables are significant. The index measure of a families' progressive versus traditional orientation toward school quality is the first of these significant variables. As a family's score on the progressive versus traditional index increases by one point (i.e., a family has a more traditional orientation toward school quality), that family is 0.712 times as likely as a family with a lower index score (i.e., a more progressive orientation) to choose a neighborhood public school for their children's education. Families who are more traditional are less likely to choose neighborhood public schools. Analysis from Chapter 3 demonstrated families of color had an average progressive versus traditional index score of 2.0248 compared to an average score of 1.6048 for; therefore, families of color are significantly more traditional in their orientation toward school quality than whites. This explains why the race effect seen in this chapter's Model 3 disappears in Model 4.

The number of school choice options a family considers during their school choice search process also has a significant effect in Model 4. As the number of schooling options a family considers increases by one, the family is 0.751 times as likely as a family who considered fewer schooling options to decide a neighborhood public school is their choice for the education of their children. Chapter 4 demonstrated families of color consider more schooling options than white families, which helps explain why this race effect does not hold up in Model 4. Families who consider more options are possibly considering those options because they are less satisfied with neighborhood public schools in the first place.³⁵

Number of school choice options families consider as they search for schools served as a dependent variable in Chapter 4, and the other dependent variable from that chapter also has a significant effect in Model 4. Referred to as “Factor 1” in Chapter 4, this variable measures whether family respondents selected “the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for school choice. The effect of Factor 1 in Model 4 demonstrates that families who selected “the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for school choice are 0.452 times as likely as families who did not select Factor 1 as most important for school choice to chose a neighborhood public school for their children.

³⁵To determine if this were true if I removed families living in urban areas from my models, I re-ran all of my logistic regression models in two ways that included interaction terms involving suburban area of residence * each independent variable in the models. First, I included only families living in suburban areas, and then I ran models including only families living in urban areas. Comparisons of the suburban-dwellers only models with the city-dwellers only models demonstrated no significant differences based on area of residence. One reason for this could be my small sample size; a larger sample size may have produced significant differences between the two sets of models.

In addition to these significant effects, Model 4 demonstrates significant effects of gender, age, suburban area of residence, and rural area of residence on the probability of a family deciding to send their children to a neighborhood public school. The gender effect reveals that male family respondents are 1.675 times as likely as female family respondents to choose a neighborhood public school for their children. In terms of age, for every one year increase in the age of the family respondent, he/she is 0.972 times as likely to select a neighborhood public school as the location for their children's schooling.

Perhaps more important than the effects of gender and age, however, is the effect of area of residence in Model 4. Where a family lives has a significant effect on the likelihood a family will make a neighborhood public school choice to educate their children. Families living in a suburban area are 2.606 times as likely as families living in an urban area to choose neighborhood public schools for their children. An even stronger effect appears with regard to rural area of residence. Families living in rural areas are 3.530 times as likely as families living in urban areas to currently send their children to neighborhood public schools. A possible explanation for these findings regarding area of residence is that suburban and rural areas are more likely to have higher quality neighborhood public schools than those found in urban areas, and fewer non-neighborhood public schooling options – a higher level of quality may also mean families in these areas have higher levels of satisfaction with their neighborhood public schools and do not feel the need to look elsewhere for a quality education. Or, it could be that suburban and rural families choose neighborhood public schools because the vast majority of charter, magnet, and other non-neighborhood public school options tend to

exist within city limits, sometimes a rather long distance from suburban and rural areas. Since families of color are more likely to live in cities than are white families, this could explain why the significant effect of race on choosing a neighborhood public school disappears once area of residence is controlled.

Finally, Model 4 demonstrates a significant effect of five variables representing missing cases in the progressive versus traditional index measure of school quality as well as in gender, age, marital status, in suburban area of residence, and with regard to a families' housing tenure status. However, without further data on the missing cases within these five variables, I can only report the following. Family respondents who have a score on the progressive versus traditional index are significantly different from families without a score on this index. In terms of gender, family respondents who did not report their gender are significantly different from those who did report gender. Family respondents who reported their age are significantly different from those who did not report their age. Family respondents who reported their marital status are significantly different from those who did not. Family respondents reporting they currently live in suburban areas are significantly different from those who did not report where they currently live. Finally, families who reported whether they own or rent their home are significantly different from those who provided no information regarding their current status with regard to housing tenure. Again, without further data on these missing cases, I cannot speculate any further with regard to why these significant group differences exist.

Choosing Private School

Having explored analyses focusing on families who chose neighborhood public schools for their children, Models 5 and 6 focus upon families who select private schools

as their choice (or one of their choices) for their children's education. (See Table 5.12)

Models 5 and 6 are logistic regressions predicting the likelihood families will choose private schools as their ultimate choice. Sample size for these models is N = 585. Within Model 5, there are two significant variables: income, and the dummy variable representing missing cases within the income measure. In terms of income, a \$1,000 increase in a

Table 5.12 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Private School

	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	-2.480***	-4.595***
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	0.402	-0.149
<i>Income</i>		
	0.012***	0.013**
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	0.195	0.265
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		0.316***
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		-0.023
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		0.465
Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		0.042
<i>Number of school choice options considered</i>		0.125
<i>Factors Influencing School Choice</i>		
School supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn		1.156***
School is conveniently located		-0.714
My children will fit in at the school		0.738
Children in the school are from families like mine		0.581

Table 5.12 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Private School (*continued*)

<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		-0.317
<i>Age</i>		
		0.014
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		
		0.125
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		-0.072
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		-0.750*
Rural		-1.019**
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		0.086
Model χ^2	18.55**	89.95***
<i>df</i>	6	30
Chi-Square Block/ <i>df</i>		89.95/30
Chi-Square Model/ <i>df</i>	18.55/6	89.95/30
-2 Log Likelihood	566.92	495.52
Nagelkerke R ²	0.05	0.23

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is $N = 585$. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

a family's annual household income leads to about the same odds of a family choosing to send their children to private school. However, the significance of the income effect in Model 5 involves large discrepancies in families' annual household incomes. As discrepancies in income become greater (i.e. families making \$100,000 annual compared to families making \$10,000 annually), the difference in a family's likelihood of choosing private school increases by 0.012 percent.

The effect of the dummy variable representing missing cases in income reveals that families who did not report their income are 2.634 times as likely as families who did

report their income to choose private school for their children's education. However, without further information regarding the missing cases in my income measure ($N = 96$), I can only make this observation about the significant effect of missing cases in the independent measure of families' annual household incomes.

With the addition of control variables, Model 6 produces a greater number of significant variables in the logistic regression predicting the probability families choose private school for their children. First, the income effect from Model 5 holds up in Model 6. Again, a \$1,000 increase in annual household income leads to about the same odds a family will choose private school for their children's education. However, as discrepancies in families' incomes increase, the likelihood a family will make a private school choice for their children increases by 0.013 percent, a slight increase from the income effect found in Model 5.

The second significant effect in Model 6 involves the progressive versus traditional index measure of school quality. As a family's score on this index increases by one (i.e., the family has a more traditional orientation toward school quality), they are 1.371 times as likely as a family with a lower score on the progressive versus traditional index (i.e., a more progressive orientation toward school quality) to choose private schooling for their children's education. In terms of factors influencing school choice, Factor 1, "the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn," has a significant effect in Model 6. Families who reported Factor 1 as the most important factor for their school choice are 3.177 times as likely as families who did not select Factor 1 as most important for school choice to choose private schooling for their children.

Similar to Model 4, area of residence has a significant effect on the probability a family chooses private schools for their children's education. Both suburban area of residence and rural area of residence have a significant effect in Model 6. For suburban area of residence, families living in the suburbs are 0.472 times as likely as families living in urban areas to select private schools as their final choice for their children's education. Families living in rural areas are 0.361 times as likely as families living in urban areas to choose private schools as well. The dummy variable representing missing cases in the measure of suburban area of residence ($N = 9$) also has a significant effect within Model 6. Families who did not report they live in suburban areas are 52.132 as likely as families who reported living in suburban areas to choose private schools as the site of their children's education. However, without further data for these nine cases, I can only observe this statistically significant difference between families who did not report suburban area of residence and families who did report living in the suburbs.

Choosing Magnet Schools

Models 7 and 8 examine the probability families select magnet schools as their final school choice for their children's education. (See Table 5.13) Both Model 7 and Model 8 employ logistic regression, and the sample size for these models is $N = 567$. Model 7 demonstrates only one significant effect within the regression: families' racial background. Families of color are 2.570 times as likely as white families to choose magnet school as the site for their children's education. However, this race effect does not hold up in Model 8 with the addition of the control variables.

Model 8 demonstrates a greater number of variables with a significant effect on the likelihood a family will make a magnet school choice for their children. First, level of

education has a significant effect within this model revealing that family respondents with a bachelor's degree or more are 0.124 times as likely as family respondents with less than a bachelor's degree to choose magnet schools. In addition to level of education, the number of schooling options a family considers during their school choice search process also has a significant effect within Model 8. As the number of schooling options a family considers increases by one, the family is 2.522 times as likely as families who considered fewer schooling options to make magnet school their final school choice for their children's education.

Table 5.13 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Magnet School

	Model 7	Model 8
Constant	-2.897***	-8.768***
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	0.944*	0.281
<i>Income</i>		
	0.001	-0.003
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	-1.019	-2.088**
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		0.097
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		-0.056
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		0.572
Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		1.058
<i>Number of school choice options considered</i>		0.925***
<i>Factors Influencing School Choice</i>		
School supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn		-1.169*

Table 5.13 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Magnet School (continued)

School is conveniently located		-1.753
My children will fit in at the school		-2.348***
Children in the school are from families like mine		-0.100
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		-0.959
<i>Age</i>		0.058**
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		-0.249
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		0.036
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		-0.365
Rural		-1.764
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		1.987*
Model χ^2	16.18**	81.17***
<i>df</i>	6	30
Chi-Square Block/df		81.17/30
Chi-Square Model/df	16.18/6	81.17/30
-2 Log Likelihood	218.56	153.56
Nagelkerke R ²	0.08	0.40

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is $N = 567$. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

When it comes to factors influencing families' school choices, two factors, Factor 1, "the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn" and Factor 8, "my children will fit in at the school" have significant effects on the probability a family will choose a magnet school. Families who reported that Factor 1 was the most important factor for their school choice decisions are 0.311 times as likely as families who did not

report Factor 1 as most important for school choice to choose a magnet school education for their children. Families who reported that Factor 8 was the most important factor for their school choice decisions are 0.096 times as likely as families who did not report this factor as most important for school choice decisions to choose a magnet school for their children.

Finally, both age and a families' housing tenure status both have significant effects in Model 8. In terms of age, for every one year increase in the age of a family respondent, he/she is 1.060 times as likely as a younger family respondent to choose a magnet school for their children's education. The housing tenure effect illustrates that families who own their home are 7.294 times as likely as families who rent their home to make a magnet school choice.

While people of color are overall more likely to choose magnet schools, this can be explained in part by some of the control variables. People of color are less likely to have bachelor's degrees than whites and those without bachelor's degrees are more likely to choose magnet schools. Families of color are also more likely to consider more school options for their children, perhaps because they are unsatisfied with their neighborhood schools and families who consider more options are ultimately more likely to choose magnet schools than those who consider fewer options.

Similar to Model 4, there are a number of variables representing missing cases within specific variables that have a significant effect on whether a family will choose a magnet school for their children's education. In Model 8, the significant variables representing missing cases involve families' racial background, families' annual household income, families' level of education, and missing cases in the factors most

important for school choice decisions, gender, and marital status. Without additional data on these missing cases, I can only observe that family respondents who reported information for these six variables are significantly different from family respondents who did not report information for these variables. I am unable to provide further explanation for why these differences exist.

Choosing Charter Schools

Models 9 and 10 (See Table 5.14) estimate the probability that a family will select a charter school as their ultimate school choice. Both models employ logistic regression, and the sample size for these models is $N = 558$.

Table 5.14 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Charter School

	Model 9	Model 10
Constant	-2.872***	-2.602*
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	1.284**	0.122
<i>Income</i>		
	-0.011	-0.010
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	0.141	0.52
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		0.046
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		-0.873
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		-0.608
Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		-0.583
<i>Number of school choice options considered</i>		0.734***

Table 5.14 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Charter School (*continued*)

<i>Factors Influencing School Choice</i>		
School supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn		0.289
School is conveniently located		-0.945
My children will fit in at the school		-0.370
Children in the school are from families like mine		0.317
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		0.201
<i>Age</i>		
		0.007
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		
		-0.020
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		0.202
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		-1.912***
Rural		-18.675
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		0.274
Model χ^2	20.43**	81.37***
<i>df</i>	6	30
Chi-Square Block/ <i>df</i>		81.37/30
Chi-Square Model/ <i>df</i>	20.43/6	81.37/30
-2 Log Likelihood	207.55	146.61
Nagelkerke R ²	0.11	0.41

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is $N = 558$. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

Model 9 is similar to both Models 3 (predicting the probability a family will choose a neighborhood public school) and Model 7 (predicting the probability a family will choose a magnet school) in that Model 9 demonstrates a significant effect of race

that does not hold up once the control variables are added to the model. In Model 9, the race effect reveals that families of color are 3.613 times as likely as white families to choose charter schools for their children's education. However, just as in Models 3 and 7 the race effect is mediated by other variables as it does not hold up in Model 10 with the addition of control variables.

Model 10 includes three significant effects on the likelihood a family makes a charter school choice: the number of school choice options they consider during their search for a school and whether a family resides in a suburban area. As the number of schooling options a family considers increases by one, the family is 2.084 times as likely as a family who considered fewer schooling options to choose a charter school for their children's education. The effect of suburban area of residence illustrates that families living in suburban areas are 0.148 times as likely as families residing in urban areas to make a charter school choice for their children. Again, it appears that families of color consider more options and are more likely to live in cities, and these factors partially explain their choice of charter schools for their children.

In Model 10, four variables representing missing cases in families' racial background, families' level of education, the age of the family respondent, and whether a family resides in a suburban area have significant effects on the probability a family will choose a charter school for their children's education. Without additional data on these missing cases, the only conclusion I am able to make is that family respondents who provided information about their race, level of education, his/her age, and residence in a suburban area are significantly different from family respondents who did not report this

information. I am unable to provide more detailed explanations for why such differences exist between family respondents reporting this information and those who did not.

Choosing a Non-Neighborhood Public School

Models 11 and 12 (See Table 5.15) are logistic regressions predicting the likelihood a family will choose a non-neighborhood public school for their children. The sample size for these models is $N = 655$. Model 11, including only the three independent variables of race, income, and level of education as well as dummy variables representing missing cases in these three variables, is not a significant model. However, with the addition of control variables to this model, Model 12 is a significant model and demonstrates four variables with a significant effect on the probability a family will make a non-neighborhood public school choice for their children's education.

Table 5.15 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Non-Neighborhood Public School

	Model 11	Model 12
Constant	-2.991**	-8.069***
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	0.636	-0.208
<i>Income</i>		
	-0.003	-0.001
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	-0.347	-0.254
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		0.075
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		-0.827*
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		0.757

Table 5.15 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Non-Neighborhood Public School (*continued*)

Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		5.760*
<i>Number of school choice options considered</i>		1.162***
<i>Factors Influencing School Choice</i>		
School supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn		0.442
School is conveniently located		0.590
My children will fit in at the school		0.672
Children in the school are from families like mine		0.310
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		0.158
<i>Age</i>		-0.017
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		
		0.171
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		-1.229*
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		0.622
Rural		0.176
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		0.360
Model χ^2	8.49 [†]	76.96***
<i>df</i>	6	30
Chi-Square Block/ <i>df</i>		76.96/30
Chi-Square Model/ <i>df</i>	8.49/6	76.96/30
-2 Log Likelihood	229.01	160.54
Nagelkerke R ²	0.04	0.37

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is $N = 655$. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

[†]Not significant ($p = 0.204$)

The two significant effects in Model 12 involve two aspects of schools families reported as most indicative of school quality: the proportion of students in a school who will eventually go on to a four year college and a school with up-to-date resources like textbooks and computers. The effect of the quality indicator involving students' eventual attendance to a four year college demonstrates that families who reported this indicator as most significant in terms of school quality are 0.437 times as likely as families who did not select this school feature as most indicative of school quality to choose a non-neighborhood public school for their children. With regard to the quality indicator involving school resources, families who reported up-to-date resources are most indicative of school quality are 5.760 times as likely as families who did not select this indicator to make the choice of a non-neighborhood public school for their children's education. The number of schooling options a family considered during their search for their children's school also has a significant effect within Model 12. As the number of schooling options a family considers increases by one, the family is 3.197 times as likely as a family who considered fewer options to select a non-neighborhood public school as their final school choice. Finally, the last significant effect within Model 12 involves a family's marital status. Married households are 0.293 times as likely as non-married households to choose non-neighborhood public schooling for their children.

Model 12 demonstrates significant effects of two variables representing missing cases in families' racial background and the gender of the family respondent. Similar to my analyses of significant variables representing missing cases in previous models, I can only observe that family respondents who reported their families' racial background and his/her gender are significantly different from those who did not provide this information.

Further, I am unable to explain further why these significant differences exist without additional data on these missing cases.

Choosing Home Schooling

Models 13 and 14 (See Table 5.16) employ logistic regression to estimate the probability a family will choose home schooling as their final school choice. Sample size for these models is $N = 655$; however, neither Model 13 nor Model 14 are statistically significant and, therefore, do not demonstrate any significant variables within the models. A possible explanation for this is the relatively small number of families within my sample ($N = 6$) who reported choosing to home school their children as their ultimate school choice.

Table 5.16 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Home Schooling

	Model 13	Model 14
Constant	-3.641***	-41.722
<i>Race (white excluded)</i>		
People of Color	-1.062	-0.702
<i>Income</i>		
	-0.012	-0.025
<i>Education (less than a B.A. excluded)</i>		
More than a B.A.	0.143	0.214
<i>School Quality Measures</i>		
Progressive vs. Traditional index		0.402
4 year college as most important indicator of quality		0.067
Small class size as most important indicator of quality		0.358
Up-to-date resources as most important indicator of quality		16.578
<i>Number of school choice options considered</i>		0.006

Table 5.16 Estimated Coefficients of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Families' Choice of Home Schooling (continued)

<i>Factors Influencing School Choice</i>		
School supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn		-0.092
School is conveniently located		0.971
My children will fit in at the school		-15.958
Children in the school are from families like mine		-14.913
<i>Gender (female excluded)</i>		
Male		-17.548
<i>Age</i>		
		0.044
<i>Number of school aged children in household</i>		
		0.675
<i>Marital status (not married excluded)</i>		
Married		1.532
<i>Area of residence (urban residence excluded)</i>		
Suburban		-0.724
Rural		1.943
<i>Housing tenure (renters excluded)</i>		
Own home		16.288
Model χ^2	1.86 [†]	32.16 ^{†*}
<i>df</i>	6	30
Chi-Square Block/ <i>df</i>		32.16/30
Chi-Square Model/ <i>df</i>	1.86/6	32.16/30
-2 Log Likelihood	76.61	45.31
Nagelkerke R ²	0.03	0.43

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Sample size is $N = 655$. The models also include dummy variables denoting missing cases for all independent variables.

[†]Not significant ($p = 0.932$); ^{†*}Not significant ($p = 0.360$)

Discussion

The point at which families choose a specific school for their children's education represents the final step in a process of decision-making. When a family makes its school choice, it is clear a number of factors influence the different choices families make. These factors may include families' perceptions of school quality, the number of schooling options they consider as they search for their children's school, and the factors families believe are most important when making a school choice decision. The analyses from this chapter suggest a need to focus upon three important aspects of the final school choices families make. First, I consider the existence of significant variation along racial and class lines in families' final school choices. I then highlight the relevance of two influences my analyses demonstrate have significant effects upon families' school choices. First, I focus upon the number of schooling options families considered prior to the selection of their final school choice; I made this decision because the number of schooling options considered has a significant effect in a total of four of my logistic regression models, by far the most consistent significant findings in my analyses. Finally, I turn to the existence of a relationship between families' perceptions of school quality and the actual school choices families make, a relationship supported by analysis within this chapter.

Findings from this chapter reveal significant variation along racial and class lines when it comes to the actual school choice families from diverse backgrounds make for their children's education. Variation along racial lines exists in the choices of neighborhood public schools, magnet school, charter schools, and non-neighborhood public schools. White families made a neighborhood public school choice more than

families of color, a finding that may result from the level of quality found in the neighborhood public schools available to both groups and the accessibility of other non-neighborhood public schooling options. For white families, the quality of their neighborhood public school is likely to be high, especially if these families live in suburban areas; therefore, when choosing a school for their children, these families may not feel they need to look much further than the public school located within their neighborhood.

Families of color, on the other hand, may reside in areas served by neighborhood public schools of lesser quality leading them to seek out alternative schooling options for their children. Options for non-neighborhood schooling, like charter, magnet, and transfer programs are more likely to be found in cities, and families of color are more likely to reside in cities than are white families. This explanation seems supported by findings regarding the racial background of families who make magnet, charter, and non-neighborhood public school choices for their children. Families of color choose magnet, charter, and non-neighborhood public schools more than white families do, suggesting these three schooling options serve as the alternatives to which families of color turn when dissatisfied with the public schools located within their neighborhoods.

Variation along class lines exists in the choice of private schools, magnet schools, and charter schools. Families who choose private school for their children tend to have higher incomes (i.e., annual household incomes greater than or equal to \$45,000) and also have higher levels of education (i.e., more than a bachelor's degree). For families making a magnet school choice for their children, their level of education tends to be less than a bachelor's degree, a finding that may be explained by the fact that families of color are

more likely to make magnet school choices and the level of education in these families may be lower than that found in the average white family. Class variation in selection of charter schools operates in the opposite direction than that found in selection of private schools. Families who choose charter schools have lower annual household incomes (i.e., less than or equal to \$75,000), a rather straightforward findings since charter schools do not charge tuition for attendance while private schools do. Perhaps families who desire a private school education for their child, but do not have the financial means to send their child there, turn to charter schools as an affordable alternative for the type of education they desire for their children.

The existence of this variation along racial and class lines in families' final school choices suggests the end result of the school choice process is often quite different for families from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds. However, findings from Chapter 4 regarding the number of schooling options families consider during their search for their children's school foreshadowed the existence of such variation since this variation existed in the number of schooling options families considered during their search for their children's school.

In terms of variation by race, a little less than one-half of white families considered only one school option during their search. Since white families choose to send their children to the neighborhood public school more often than do families of color, one could argue that the one option white families consider is that of their neighborhood public school. On the other hand, only 20.8 percent of families of color consider only one option as they search for their children's school. Further, while almost

two-thirds (64.5 percent) of families of color consider two or more schooling options only 54.5 percent of their white counterparts consider this many schooling options.

As mentioned previously, the number of schooling options families considered prior to making their final school choice is the most consistent significant effect in the logistic regression analyses in this chapter.³⁶ In addition to variation along racial lines, significant variation also exists in the number of schooling options considered during the school searches of families with diverse financial resources. Families with annual household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$45,000 consider more schooling options than families with annual incomes between \$55,000 and \$120,000. 58.7 percent of families with lower incomes consider zero to two schooling options during their search compared to 70.2 percent of families with higher incomes. Further, a much larger percentage of families with low incomes (41.2 percent) consider three or more schooling options compared to 29.1 percent of high income families who consider three or more schooling options during their school choice search.

The results from these analyses reveal that families with lower annual household incomes and families of color consider *more* schooling options than their wealthier, white counterparts. An important aspect of these findings is they contradict existing research offering explanations for the existence of variation by race and class in the number of schooling options families consider (Ball 2003; Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield 1996; Lareau 1989; Reay and Ball 1998; Schneider, Teske, Roch, & Marschall 1997). For example, Schneider et al. (1997) propose one explanation for this variation is varying levels in the

³⁶The number of schooling options families considered had a significant effect within Model 4, predicting whether families will choose neighborhood public schools; Model 7, predicting whether families will choose magnet schools; Model 9, predicting whether families will choose charter schools; and Model 12, predicting whether families will choose non-neighborhood public schools for their children's education.

access diverse families have to information about schools and available schooling options. They argue higher income families are more likely to gather information about schools from networks of friends and co-workers while lower income families are more likely to gather their information from relatives, a social network smaller than that of higher income parents and, therefore, more likely to result in less information about schools for lower income families (Schnieder et al. 1997).

An alternative explanation, supporting my findings that families with lower incomes consider *more* schooling options than higher income families and families of color consider *more* options than white families, involves the diverse social contexts in which families from diverse racial backgrounds and with different economic resources live. White families and families with higher incomes are more likely to live in neighborhoods that provide high quality schools in their neighborhood. Therefore, they feel less of a need to search a greater number of schooling options. Because their neighborhood schools are of high quality, these schools may be the “obvious” choice for these families, precluding them from expanding their search for their children’s school. It could be, in fact, that white families and families with more resources choose their residences in large part based on their perceptions of the quality of the neighborhood public school. White families and families with more resources may “choose” among neighborhood public schools by choosing where to live. This type of choice may not be available to those with fewer resources that enable a family to buy a home easily, like wealth or financial assistance from family members. Further, higher income families have the resources to pay for private school tuitions and to arrange for their children to get to and from private schools.

Families of color and families with lower incomes face a different situation: their neighborhood schools may be of low quality, removing them as an “obvious” choice for their children’s education. They may not have the ability to choose higher quality neighborhood public schools by changing residences. Further, for these families, private school tuition costs are prohibitive and their ability to transport their children to schools far from home is more limited compared to families with greater financial resources. Therefore, these families expand their school search and consider a greater array of options to find the “right” school choice for their children.

Finally, families’ perceptions of school quality has a significant effect within both Model 4, predicting whether a family will choose a neighborhood public school and Model 6, predicting whether a family will choose private school education for their children. It is important to note that the significant effect of the progressive versus traditional index measure of school quality within these two models involves the two most frequently chosen school choices within my sample: neighborhood public school (N = 430) and private school (N = 117). The remaining school options involved significantly fewer school choices by the families within my sample. However, a larger overall sample size would have the potential to increase the number of families making the remaining school choices which, in turn, may increase the possibility that families’ perceptions of school quality would be significant within these models as well.

The analyses in this chapter suggest two explanations for the significant effect of families’ traditional or progressive orientations on their choices of neighborhood public and private schools. First, more traditional families are less inclined to choose neighborhood public schools leading them to search for alternative schooling options.

The alternative option they find and end up choosing is often a private school education for their children. Another explanation could be that families who believe it is important to have their moral and ethical values represented in the school they choose for their children, are more likely to choose private schools, even when all other control variables are held constant.

The significant effect that families' perceptions of school quality has in Models 4 and 6, measured by the progressive versus traditional index of school quality, demonstrates the existence of a relationship between families' perceptions of what a good school is and the ultimate school choices they make at the end of their school choice decision-making process. Further, it is important to note that determining the existence of this relationship results from a deliberately designed examination of school quality and school choice. First, this examination must take place at the family level both with regard to determining what families believe constitutes a quality education as well as in terms of the ultimate school choices families make. Second, it is important that during this examination, one recognizes that issues of school quality and school choice are, at first, conceptually distinct issues in need of exploration on their own. Once one has explored issues of quality and issues of school choice at the family level separately, it is then possible to see how these two issues work together.

Studying school quality and school choice in this manner allows one to see that while both are important concepts on their own, one can learn additional information about the school choice process can by examining school quality and school choice together. This was an important goal of this study. The significant effect of families' perceptions of school quality in models predicting families' choices of neighborhood

public and private schools illustrates that within the process of school choice decision-making, it is vital for any researcher to recognize how families' beliefs about school quality influence the ultimate school choices they make for their children.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The primary goals of this dissertation were three-fold. First, I wanted to determine whether a relationship exists between families' perceptions of school quality and their actual school choice decisions. Second, if such a relationship exists, what effect do families' perceptions of school quality have on their ultimate school choice decisions? Finally, I wanted to determine if the effect of families' perceptions of school quality on their school choice decisions varied significantly along racial and class lines. The findings from my analyses in the preceding chapters demonstrate these goals have been realized. A relationship exists between families' perceptions of quality and their school choices, these perceptions have effects upon their ultimate school choice decisions, and significant variation along racial and class lines existed throughout my analyses that helped me achieve the first two goals of my study.

Before I could determine if there was a relationship between families' perceptions of school quality and their ultimate school choice decisions, I first had to determine what these perceptions were. In Chapter 3, my analyses focused upon whether families had a more traditional or more progressive orientation toward school quality as well as upon three specific school features that families could have reported as most indicative of school quality. In addition to determining what families' perceptions of school quality are, these analyses demonstrated significant variation along racial and class lines in terms of the perceptions families of diverse backgrounds hold when it comes to assessing school quality. In addition, the existence of variation along racial and class lines found in

Chapter 3's analyses also existed in the analyses in subsequent chapters that further explored the process of families' school choice decision-making.

The analyses designed to determine whether families hold a traditional or progressive orientation toward school quality demonstrated significant variation by race and class. In terms of race, families of color tended to have a more traditional orientation towards school quality than white families. Significant variation also existed in terms of families' annual household incomes and their effect on a traditional or progressive orientation toward school quality

The key to understanding this effect of income on families' perceptions of school quality lies in examining increasing discrepancies in families' amounts of annual household income. My analyses demonstrated that families with very high annual household incomes had more traditional orientations towards school quality compared to families with much lower annual household incomes, who demonstrated a more progressive orientation toward school quality. The existence of this variation along racial and class lines in families' perceptions of school quality suggests it is important to explore further some specific school features that families consider most indicative of a school's level of quality. The remaining multivariate analyses in Chapter 3 carry out this exploration.

The analyses predicting the likelihood a family will select a school's proportion of students who will eventually go on to a four year college as the most important indicator of school quality revealed significant variation by the level of education within a family. Families in which the level of education was more than a bachelor's degree were almost twice as likely as families with lower levels of education (i.e., less than a bachelor's

degree) to select a school's proportion of students who will eventually attend a four year college as the most important indicator of school quality.³⁷ Since level of education has often been used in conjunction with income as a measure of socioeconomic status, the significant variation by level of education described here provides further evidence demonstrating variation along class lines in families' perceptions of school quality.

In addition to the significant variation by level of education described above, the analyses predicting whether families reported that up-to-date resources are the most important aspect of school quality also illustrated significant variation along class lines. However, in this analysis the significant variation has to do with families' annual household income. In this multivariate model, as disparities in families' annual household incomes increased, the magnitude of the difference in the likelihood a family selects up-to-date resources as the most important indicator of quality also increased. This finding, when coupled with the additional evidence from Chapter 3 regarding significant variation along racial and class lines, highlights the importance of recognizing that families from diverse social backgrounds have different perceptions of school quality.

A relationship between families' perceptions of school quality and their actual school choice decisions is shown by the significant effects families' traditional or progressive orientations toward school quality had upon not only their ultimate school choices, but also on the search behavior they exhibited during the process of school choice decision-making. In Chapter 4, a significant effect of families' traditional or

³⁷ It is important to note that the data do not reveal *why* families with lower levels of education were less likely to select the proportion of a school's students who will eventually attend a four year college as the most important indicator of school quality. It could be that for these families, eventual college attendance is a less important criterion for judging quality schools for children in grades K through 12. On the other hand, it is equally likely that families with lower levels of education may lack the same level of access to information about college compared to families in which at least one person already possesses at least a bachelor's degree.

progressive views on school quality existed on the likelihood a family selected the factor “the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor in their school choice decisions. Families with a more traditional orientation toward school quality were significantly more likely than families with a more progressive orientation to select that item as the most important aspect to consider during school choice decision-making.

Within the same analysis from Chapter 4, as well as in additional bivariate analyses, my findings demonstrate significant variation in the school choice search behavior of families from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds. First, a significant effect of income existed in the model predicting the probability a family will select “the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for school choices. As discrepancies in families’ annual incomes increased, the likelihood a family will select this factor as most important for their school choice decisions increased as well. In other words, the higher a families’ annual household income, the more likely they were to select “the school supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as most important for school choice.

In addition to this significant variation by income within Chapter 4’s multivariate analyses, the bivariate analyses presented in this chapter demonstrated significant variation with regard to another aspect of families’ school choice search behavior: the number of school choice options that families consider when searching for their children’s school. However, the variation within these analyses was not only confined to variation by class, but along racial lines as well.

Bivariate analyses from Chapter 4 demonstrated significant relationships between both race and income and the number of school choice options families consider seriously during their search for their children's school. In terms of race, my findings illustrate that, on average, families of color considered more schooling options than white families. In terms of variation by income, families with lower annual household incomes considered a greater number of schooling options than families with higher annual incomes. Therefore, the notion that all families will search for their children's school in a similar manner is clearly contradicted by the findings from my study.

Chapter 5's analyses were designed to incorporate all variables included in previous models in an attempt to understand more completely families' final school choices as well as factors influencing why they made particular choices. Similar to preceding chapters, evidence for significant variation along racial and class lines exists in Chapter 5 as well. Simply by looking at the results from my bivariate analyses, one can see how much families' final school choices vary by race and socioeconomic position. Four different school choices demonstrated a significant relationship with race: neighborhood public schools, magnet schools, charter schools, and non-neighborhood public schools.

Interestingly, among the school choices with a significant relationship with race, neighborhood public school is the only school choice that white families made more often than families of color. For the remaining school choices of magnet schools, charter schools, and non-neighborhood public schools, among families making each choice, my findings demonstrate that families of color chose magnet, charter, and non-neighborhood public school for their children more frequently than white families. I believe these

findings are related to additional findings from Chapter 5's multivariate analyses which found significant effects of a family's area of residence on specific school choices.

Chapter 5's bivariate analyses also demonstrated significant variation along class lines. The choices of private schools or charter schools had statistically significant relationships with families' annual household income. However, the direction of the relationship between the choice of a private school and income was in the opposite direction of the relationship between the choice of a charter school and income. For families who chose private schools for their children, a little less than one half (42.6 percent) of these families have annual household incomes ranging between \$45,000 and \$120,000. Within the same group of families who made a private school choice for their children, only 8.6 percent of them have incomes ranging between \$5,000 and \$35,000. This is a much lower annual income than the majority of families who chose private schools for their children. To further explain these findings, it is possible that for wealthier white families, private school is an important school choice option. For poorer families and families of color, charter schools seem to offer an alternative choice to the neighborhood public school as it represents an affordable choice. This helps explain why recent studies of the effectiveness of charter schools are so crucial to the education of poorer families and families of color.

However, among families who selected charter schools for their children, the direction of the relationship to income is in the reverse direction. More families with "low range" annual incomes (i.e., \$5,000 to \$35,000) and "mid range" annual incomes (i.e., \$45,000 to \$75,000) made this school choice compared to families choosing charter schools with "high range" incomes (i.e., \$85,000 to \$120,000). Perhaps lower income

families desire the type of schools provided by private schools, but simply are unable to overcome the burden of high tuition payments. Charter schools tend to be tuition-free; therefore, charter schools represent an alternative school choice for families who might otherwise select a private school education for their children.

The multivariate analyses from Chapter 5 lend further support to both the existence of a relationship between families' perceptions of quality and their eventual school choice decisions, and they provide evidence of significant variation by race and class in final school choices. Significant racial variation existed in the models predicting families' choices of neighborhood public schools, magnet schools, and charter schools; however, this effect was reduced once other variables were added to the models. Once control variables such as the traditional versus progressive index measure, the number of schooling options families considered seriously during their search, and whether families live in suburban or rural areas were added, the effect of race was mediated by the presence of these controls and no longer appeared in the larger models. Models predicting families' choice of private schools demonstrated a significant effect of income on this particular school choice. As families' annual household incomes increased (i.e. families making \$100,000 annual compared to families making \$10,000 annually), a family's likelihood of choosing a private school also increased.

The effects of families' perceptions of school quality upon their final school choice decisions becomes clear when one examines the significant effect that the progressive versus traditional index measure of families' orientation toward school quality had in a number of models. The significant effect of this index measure of school quality existed in those models predicting families' choices of neighborhood public

schools and private schools, the two school choices most frequently made by families in my sample. For neighborhood public schools, families with a more traditional orientation toward school quality are significantly less likely than families with a progressive orientation to choose a neighborhood public school while for private schools; families with a more traditional orientation toward school quality are significantly more likely to choose private schooling for their children.

Another prominent significant effect found in these multivariate models predicting families' school choices is that of the number of schooling options families considered seriously as they searched for their children's school. The number of schooling options that families considered had a significant effect within the following four models: models predicting choice of neighborhood public schools, models predicting choice of magnet schools, models predicting choice of charter schools, and models predicting choice of non-neighborhood public schools.

For neighborhood public schools, families who considered more schooling options are less likely than families who considered fewer schooling options to choose neighborhood public schools for their children. For the remaining school choices of magnet schools, charter schools, and non-neighborhood public schools, the effect of the number of school choices operates in the reverse direction. For these three school choices, families who considered more schooling options are at least two times as likely as families who considered fewer options to make the choice of a magnet school, a charter school, or a non-neighborhood public school for their children. It appears the more options families considered during their school choice searches, the more likely they were to choose alternative schooling options than their neighborhood public school.

The last consistent significant effect found in the multivariate models predicting the probability a family will choose a specific school choice for their children involves families' area of residence (i.e., urban, suburban, or rural). Area of residence had a significant effect within the models predicting the following school choices: neighborhood public schools, private schools, and charter schools. For neighborhood public schools, families living in suburban and rural areas were significantly more likely than families residing in the city to choose their neighborhood public school for their children's education. The choice of private schools, on the other hand, demonstrated families living in suburban and rural areas were significantly less likely than families living in urban areas to make a private school choice for their children.

One possible explanation for this finding is families in these areas are very satisfied with their neighborhood public schools; therefore, they are less likely to seek out an alternative schooling option such as a private school. The effect of area of residence in the models predicting choice of charter schools lends additional support to this explanation. Compared to families living in urban areas, families from the suburbs were significantly less likely to choose charter schools for their children. Perhaps the location of many charter schools within city limits combined with the level of satisfaction suburban families have with their neighborhood public schools helps to explain these findings.

Taken as a whole, the significant findings I describe above demonstrate I have attained the three primary goal of my dissertation. First, a significant relationship between families' perceptions of school quality and their eventual school choice decisions exists within my sample. Further, my analyses demonstrate a number of effects

demonstrating that it is not only families' perceptions of quality, but also other external factors connected with the school choice process have significant effects upon the final school choice decisions families make. And throughout all of these analyses, the presence of variation along racial and class lines has existed and been significant.

The presence of such variation demonstrates that families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds perceive school quality differently, navigate the school choice process in different ways, and make school choices in ways that differ from one another. These findings have theoretical implications for how to view families' perceptions of quality and the school choice process as well as important policy implications for existing school choice programs and their potential to either increase or decrease the level of racial and socioeconomic integration within schools. I will address these implications in greater detail later in this chapter.

Limitations of the Data

As with any empirical study, the data one uses always has some limitations. In terms of this study, I see six specific limitations of the data used in this study. The first limitation involves constraints within which I had to work with regard to survey questions used to create some variables in my analysis. Other limitations involve my ability to generalize my findings to other populations. First, the measure of race used in my analyses was limited to two groups: white families and families of color. Unfortunately, my sample lacked sufficient diversity in terms of families' racial backgrounds for me to create a more specific measure of race. For example, I would have liked to have my measure of race to have, in addition to white families, groups such as African American families, Hispanic families, Asian families, and Native American

families. Therefore, my measure of race is clearly an area with potential for improvement.

Using the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area as the geographic location of my study affects the generalizability of my findings to other large metropolitan areas in the United States. I refer specifically to Chapters 4 and 5 to explain this limitation. In Chapter 4, the most frequently reported factor that families stated was most important for their school choices was “a school that supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn.” Over one-third of families in my sample reported this factor as most important in terms of school choice. Further, Chapter 5’s model predicting the likelihood a family will choose a private school for their children demonstrated that families who reported “a school that supports the moral and ethical values I want children to learn” as the most important factor for their school choice decisions were more than three times as likely as families who did not select this factor to choose private school education for their children. Collecting the data used in my study from the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area can help explain these findings and why they are somewhat limiting.

The Philadelphia Metropolitan Area has a significantly higher percentage of school-aged children enrolled in private schools compared to the national percentage of private school children, 23.6% compared to 11% respectively (U.S. Census Bureau 2006-2008 American Community Survey; Council for American Private Education 2010). This 12.6 percentage point difference in the total number of children enrolled in private schools in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area compared to the U.S. as a whole suggests that the Philadelphia area is somewhat unique in the prevalence of and use of private education. This is partially explained by the presence of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia

and the schools they provide to people living in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office of Catholic Education reports that in 2010, they are operating 187 elementary schools, 20 high schools, and five special education schools. The presence of so many Catholic schools coupled with the frequency with which families in my sample reported that a school supporting their ethics and values is most important for their school choices helps to illustrate why the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area is different from other areas of the U.S. where fewer Catholic and other non-religiously affiliated schools exist. This unique aspect of the educational landscape in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area prevents me from generalizing my findings to other large metropolitan areas around the U.S.

While the use of private education was quite prevalent amongst families in my sample, another limitation of my data involves the very small number of families who reported they are using none of the school choices (N = 13 families) or who are currently home schooling their children (N = 7 families). The most obvious solution to this problem would be to have a larger sample size than my N = 589 families. In terms of the families who reported they currently use none of the school choice options the PMP survey presented, the best way one can address this issue in future research would involve having an open-ended follow up question allowing these families to explain the type of schooling they do use for their children.

The numbers of families currently home schooling their children have seen significant growth in recent years, especially in light of the advent of "cyber schools" regulated by some states.³⁸ These "cyber schools" involve on-line learning instruction

³⁸ One example of a "cyber school" in Pennsylvania is the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School (PAVCS) located in Norristown, Pennsylvania. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's 2001

linked with the public school curricula in a families' school district or within their state. With these new resources, families who choose to home school their children can now use lesson plans and follow state guidelines to ensure their children receive the same education their non-home schooled counterparts receive within classrooms of traditional schools. Therefore, in any future efforts to replicate or expand upon this study, ensuring that the sample has a representative number of families who home school their children will be a necessary component of such efforts.

Two additional limitations of my data involve specific questions from the PMP used to create some variables used in my analyses as well as the absence of some important questions that would have added to the depth of information gained from my analyses. First, the construction of the variables I called the "private school variables" in Chapter 4 represented my best effort at achieving an accurate measure of the religious or non-religious affiliation of the private schools in which families in my sample currently have their children enrolled. However, the structure of the section of the PMP survey that included the questions allowing me to make this identification was somewhat flawed. The main problem here involved the absence of a follow up question specifically asking family respondents to report the religious affiliation, or lack thereof, of the private schools that their children attend. However, the section of the PMP survey aimed at gathering this information suffered from a minor error in verb tense, which required me

report, Cyber Charter Schools Review, PAVCS "...opened its first year as a K-2 school with approximately 622 students representing 60 different counties across the Commonwealth [of Pennsylvania]. PAVCS was approved as a K-12 school and expects to expand its enrollment to serve middle and high school students by year four of its charter (2004)..." (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2001. Cyber Charter Schools Review. Retrieved September 21, 2010 (http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=space&name=CommunityPage&id=6&cached=true&in_hi_userid=2&control=SetCommunity&PageID=0&CommunityID=7238&Criterion_0=False,False,False,False,False&Criterion_1=False,False,False,False,False&Criterion_2=False,False,False,False,False,False,False&Criterion_3=&q=on-line+elementary+education&Alter=3:Add,Cyber+School+Review&showRes))

to construct the private school variables to the best of my ability. I do recognize that the quality of the data these variables represent is less than perfect.

While the above limitation deals with PMP survey questions that somewhat hindered my ability to create the variables I wanted for my analyses, the second limitation of the PMP survey involves the absence of questions I believe would have enhanced my findings about the final school choices families made for their children. In my sample, the mean number of school aged children in the household was 1.82. Therefore, a number of families have more than one school aged child for whom they are currently making or who have made a school choice decision. While I was able to record each school choice for each child within the household, what I was not able to do was identify descriptive information about each child (i.e., oldest child, middle child, male child, female child) for whom my families reported the school choice made for him/her. I believe having this additional information would provide further insight into how families navigate the school choice process when they have more than one child and could possibly reveal sibling order effects in families' school choices or gender effects in these choices.

Finally, while a quantitative analysis of families' perceptions of school quality and its effects on their school choice decisions provides one with evidence of important trends in how families define school quality and how those definitions affect them during their school choice decision-making, such an analysis is limited in its abilities to allow the voices of families engaged in the school choice process to support these trends. Therefore, my suggestion to expand upon this dissertation is to conduct a qualitative study of families currently or recently involved in the school choice process. Using a

qualitative approach to answer the same research questions posed in this study would provide one with richer data; in other words, the qualitative approach to the questions posed in this study would allow the researcher to explore further what families believe school “quality” means, how their perceptions of quality influence them throughout the process of school choice decision-making, and whether they are able to fulfill their desires for a quality school in the final choice they make for their children.

In designing such a study, I would adhere very closely to the design of my existing quantitative study. Using in-depth interviews with families either currently making school choice decisions or having recently done so, I would include families who are considering each school choice options presented in this study. Further, I would continue to focus on any variation by race and class that emerges from families’ descriptions of how they define school quality, what their experiences were like when searching for their children’s schools, and whether the school they truly wanted for their children is the school their children currently attend. If the answer to this final is no, I would explore this mismatch between families desires for their children’s school and the obstacles preventing them from turning those desires into the educational reality for their children. I believe the results of a qualitative study like this, in combination with the findings from my quantitative analyses of families’ perceptions of school quality and their effects on school choice decisions, would result in a more comprehensive understanding of how families define “quality” and the factors that influence them throughout the process of school choice decision-making up until they make their final choice for their children’s education.

Theoretical Implications

Within existing literature on school choice, there is considerable debate over how one should theoretically approach the process of school choice decision-making. While this debate is most often couched in terms of school *choice*, the findings from my dissertation suggest that this debate also involves *perceptions* of school quality. More specifically, what makes a “quality” school and what makes a school lacking in quality? I argue that the most prevalent theoretical framework for explaining school choice, rational choice theory, falls short in its abilities to explain fully the experiences families have during the school choice decision-making process as well as the ways in which families define what “quality” education means to them.

Rational choice theory when applied to school choice decisions is not a wholly inappropriate approach to understanding how families make such decisions. Parts of rational choice theory, such as the idea that families will survey a number of schooling options before reaching their final school choice, appears to describe well how families begin to search for their children’s schools. Where this theory falters lies within a number of assumptions it makes about how families will proceed from this initial point of the choice making process. For example, many rational choice theorists argue that all families will survey all available schooling options for their children. While some families may do this, my findings demonstrate significant variation by race and class in the number of schooling options families consider seriously during their search for their children’s school. Therefore, this assumption of rational choice theory does not accurately depict this part of the school choice process for the families in my sample.

Another assumption of rational choice theory that my findings contradict involves the importance families give to issues of school quality as they make school choice decisions. Certainly, issues of quality are important to all families as they search for the right school for their children; however, rational choice theory suggests that issues of school quality will be paramount amongst families' preferences for the school they eventually choose. Again, while this may be true for some families, not all families engaged in school choice decision-making operate in this way. Issues of quality may be high on families' list of desirable school features, but other factors such as a school's ability to teach children the moral and ethical values families want their children to learn may receive equal, if not more, importance than issues of quality for some families during the school choice process.

Further, those who explain school choice processes from a rational choice perspective do not delve further into the salience of issues of quality throughout the entire process of school choice decision-making nor how the school choice behavior of different families may vary in other ways. Rational choice theory states issues of quality will be paramount in families' minds during their search for their children's school. However, my findings demonstrate other factors such as the number of school choice options families consider as they search for their children's school and whether a school will provide their children with the moral and ethical values they want them to learn had significant effects on families' final school choices.

Certainly, as families move through the steps of the school choice process, they carry their perceptions of quality with them. However, during this process the level of importance they choose to give issues of quality at different points in the process may

change for some. One can see an example of this in that families' school search behavior varied with regard to the number of school choice options different families considered seriously during this search. Simply making the a priori assumption that issues of school quality are most salient for all families making school choices limits the ability of rational choice theory to explore further the multilayered process of school choice and how families may navigate their way through it differently.

Further, rational choice theory also may assume that all parents have equal access to information about schools. This awaits further study. For example, white families were more likely to cite the percentage of students who go on to attend college as a most indicative of a school's level of quality. There are two important implications of this finding. First, it is unclear whether white families actually sought out information about the percentage of a school's students who go on to a four year college or if this is simply a feature of the type of school they wish to send their children. Second, it is also not clear whether this sort of information is available to all parents equally. Even if families have this information at their disposal, it is not entirely clear what they are able to do with it in terms of its influence on their perceptions of school quality and/or their final school choices. For families in stronger public school districts, they may use it as a marker that the public school is an acceptable option. For families in weaker school districts, who are often not able to afford a private option, they are compelled to seek alternative school options such as charter schools.

The work of Fuller, Elmore, and Orfield (1996) suggests an alternative theoretical framework for explaining the process of school choice. Borrowing their phrase "cultural logic of families," I argue the perspective from which researchers like

Fuller, Elmore, and Orfield (1996) approach the process of school choice decision-making provides a more appropriate way of understanding the process in which families engage as they search for their children's school. The "cultural logic of families" perspective, in contrast to rational choice theory, highlights the roles that human agency and culture play in how families from different socio-demographic backgrounds engage in school choice decision-making. In other words, the "cultural logic of families" framework allows for consideration of other important social and cultural influences that may affect the choices families ultimately make for their children's education.

Rather than focusing primarily on the salience issues of quality have for families' school choice decisions, the "cultural logic of families" perspective takes a broader approach. This theoretical framework acknowledges the important role quality plays in families' decision-making, but also recognizes the influence additional external factors may have upon families engaged in school choice decisions. For example, families in my sample considered other factors such as whether they have the financial means to afford tuition costs at private schools they may want their children to attend, whether a school will support the moral and ethical values they want their children to learn, and whether their child will fit in at a specific school. Any examination of families' perceptions of school quality and their effects on school choice decisions appears better served if one employs the "cultural logic of families" as her theoretical foundation for understanding of the school choice process compared to operating from a rational choice perspective.

Policy Implications

Given the attention my study pays to variation by race and class in families' perceptions of school quality and their eventual school choice decisions, the discussion of

the policy implications suggested by my findings focuses upon an important consequence of school choice programs: their effect on levels of racial and socioeconomic integration in U.S. schools. Some researchers have identified this consequence as one of the three most important dimensions one can use to assess the effectiveness of school choice plans; two other equally important dimensions are the effect of school choice programs on academic achievement and on productive school competition.³⁹ The potential impact school choice programs can have on existing levels of school segregation by race and class is a controversial issue within the school choice debate. In fact, researchers such as Betsy Levin (2000) have suggested "...school choice would...unwind decades of school integration efforts, fuel increased socioeconomic stratification, and thereby enhance rather than ameliorate social inequities" (Levin 2000: 266-68). Levin is not alone in harboring such concerns about the possible negative effects of school choice programs on existing levels of segregation in U.S. schools. Further, this point of view is supported by two beliefs many people hold regarding school choice programs.

The first belief buttressing such concerns involves the idea that "...black and white parents, if given the choice, will opt for schools that are more racially homogeneous than current public schools" (Ryan and Heise 2002: 2092). Findings from my study somewhat contradict this belief in that two of the factors some families in my sample selected as most important for school choice decisions, "my children will fit in at the school" and "the children in this school are from families like mine," did not have significant effects within any of my multivariate models predicting families' specific school choices. One can argue these factors represent proxy measures of a desire for

³⁹ For a discussion of these two dimensions, please see Ryan, James E. and Michael Heise. 2002. "The Political Economy of School Choice." *The Yale Law Journal*, 111(8): 2043-2136, specifically pp. 2102 – 2115.

families to send their children to schools that not only mirror their racial background, but their socioeconomic background as well.

The second belief lending support to concerns over negative effects of school choice on school segregation levels emerges from the notion "...that if more families are empowered to choose among education options, the most well-informed, motivated, and economically well-off families are more likely to avail themselves of school choice" (Ryan and Heise 2002: 2092). Once again, findings from analyses in chapter 4 do not necessarily support this belief; however, these findings speak specifically to the notion that it will be more economically stable families who will take advantage of school choice programs. My findings revealed that families who considered a greater number of schooling options during their school choice search were not necessarily the most economically well-off. Instead, I found that families with lower annual household incomes considered a greater number of schooling options during their school search than families with higher annual incomes.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is clear that two widely held beliefs about the negative effect school choice programs can have upon levels of school segregation in the U.S. are not supported by my findings. Further, Ryan and Heise (2002) argue while it is important to recognize such concerns about the negative effects of school choice programs, to truly understand why such beliefs exist one must understand that they have arisen in light of the current type of school choice plans available in the United States. The design of these choice plans does not provide much potential for reducing levels of school segregation, a possible reason for why the two beliefs described above have become rather widespread within the debate over school choice programs.

⁴⁰ See Table 4.2 in Chapter 4.

If one examines both the design of existing school choice programs as well as some assumptions such designs make, she will realize that the potential for school choice plans to exacerbate existing levels of school segregation by race and class is a function of the two aforementioned issues. First, one must realize that the majority of school choice programs in the U.S. today are *intra-district* programs, providing families and students with the ability to change schools within the same district where their current school is located. Designed this way, such choice plans are rather limiting, and the limitation comes from understanding the ways in which residential patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation are mirrored by patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation in schools (Ryan and Heise 2002).

Residential patterns of racial and class segregation are tightly connected to patterns of segregation within U.S. schools primarily because most children attend the schools located within their neighborhoods. Therefore, if a student's neighborhood is plagued by high levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation, it is very likely his/her school will reflect the same segregation within its student body composition.

For example, Ryan and Heise (2002) write that one-third of African Americans in the U.S. live in "hypersegregated" neighborhoods. Such neighborhoods are "large, contiguous, racially homogeneous neighborhoods clustered around city centers" (Ryan and Heise 2002: 2093). Living in these extremely segregated neighborhoods clearly will affect the level of segregation in the schools connected to these neighborhoods. Further, in addition to the link between residential segregation by race and school segregation by race, a similar relationship exists between residential segregation by socioeconomic status and school segregation along the same lines. Chaplin's (2001) research

demonstrates, "...most poor primary school students are clustered in majority-poor [school] districts" (Chaplin 2001: 2). Chaplin builds upon this statement to drive home the point that if a neighborhood is segregated along class lines, the effect of that segregation will be felt within that neighborhood's schools in terms of both class and race. He writes,

...even if schools within districts were perfectly integrated, schools within those districts would remain majority poor and majority-minority...[i]n order to significantly reduce isolation by race, ethnicity, and poverty, integration must occur *between* rather than *within* [school] districts. (Chaplin 2001: 12, emphasis added)

This quote from Chaplin relates directly to the main point Ryan and Heise (2002) wish to make in their discussion of the effects of school choice plans on levels of racial and socioeconomic integration in U.S. schools. The problem with existing school choice plans, which fuels concerns that school choice will worsen current levels of school segregation, lies within their design. As mentioned earlier, most school choice programs in the U.S. are *intra-district* programs. If school choice plans continue to be constructed in this way, then surely they will have little to no chance of reducing the level of racial and socioeconomic segregation in U.S. schools due to the strong links between patterns of residential segregation and patterns of school segregation. Instead, the way that school choice plans can have a greater chance of reducing segregation in U.S. schools involves designing such plans to incorporate three important features (Ryan and Heise 2002: 2101).

Before describing these three features of choice programs designed to reduce levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation in U.S. schools, it is necessary for one to recognize the difficulties involved in both implementing and sustaining such programs. There is, and will likely always be, a tension between

schools located in the city and those located in the suburbs. Even suggesting the creation of inter-district school choice programs is enough to create concerns amongst families and students living in both urban and suburban areas. With this in mind, I present below Ryan and Heise's (2002) three necessary features for choice programs better equipped to reduce levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation within U.S. schools. Taken as a whole, these features represent an "ideal" situation for solving the problems of existing choice plans. I then address problems likely to arise in any effort to implement these "ideal" programs followed by recommendations for overcoming these obstacles in a realistic manner.

The first feature of better designed school choice programs is quite simple: such programs should be *inter-district* allowing students to make choices that enable them to move to other school districts if they feel their options are too limited within their current district. The second feature builds upon the first: school choice programs must involve both city schools and suburban schools. If school choice programs are targeted only toward city schools, then the limiting nature of intra-district choice plans is reincarnated with the same problems plaguing intra-district only choice plans. Finally, school choice programs with a legitimate chance of reducing extant levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation in U.S. schools must involve a wide array of choice options for students who wish to avail themselves of such choices.

This third feature is connected to the two previous features: students must be able to look outside their assigned school district for schools other than public

schools. For example, if they wish, students from one district should be able to choose to attend private schools, charter schools, or magnet schools in other districts given that they meet the necessary admission requirements such schools present for all students. Examples of existing school choice programs that have successfully reduced racial and socioeconomic segregation in their schools districts are the voucher programs of Milwaukee and Cleveland, a transition from desegregation programs based on mandatory busing to controlled school choice in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC school districts, and cross-district choice plans in Hartford, Connecticut, Rochester, New York, and Boston, Massachusetts.⁴¹

The above description of school choice programs with potential for reducing existing levels of segregation by race and class within U.S. schools represents the ideal situation. However, turning an “ideal” into reality often involves a number of obstacles to overcome as well as a certain level of compromise from those who would advocate for such programs and those who would oppose such programs. In the case of inter-district school choice programs, the lines of opposition tend to fall geographically. Specifically, there is tension between those living in urban areas and those living in suburban areas.

⁴¹ For more information about these school choice programs, please see Garnett, Nicole. 1996. “The NAACP’s Parent Trap.” *The Weekly Standard*, 2(16): 16 (Milwaukee voucher program); Greene, Jay. 1999. “The Racial, Economic, and Religious Context of Parental School Choice in Cleveland. Paper Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Association of Policy Analysis and Management in Washington, DC. November 5, 1999 and for the Buckeye Institute; Jarrell, Douglas M. and Scott W. Gaylord. 2000. “Will 4th Circuit Continue Race-Based Assignments?” *National Law Journal*, December 11, 2000 (Charlotte-Mecklenburg transition from mandatory busing to controlled school choice); Ryan, James E. 2004. “‘Brown,’ School Choice, and the Suburban Veto.” *Virginia Law Review*, (90)6: 1635 – 1647.

Perhaps the most cogent point of contention suburban residents have when it comes to allowing their schools to participate in inter-district choice programs involves the relationship between property taxes and public school funding. In the suburbs, families often pay high property taxes to support their neighborhood schools. Therefore, some suburbanites may be averse to allowing students from poorer districts, where property taxes are lower, to avail themselves of the benefits of suburban neighborhood schools for which they (or their families) do not “pay.” To counter this argument, it is important to recognize

...economists have demonstrated [that] homes in high-quality school districts are relatively more expensive than similarly sized and situated homes in worse school districts because the value of good schools gets capitalized into home prices. (Bogart and Cromwell: 304)

Therefore, to oppose inter-district school choice simply because one’s property taxes “pay for” his/her neighborhood school involves much more than the dollar amount of one’s property taxes. As Bogart and Cromwell’s research demonstrates, it is important for people to acknowledge “...the way[s] in which public schools are provided as well as how they are financed” (Bogart and Cromwell: 304).

Research like that of Bogart and Cromwell, however, is not likely to change the minds of suburban residents who feel strongly about the connection between their tax dollars and their neighborhood schools. Designers of inter-district choice plans must make use of other tactics to bridge the social gap between suburban residents and urban residents in order to demonstrate the benefits that inter-district choice can have for everyone involved. Increasing the level of family involvement in school choice beyond the solitary act of choosing a school for their children is one possible strategy. Families involved in school choice decision-making demonstrate engagement and involvement in

their children's education. If those designing inter-district choice plans can expand on this involvement, it is likely more families will understand the positive outcomes of these programs and recognize the negative effects existing choice programs have on levels of segregation in U.S. schools.

One easy way to increase families' involvement beyond making one school choice for their children is to involve suburban parents in urban school districts as well as involving urban parents in suburban school districts. For example, if a suburban parent could serve as a member of an urban school district, he/she would have firsthand experience with the operation of schools that may be drastically different from the schools in their suburban neighborhoods. Similarly, urban parents serving on suburban school districts would also lead to increased knowledge about "the other," which in this case is the suburban school district and the students and families they serve.

Tension regarding issues of school choice between suburban and urban school districts and the families they serve is likely the result of unfamiliarity. Beyond images the media presents of wealthy, mostly white suburban schools and dilapidated, majority-minority urban schools, families residing in the suburbs may be unaware of the realities of the problems urban districts and individual schools face. Similarly, urban families may be unfamiliar with what schools in the suburbs look like and how they operate. Creating positions on both urban and suburban school boards for members who reside in different residential areas has the potential to show that, while different in many ways, the goals of school boards in both areas are quite similar. Put simply, in the suburbs and in the city, school boards operate to provide the best possible education for the students and families whom they serve.

Another way to ensure the success of well-designed inter-district school choice programs involves two other important groups of stakeholders in education. The first group consists of school administrators, faculty, and staff while the second group consists of students themselves. While opponents of school choice may hold the opinion that the goals of inter-district choice simply involve plucking students from a lower quality school setting, placing them down in a higher quality school setting, and hoping this environmental change will suffice, this is not the case. Well-designed inter-district school choice plans must incorporate structured forms of assisting “choice” students to transition smoothly and acclimate appropriately into their new school environment as well as to assist students who already attend these schools to have positive interactions with their new classmates.

This structure can be provided by training administrators, teachers, and staff members to make a student’s transition to a new school as smooth as possible as well as by offering outlets for new students to discuss and explain any issues that may arise during their transition to a new school and throughout their time as a member of the school’s student body. But faculty members are not the only conduits for helping “choice” students find their way at a new school. Educating students themselves also provides greater possibility for the success of inter-district choice plans. Perhaps involving students in the design of inter-district choice programs is one way for them to learn about the benefits of expanding choice and the consequences of allowing the existing, more limited choice plans to remain the only option for students who want more from their

education. Ensuring that faculty and students are involved in inter-district choice plans, from their inception to implementation to continuation is likely to have positive results for programs allowing students the choice of schools outside of their neighborhood district.

There is no doubt that creating well-designed inter-district school choice programs, implementing them in a way that involves both suburban and city schools, and sustaining such programs will be a challenge. However, the above recommendations are concrete ways that can help overcome the obstacles that have prevented the success of wide spread inter-district choice plans in the past. Further, these new choice plans can serve to ameliorate, rather than exacerbate, the existing levels of segregation in U.S. schools along racial and class lines. There is, however, one final strategy one can employ to turn the “ideal” of inter-district school choice into a reality of the U.S. educational landscape. This strategy involves educating all members of U.S. society about an important purpose of education that often is overlooked. Education is a social commodity; while a quality education clearly impacts the individual lives of those who receive one, it is equally true that society as a whole benefits from having a well-educated population. Ensuring that all U.S. students have equal access to high quality education is vital for the future of U.S. society. In very simple terms, society can either “pay now” to ensure this kind of education for all students or “pay later” for the consequences of not doing so. When an individual lacks a quality education, the consequences are dire not only for that one person, but for the society in which he/she is a member.

A poor educational foundation does not provide one with the skills or abilities to find secure, sustainable employment in the job market once his/her education is complete.

In fact, many who lack a strong educational foundation find themselves economically marginalized, stuck in a low-wage, often very insecure job. Others are in an even worse situation; they find themselves completely isolated from the economic marketplace without even a low-wage job to support themselves and possibly a family. These are just two consequences of the choice for society to “pay later” mentioned in the previous paragraph. If members of our society do not recognize the need to “pay now” for the benefits everyone will reap from equally accessible, high quality education, then the alternative is to “pay later” for its consequences such a high unemployment rates, the need for increased social service programs, and increased levels of poverty in U.S. society.

It is true that providing accessible, high quality education for all U.S. students will be difficult, cost money, and require compromises amongst people from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds. Further, inter-district school choice programs are just one solution to these problems, but they are a viable site at which society can begin this work. They represent a way in which society can choose to “pay now” and benefit greatly from that decision, the result of which is a well-educated populace in a strong position to contribute to society through the abilities honed through and skills acquired from a quality education. Choosing to “pay later” by maintaining the educational status quo leads to no benefits for society. Instead, it will result in dire consequences not only for a host of individuals, but for overall society as well. Perhaps even more important, is the fact that the solutions required to fix these consequences certainly will come at a much higher cost to society.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

“Traditional” vs. “Progressive” Education

ELEMENT	TRADITIONAL	PROGRESSIVE
Classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Row of seats • Bolted down seats/desks • Seats facing front/dead space • Teacher in front • Teacher-center • Elevated teacher • Quiet • Blackboard in front • Right angles • Set times/plot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clusters • Beanbags • Tables • Carpet • Motion • Active/loud • Artwork • Plants • Light • Food
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stern/strict • In-charge • Talking • Authoritative • Hierarchy • Alone • Responsible for curriculum • Unvarying/focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitative • Allow student discussion • Adaptive/flexible • Project oriented • Collaborative/teams • Cooperative • Unprepared
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obedient • Empty vessels/receivers • Attentive • Respectful to teacher • Grade-motivated • Standard evaluation • Single modality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom to choose • Independent of teacher • Self-motivated • Collaborate • Already full of experience • Evaluation through multiple rubrics • Multiple modalities
Text/Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbooks • Workbooks • Rote learning • Teach/test • Objective • Provided/pre-generated by experts • Paper/pencil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-created • Multimedia • Multi-source • Raw materials • Inter/multidisciplinary • Interactive • Performance
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit and listen • Take notes • Mastery • Read • Discuss (teacher-led) • Prescriptive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance evaluation • Authentic • Multi-level • Individualized • Open-ended • Multiple intelligences

Source: Cunnigham, Craig A. 2004. “A Comparison of ‘Traditional’ vs. ‘Progressive’ Education.” Chicago, IL: Chicago Public Schools/University of Chicago Internet Project (CUIP), Retrieved March 18, 2009. (<http://cuip.uchicago.edu/~cac/stuff/philosed/tradvsprog.htm>)

APPENDIX B

CONSTRUCTION OF PROGRESSIVE VS. TRADITIONAL INDEX VARIABLE

I used five questions from the Pennsylvania and Metropolitan Philadelphia Survey (PMP) to construct the progressive vs. traditional index variable. This index measure was used as a dependent variable in chapter 3, Models 1 and 2, and as an independent variable in all remaining models. Each question presented the family respondent with two school features and asked, “Which would you consider to be a high quality school?”

I list below the five sets of school features associated with the survey questions as well as results from factor analysis using five variables I created based upon the original survey questions. I employed factor analysis to assist in assigning the description of either “traditional” or “progressive” to one school feature within each set of features presented to family respondents in the survey questions; these descriptions are within [] in the list below.

School features from survey questions

1. A school that emphasizes strict discipline [traditional] or flexibility [progressive]
2. A school where children are required to wear uniforms [traditional] or where children choose their own clothes [progressive]
3. A school that offers education focused on core subjects [traditional] or a school that offers a choice of a wide variety of courses [progressive]
4. A school that encourages a particular strong moral or ethical viewpoint [traditional] or a school that encourages a wide variety of viewpoints [progressive]
5. A school that emphasizes teaching all children in the school what is required to pass city and state standardized tests [traditional] or a school that emphasizes teaching that is individualized for children [progressive]

Factor Analysis

Total Variance Explained						
Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sum of Squared Loadings		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Variance</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Variance</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
1	1.529	30.572	30.572	0.688	13.756	13.756
2	0.966	19.328	49.900			
3	0.913	18.266	68.167			
4	0.820	16.395	84.562			
5	0.772	15.438	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Components Analysis

Component Matrix^a	
	<i>Component 1</i>
Discipline vs. Flexibility	0.616
Children wear uniforms vs. Children wear own clothes	0.554
Emphasize core subjects vs. Offer wide variety of courses	0.526
Encourages a strong particular moral or ethnic viewpoint vs. Encourages a variety of viewpoints	0.641
Emphasizes teaching all children what is required to pass standardized tests vs. Emphasizes teaching individualized for children	0.392

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

^a1 component extracted

APPENDIX C

BIVARIATE ANALYSES DEMONSTRATING NON-SIGNIFICANT RESULTS

The following bivariate analyses demonstrate non-significant relationships between the variables in the analyses. Table 4a, Number of School Choice Options Considered by Education shows no significant relationship between these this dependent variable and level of education.

Table 4.a Number of School Options Families Considered During School Choice Search by Education

	Level of Education			Total
	Less than B.A.	More than B.A.		
Number of School Options Families Considered During School Choice Search	Did not consider any school options	0.9%	0.5%	0.8%
	Considered one school option	37.3%	39.9%	38.3%
	Considered two school options	26.2%	29.3%	27.4%
	Considered three school options	15.4%	17.7%	16.2%
	Considered four school option	13.0%	6.6%	10.6%
	Considered five school option	7.2%	6.1%	6.8%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 6.350$; $\phi = 0.109$, Not Significant. Sample size is 530.

In addition, all bivariate analyses between the dependent variable “The School Supports the Moral and Ethical Values I Want Children to Learn” [Factor 1] as the most important factor for school choice and each independent variable of race, income, and level of education demonstrate no significant relationships as well. Please see tables 4b, 4c, and 4d.

Table 4b. "School Supports the Moral and Ethical Values I Want Children to Learn" as the most important factor in school choice by Race				
School Supports Moral and Ethical Values I Want Children to Learn	Race			
		White Families	Families of Color	Total
	Family did NOT select "School supports moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision	64.6%	66.9%	65.2%
Family selected "School supports moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision	35.4%	33.1%	34.8%	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 0.241$; $\phi = -0.022$, Not Significant. Sample size is 506.

Table 4c. "School Supports the Moral and Ethical Values I Want Children to Learn" as the most important factor in school choice by Income				
	Income		Total	
	Low Income¹	High Income²		
School Supports Moral and Ethical Values I Want Children to Learn	Family did NOT select "School supports moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision	68.2%	64.5%	66.0%
	Family selected "School supports moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision	31.8%	35.5%	34.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 0.691$; $\phi = 0.038$, Not Significant. Sample size is 474.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$45,000 over the past 12 months

²High Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$55,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

Table 4d. "School Supports the Moral and Ethical Values I Want Children to Learn" as the most important factor in school choice by Education				
School Supports Moral and Ethical Values I Want Children to Learn	Level of Education			Total
	Less than B.A.	More than B.A.		
	Family did NOT select "School supports moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision	65.9%	64.8%	65.5%
	Family selected "School supports moral and ethical values I want children to learn" as Most Important Factor in School Choice Decision	34.1%	35.2%	34.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 0.072$; $\phi = 0.012$, Not Significant. Sample size is 510.

APPENDIX D

ADDITIONAL BIVARIATE ANALYSES DEMONSTRATING WEAKER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VARIABLES INVOLVED IN ANALYSIS

The following bivariate analyses involving Chapter 5's dependent variables and independent measures of race, income, and level of education demonstrate significant relationships between the variables in the analyses; however, the measure of association, ϕ (phi), used to determine the strength of the association between the two variables in each analysis demonstrate weaker associations than the bivariate analyses presented and discussed within Chapter 5.⁴²

	Income			Total	
	Low Income ¹	Middle Income ²	High Income ³		
Attendance at None of the school choice options	Family chose a school choice option	97.2%	97.8%	97.4%	97.5%
	Family chose NONE of the school choice options	2.8%	2.2%	2.6%	2.5%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 20.0$; $\phi = 0.035$, $p < .001$.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000 over the past 12 months

²Middle income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$45,000 to \$75,000 over the past 12 months

³High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$85,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

⁴² Similar to the bivariate analyses presented in Chapter 5, as a result of the frequency weights added to these bivariate analyses, I did not report sample size on the tables representing these analyses. The effect of the frequency weights increased my sample size to very large numbers; therefore, I did not report the very large sample sizes in these tables to avoid any confusion about the actual sample size used in this chapter, N = 655 school choices made by the 589 families in my overall sample.

Table 5b. Current Attendance at None of the School Choice Options by Education				
Attendance at None of the school choice options	Level of Education			Total
	Less than B.A.		More than B.A.	
	Family chose a school choice option for their children	97.7%	97.5%	97.7%
Family chose none of the school choice options for their children	2.3%	2.5%	2.4%	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 45.0$; $\phi = 0.012$, $p < .001$.

	Income			Total	
	Low Income¹	Middle Income²	High Income³		
Neighborhood Public School Attendance	Family did NOT choose neighborhood public school for their children	18.3%	26.3%	26.6%	24.0%
	Family chose neighborhood public school for their children	81.7%	73.7%	73.4%	76.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 50.0$; $\phi = 0.061$, $p < .001$.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000 over the past 12 months

²Middle income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$45,000 to \$75,000 over the past 12 months

³High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$85,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

Table 5d. Current Neighborhood Public School Attendance by Level of Education				
Neighborhood Public School Attendance	Level of Education			Total
		Less than B.A.	More than B.A.	
	Family did NOT choose neighborhood public school for their children	23.2%	25.7%	24.1%
	Family chose neighborhood public school for their children	76.8%	74.4%	75.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 54.0$; $\phi = 0.013$, $p < .001$.

Table 5e. Current Private School Attendance by Race				
Private School Attendance	Race			Total
		White Families	Families of Color	
	Family did NOT choose private school for their children	83.4%	79.7%	82.5%
	Family chose private school for their children	16.6%	20.3%	17.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 12.0$; $\phi = 0.011$, $p < .001$.

	Income			Total	
	Low Income ¹	Middle Income ²	High Income ³		
Magnet School Attendance	Family did NOT choose magnet school for their children	94.6%	94.3%	96.6%	95.2%
	Family chose magnet school for their children	5.4%	5.7%	3.4%	4.8%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 15.0$; $\phi = 0.059$, $p < .001$.

	Level of Education		Total	
	Less than B.A.	More than B.A.		
Charter School Attendance	Family did NOT choose charter school for their children	95.2%	96.7%	95.7%
	Family chose charter school for their children	4.8%	3.3%	4.3%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 84.0$; $\phi = 0.047$, $p < .001$.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000 over the past 12 months

²Middle income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$45,000 to \$75,000 over the past 12 months

³High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$85,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

Table 5h. Current Non-Neighborhood Public School Attendance by Income					
Non-Neighborhood Public School Attendance	Income				
		Low Income ¹	Middle Income ²	High Income ³	Total
	Family did NOT choose non-neighborhood public school for their children	94.4%	95.1%	97.4%	95.6%
	Family chose non-neighborhood public school for their children	5.6%	4.9%	2.6%	4.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 27.0$; $\phi = 0.055$, $p < .001$.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000 over the past 12 months

²Middle income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$45,000 to \$75,000 over the past 12 months

³High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$85,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

	Level of Education			Total
	Less than B.A.	More than B.A.		
Non-Neighborhood Public School Attendance	Family did NOT choose non-neighborhood public school for their children	94.8%	97.1%	95.7%
	Family chose non-neighborhood public school for their children	5.2%	2.9%	4.3%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 23.0$; $\phi = 0.051$, $p < .001$.

	Race		Total	
	White Families	Families of Color		
Home Schooling Attendance	Family did NOT choose home schooling for their children	98.6%	99.5%	98.8%
	Family chose home schooling for their children	1.4%	0.5%	1.2%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 92.0$; $\phi = 0.027$, $p < .001$.

	Income				Total
	Low Income ¹	Middle Income ²	High Income ³		
	Home Schooling Attendance				
	Family did NOT choose home schooling for their children	98.6%	98.2%	99.6%	98.7%
	Family chose home schooling for their children	1.4%	1.8%	0.4%	1.3%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 20.0$; $\phi = 0.040$, $p < .001$.

¹Low Income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000 over the past 12 months

²Middle income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$45,000 to \$75,000 over the past 12 months

³High income category includes family household incomes ranging from \$85,000 to \$120,000 over the past 12 months

	Level of Education			Total
	Less than B.A.	More than B.A.		
	Home Schooling Attendance			
	Family did NOT choose home schooling for their children	98.8%	98.9%	98.8%
	Family chose home schooling for their children	1.2%	1.1%	1.2%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 34.0$; $\phi = 0.008$, $p < .001$.